

"Backup How-To's": Free Backup Software vs. Commercial Backup Software

In the previous articles of the "Backup How-To's" series we saw that using specialized backup software is much more reliable and profitable in terms of efforts and time than backing up data by hands. Today it is time to discuss advantages and disadvantages of free software, as compared to commercial software.

Data to Back Up

The majority of free backup software provides only basic functionality regarding data backup. Their primary aim is to automate all actions that are generally done when you back up your files manually. Most of these programs can't be used for hard disk imaging or cloning and don't support things like hot database backup and recovery. And even if you manage to find a free program that can image your drive, it's very unlikely to support files-based backup, scheduling, and other necessary features.

Storage Media

Paid backup software offer much richer choice of supported storage media. It is of much importance: for example, many enterprises back up their data on magnetic tape. And tape streamers require programming of the appropriate drivers which is a very nontrivial task. Moreover, integration of a mere DVD burning tool is not easy – even major products like Windows XP weren't capable of burning DVD discs until year 2004 or so! It comes as no surprise that most free backup software don't have it either.

Support

Lack of support is probably the weakest place of free backup software. When you purchase a program, you can be sure that in case of a problem you will receive qualified help and answers to your questions. With free applications there is no such opportunity. Will it conflict with other software you install? Will it continue working if you decide to move to another system? You can never know.

Another question is today's worldwide migration to Windows Vista (which is not supported by absolute majority of free backup software). If you are planning to upgrade to it – and sooner or later you'll have to, because 95% of new hardware produced today is meant for Vista, – you will inevitably have to use commercial soft. Authors of free backup tools rarely rewrite their programs; and chances that new free software appears in the nearest future are very small.

Time to sum up. If you are content with regular files-based backups that are stored on simple media (for example, another hard disk) and if you are not planning any major upgrades, then you definitely may go for free backup software. But if you need a program for something more complex, e.g. HDD cloning, it's highly recommended to use a professional software which is proven to work correctly and error free. Do remember: it's all about data protection. In many cases time and efforts needed to recover your files will cost you much more than the most expensive piece of backup software.

In the next article: Appropriate Storage for Your Backups

About the Author

"Backup How-To's" is a series of articles by Alexander Rassokhin discussing methods and strategies of organizing computer data protection. These articles will be of great interest and use for PC users of all levels, from those who use computers at home to system administrators in large commercial enterprises. Alexander Rassokhin is an IT-expert and technical writer of Novosoft which is a developer of its own [computer backup software](#). I highly recommend visiting here for more info about [vista](#)

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