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The Million Dollar Minute

By Douglas Niedt

Time to be Religious—About Backing Up Your Data

I'm Douglas Niedt. Thanks for joining me for this million dollar minute. I'd like to talk about a real snoozer of a topic: Backing Up Your Data.

They say death and taxes are the only sure things in life. They forgot one: your computer will crash. I don't care if you have an expensive computer or a cheap one. I don't care if you have a PC or Mac. It will crash. If it doesn't crash, I know you will do something stupid and lose data. YOU MUST BACK UP YOUR DATA externally. It doesn't matter what you are doing on the computer or how often you use it. YOU MUST BACK IT UP CONSTANTLY.

This goes for complex stuff like your FileMaker databases, your actual recording sessions, as well as the simplest most basic information you have on your computer. YOU MUST BACK UP YOUR DATA externally. Even *as* you are recording or working on a database or other important project, YOU MUST BACK UP YOUR DATA. Don't wait until the end of a recording session to backup your tracks. Take time during the session for backups. YOU MUST BACK UP YOUR DATA. Get it?

What do I mean by "externally"? Use an online backup service or external hard drive. I strongly recommend you do both. Or, back up to *two* external hard drives (even external hard drives

fail—redundancy is the solution). Keep one at home and one at another location in case of fire, theft, etc. External hard drives (depending on how much information they store) can be purchased inexpensively—usually $100–$200 for a fairly capacious one. Online backup services such as Mozy and Carbonite back up your computer automatically. Your information is stored on their systems with redundancy. These services are very convenient. Use them.

But, if you are a performer and using a computer to record your music, you have a different situation. Ideally, you should be using a computer dedicated solely to recording music. This computer should be used *only* for music recording and should *not* be connected to the Internet—you don't want to risk getting spyware or viruses. Plus, firewalls, anti-virus, anti-spyware, and other security programs put extra demands on your computer. This can cause problems for your recording program, especially if you are using several tracks or plug-ins. If you are a Mac user, despite what friends say, Macs are also vulnerable to viruses and spyware—no computer is immune. Therefore, even a Mac used for recording should not be connected to the Internet. Since your music-recording computer won't be connected to the Internet, an online backup service is not a viable option. Use two external hard drives instead. The online services would definitely be an option for your everyday computer hooked up to the Internet. But some people have even lost data with the online services. So, they use the online backup service *and* an external hard drive.

Another option is an online storage service such as Box.net. An online storage provider is not an *automatic* backup service. You must back up your files manually. They provide 5 GB of storage space for less than $100/year or 15 GB for $200/year. Ultimately, that is more expensive than backing up to an external hard drive, but it has other advantages. Your files can be accessed from anywhere. You can share files with anyone else you specify (very useful if you are working with another band member or editor or mastering house in another area of town or different city). Files can be easily moved between computers. You could also use the site to provide downloads to your website customers who want to download individual songs from your CDs (just like iTunes). The difference is that you can give your customers more flexibility with how they want to use the songs and provide better-quality files (higher bit-rates).

So, you have the options of online or external-hard-drive backup for your regular computer. For your music recording computer you must use external-hard-drive backup only (two drives stored in separate locations). YOU MUST BACK UP YOUR DATA. Constantly!