

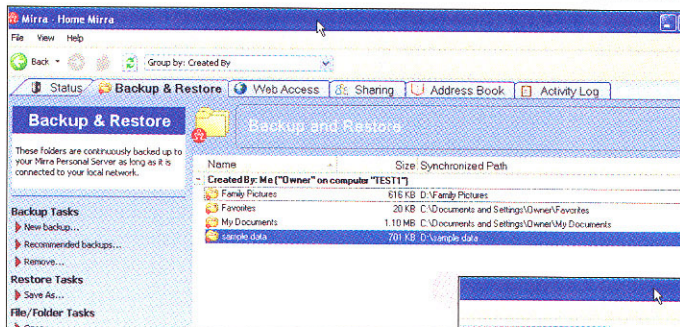
Backup for Home Networks

Home networks link computers via Ethernet or Wi-Fi so everyone in the family can get to the Internet and share printers and files. So why not handle backup the same way? We look here at some techniques and products that offer conveniences, additional benefits, and, in some cases, better pricing for backing up multiple home PCs.

The easiest answer is to back up each PC independently. The downside is you'll need to purchase software and external drives for each machine, and responsibility for the backups will be distributed throughout the house. The next step up involves designating a shared drive on one of the computers—or a network-attached storage (NAS) device—to be the central backup repository. Retrospect Professional includes a client agent and two client licenses, so you can back up three machines to a single shared drive. Other products we liked, such as Argentum, Memeo, and Norton Ghost, can all write to a shared network drive or NAS device, though it should be noted that many backup software products don't recognize NAS boxes.

An always-on device has some advantages over a hard drive attached to one of the networked PCs. You don't need to keep the computer turned on, and backup jobs won't affect the host PC's performance. A number of NAS drives have made their way into the home-network market, and they currently run about \$100 more than their USB 2.0 counterparts. The Maxtor Shared Storage Drive (\$360 street for 300GB) and Buffalo LinkStation (\$380 street for 300GB) offer large drives with fairly straightforward installations. The LinkStation includes a 30-day trial license of Memeo. The devices typically have a Web-based administrative interface for creating shared folders and access permissions, and they often have USB ports for printer sharing or storage expansion.

NAS devices provide a good means to



THE MIRRA PERSONAL SERVER has a simple interface that works for the average home user.



centralize data storage and therefore greatly help the backup process, but their main purpose is storage, not backup. We think it's best to have everyone store all their data files on the central drive.

Then you can perform backups on the NAS device to protect your important data. The traditional software packages can back up a NAS device to an external drive without a problem. Of course, if you want to protect your systems and apps, you'll need a system restore/backup program on each computer.

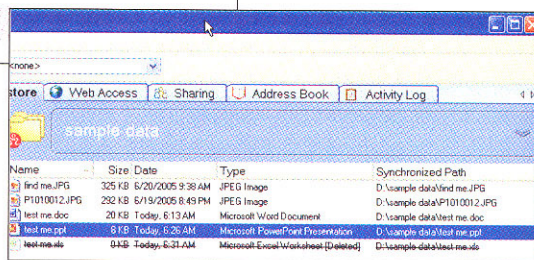
Finally, you can use a product specially designed for home network backup. We looked at the Mirra Personal Server, which makes backing up data on your home network computers very easy. Another product, the LiveVault InSync (prices vary; not reviewed), which is targeted at small businesses, goes one step further with an appliance that can synchronize data to an off-site location for disaster recovery. Expect these kinds of features to seep into the home backup and online service market soon. The integration of on-site backup with off-site synchronization is the ultimate in data protection.

PROTECT THE NETWORK

The **Mirra Personal Server M-250** (\$499 list; Mirra Inc., www.mirra.com) backs up and restores files from multiple PCs in your home network effortlessly. The device attaches to your Ethernet network. Software installed on each PC communicates with the Mirra to perform continuous backups, with up to eight versions stored for each file. The product protects

important data, such as documents and pictures, but not system files. The server is accessible by browser, and you can even designate certain folders to share so friends and family can access your files.

You'll need to install the



MIRRA'S RESTORE INTERFACE clearly shows deleted files and then all versions for each file.

software on each networked machine (Windows only). An install wizard suggests that users protect folders such as My Documents and Favorites. Users can also designate additional folders for backup using the Mirra interface or by right-clicking on any folder in Windows. Once a folder is selected, all content within it is backed up. Mirra provides continuous backups as files are created or saved. Home users will like the simple interface for all activities.

There are no fancy technical bells and whistles, such as backups that record only file changes, or versioning algorithms to control when versions are saved. What this means is, if a large file changes slightly, Mirra copies the entire file to the server, so space may be used up quickly. Also, if you save a document eight times over the course of a few minutes (as we often do), all older versions are lost. Although we'd like to see Mirra just upload file changes and do smarter versioning, most users won't experience this potential limitation.

The Mirra Personal Server is a very good platform for home network backup, and its simplicity can't be beat.

Our contributors: Robert P. Lipschutz is president of the technology firm Thing 7 (www.thing7.com) and a contributing editor of *PC Magazine*. Features editor Michael J. Steinhart was in charge of this story.