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### **Featured Articles**

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# Vista Backup & Restore Center

## Set It & Forget It



There's no need to convince people that they ought to back up their data. Virtually every computer user understands the concept that having a file or folder on a computer that isn't backed up is unwise.

Unexpected things happen to computers, even if you're careful with your equipment and diligent about keeping your machine free of malware. Drops, hardware malfunctions, and even the occasional software glitch are a few examples of things that can go awry with your computer and could cost you some or all of your data.

The question that remains, though, is how best to go about making and storing backups. What software is best? Should you spring for a third-party application, or will Windows Vista's built-in Backup And Restore Center do the trick?

### ■ The Good & The Bad



*Users can*

*perform any and all tasks built into Windows Vista's Backup And Restore Center from one convenient window.*

What's nice about Vista's Backup And Restore Center is that it's very simple to use. Every available option for both backing up and restoring files in Vista is available from one window. The fact that it's built into the operating system is also a plus. Unlike using a third-party backup program, Vista's Backup And Restore doesn't cost anything extra, and you don't have to worry about whether the software is supported and up-to-date. As long as you have Windows' Automatic Updates enabled, this software will continue to work as it should.

Users may find, however, that the Backup And Restore Center is too simplistic and limited compared to third-party backup software. You can only specify types of files to back up (such as photos or videos) instead of being able to back up specific files and folders. For example, say you have a folder where you save projects for work, but it contains many file types, such as Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, and images. It would benefit you to automatically back up that folder every day. With some third-party programs, that would be easy to set up, but it's impossible to do with Backup And Restore.

#### ■ Why Use It?

Despite lacking some useful customization features, Backup And Restore is a terrific application for those who don't need a multifaceted backup solution. If you're not concerned about backing up specific items, it's very simple to set up automatic backups and then let the utility do all the work for you.



*When you create settings for present and future backups, you can choose to back up*

*to a hard disk,  
CD, DVD, or a  
network drive.*

Further, it's a fairly elegant way to create a **disk image** (a "snapshot" of your entire system that you can use to restore your computer) in case of a disaster. Using the built-in Backup And Restore Center option also means that you don't have to find a third-party application. Even tracking down a good backup application that is free requires time.

There are two primary features of Backup And Restore Center: Automatic File Backup and Complete PC Backup. Automatic File Backup backs up files, while Complete PC Backup covers everything on your system, including data, the operating system, and even your applications.

Be aware that Vista Home Basic and Home Premium have Automatic File Backup capabilities but not Complete PC Backup. If you want the whole package, you need to be running Vista Business or Ultimate editions.

## ■ Back Up

There are a few ways you can go about backing up and restoring your files with Vista's Backup And Restore Center. Namely, you can back up different types of files, or you can back up your whole computer, creating a restore point.

First, navigate to the Backup And Restore Center by clicking Start, Control Panel, and System And Maintenance. Click Backup And Restore Center and go to work.

To back up specific types of files, click Back Up Files under the Back Up Files Or Your Entire Computer heading. Vista will automatically search for and display any and all possible backup storage options connected to or inserted in your computer. This includes CDs, DVDs, external hard drives, and even other partitions on the same hard drive on which Vista is installed. On this same screen, you can also select the On A Network radio button and click Browse to back up to a network folder.

Make your selection and click Next. Select which disks you want to include in the backup (if you have multiple hard drives or partitions) and click Next. On the next screen, choose which types of files you want to back up; for example, you can select Pictures, Music, Email, Documents, and more. Check the box next to each type of file you want to include in the backup and click Next.



***You can choose to back up all your files, or you can specify certain file types to back up.***

The next screen will ask you how often you want to create a backup. Using the drop-down menus, you can select how often (daily, weekly, or monthly), as well as the day and time. (*NOTE: The first time you create a backup in Vista, it will automatically make a full backup of your files and folders.*) When you have set the parameters accordingly, click Save Settings And Start Backup. This could take a while the first time you run it because it will be backing up all of your files. In subsequent backups, it will only be backing up new files or changes you made to old files, so it shouldn't take as long.

Vista will automatically make a copy of your files. When the process is complete, note that the date of your last backup is displayed, as well as the date of your next backup under the Back Up Files Or Your Entire Computer heading in the Backup And Restore Center window.

You can also perform a total backup of your computer, which includes Registry settings, program files, and even items such as temporary files and profile settings. This is what is commonly called a disk image. To make a disk image, click Back Up Computer in the Backup And Restore Center window.

