

Ten Questions You Should Ask Before Using an Online Backup Service

You can reduce your risk of losing important files to a virus, computer crash, theft or disaster by creating back-up copies. Best security practices recommend a combination of online backup services and a local backup residing on an external drive, USB drive or DVD.

With the need for back-up storage growing, many online services have become available. Not all online backup services are the same. Before you give your important information to just any back-up service, ask yourself these questions to determine which service is the best one for you.

1. Does the service provider have a good reputation?

Reputation is one way to tell how reliable a service is. Find out how long the company has been around and what their past and present customers have to say about their back-up service as well as their customer service.

While the campus does NOT endorse any online backup services, the following services have been subject to recent technology reviews. A Web search on these services will identify links that discuss these and other online backup services.

- <http://mozy.com>
- <http://www.sugarsynch.com>
- <http://backup.fabrik.com>
- <http://www.carbonite.com>

2. What kind of information are you planning to back-up using the service?

Knowing what kind of information you're planning to store can help you find the best, most cost-effective service for you. For example, if you're planning to store your schoolwork, but not any personal information (banking or credit account information, Social Security number, driver's license number, etc.) then a more expensive service that offers a high level of security may not be worth it.

However, if you are planning to store personal information - tax forms, job or grant applications or electronic copies of your Social Security card – the service should use encryption to transmit the data from your computer to the online backup site and use storage encryption or some other specialized means of protecting your stored information.

3. Is the service easy for me to use?

Be sure to test drive a service so that you know what you will need to do to use it. Remember when testing services that uploading files can be slow, but it may be quicker during the restoration. If, after a couple of tries, it's difficult for you to back up your information or to access information you backed up previously, continue searching for a service that's easier for you to use.

4. How will I access my back-ups?

Before you provide your information to a back-up service, make sure you understand the process for backing up and accessing your files. Ask:

- What Web site do I visit to access my information and will I need a password?
- Will I need to install a certain software program for backups and/or restores?
- Do I need a certain browser for the service to work properly?
- Can I access the data from the portable devices that I use?
- If I delete a file from the original source, will the service also delete the file from my online backup? (It is advisable to consider an online service that can restore from several generations of backups.)

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5. How often will I back up my files?

Essential files should be backed-up daily and non-critical files can be backed up on a weekly or monthly basis. Make sure that the service you choose enables you to back up files on your schedule.

6. Will I be able to back up files and access the back-ups when I need to?

If a service isn't available when you need it, it's not very useful to you. While most online services should be available 24/7, some may not be. Also, find out how/if you can access your backed up information if the online service goes down.

If you subscribe to an online service via regular occurring credit card transaction, be sure you know what will happen if the credit card date expires. Will the service continue or be disrupted?

7. Will the service provider protect my data?

Find out what measures the service provider takes to protect stored information as well as the personal information you provide them when signing up. Do they browse information people store with them? Do they provide your contact or personal information to their affiliates?

8. Can I test the capability to restore files from my back-ups periodically?

It's a good idea to make sure that your back-ups will work when you need them to by checking them when you don't need them. Report any problems to the service provider and ask them to tell you what caused the problem and how they resolved it.

9. Who can I call if I forget the password for accessing my data?

Find out what you'll need to do IF you forget your password BEFORE you forget your password. Find out if you can reset or retrieve your password online, or if you have to call the service provider. If you have to call, find out what their hours are.

10. What other back-up options do I have?

There are many ways to back up your important information. You can copy files to a CD, flash drive, USB key or an external hard drive. Some companies offer automatic backups when you purchase their programs. If you use a portable media like a CD or flash drive to back up your files, be sure to store the media in a safe place away from your computer.