Select a place to save the image. For a complete backup such as this, you need to use a partition or hard drive with a good deal of space because these disk images are very large. You can also back up onto multiple DVDs, but that can be problematic because you may easily need a dozen or more DVDs to complete the whole job. This would make it a tedious task, as you'd have to sit there and swap out each disc as it was filled up. Then you'd have a big stack of DVDs to keep track of, not to mention the tedium of using the discs to restore your computer if the need arises.

Select either On A Hard Disk or On One Or More DVDs and then click Next to advance to the next screen. Make sure the correct drive you want to back up is selected on the next screen and click Next. Click Start Backup to perform the task.

## **■ Restore**



***Being able to set the frequency, day, and time for automatic backups is a terrific feature of Vista's Backup And Restore Center.***

The Restore function of the Backup And Restore Center offers more options for working with specific files and folders. Suppose you want to restore a folder containing photos from a family vacation. Click Restore Files under the Restore Files On Your Entire Computer heading. When the window appears, be sure the Files From The Latest Backup radio button is selected and click Next. On the next screen, click Add Files (or Add Folders) to search for the files you want to restore. Locate the files you want to restore; conveniently, you can click and drag to highlight multiple files to add at once. When you've made your selections, click Add. When the window closes, click Next.

On the next screen, choose where to save the restored files. You can either choose In The Original Location or In The Following Location. If you choose the latter, click Browse to select the location where the restored files will go. When you're finished making your selections, click Start Restore.

If a copy of the original file still exists in your chosen location, you'll receive a prompt at this time asking if you want to replace the old file with the new one (Copy And Replace), if you want to cancel the restore (Don't Copy), or copy the new file anyway and give it a slightly different name (Copy, But Keep Both Files). You'll see a message indicating that the restore was successful (or that it was canceled, if that was your choice). Click Finish to close the window.



***When you want to restore your computer, you can do so from any of the saved***

Under Restore Files in the Backup And Restore Center window, you can click Advanced Restore for more options. When the window pops up, click Advanced Restore. The next screen will give you three options for restoring files: from the last backup made on your computer, an earlier backup made on your computer, or from a backup made on a different computer. Select the appropriate radio button and click Next.

***backups, not just the most recent one.***

If you choose the first option, the steps for restoring files are the same as outlined above. If you choose to restore files from an earlier backup, you can select from any of the previous backups on the next screen. Make your selection and click Next. The subsequent steps are the same as above.

If you elect to restore files from a backup made on a different computer, you'll select the location of the device on the next screen. When you've selected the source of the backup, click Next. Select the correct backup from the list on the next screen and click Next. Then, follow the same steps as above.



***You can restore specific files, adding them to the queue individually or in large chunks.***

If you want to restore your entire computer, you must be very careful; the point of a disk image is that it is a record of the state of the *entire* computer. If you restore it, it will replace any changes you made since that backup was made. You should only use this feature if your computer has had a serious problem from which it can only recover by being rolled back to a previous date.

To use this function, click Use System Restore To Fix Problems And Undo Changes To Windows at the bottom of the Restore Files Or Your Entire Computer heading. When the Restore System Files And Settings window appears, click Next. On the next screen, select the most recent restore point (or whichever one is the last known good restore point) and click Next. On the Confirm Disks To Restore screen, be sure you have the correct drive selected and click Next. Click Finish on the next screen to complete the restoration.

If you're into free and easy-to-use applications and don't mind the lack of features, Vista's Backup And Restore Center will be fine for you. Otherwise, consider a more full-featured backup and restore application.



*by Seth Colaner*

## **Did You Really Back Up?**

You may want to check to be sure the backup you performed actually backed up your files or made a restore point for your system. You can check for when your last backup was performed under the Back Up Files Or Your Entire Computer heading on the Backup And Restore Center window. Next to Last Backup, there will be a date and time listed; this is the last time a backup occurred. Beneath that is Next Backup, which tells you when the next scheduled backup will happen.

If you're still not convinced the backup was a success, you can simply look for your backed up files on whatever media you used. If you used DVDs, for example, just pop one into your optical drive and check for the files. The same goes for, say, an external drive—view the files on the device and check to see that the date matches the date of your last backup.

If you back up to overwrite certain files, navigate to one of those files, right-click it, and select Properties to see the date on which the last overwrite took place.