Radio Days – 2010-05-01

Tip of the Week – Checking Backups

Have you ever needed to recover from your backup only to discover that it was either missing some files which you needed or, perhaps worse, some or all of the files were unreadable? If so, you are in good company: this happens all the time to everybody that I know who does their own backup. Even if your backup worked last week, last month or last year it is still prudent to check that it is still working. This is like checking your insurance cover to see if it is still adequate.

I was called in to see a client whom I had not seen for some time and we reviewed his backup as many changes had taken place since my last visit. He was doing all the right things: the backup was done at the end of each day and checked that it was readable. However, he had installed some new programs since my last visit and the data that they created was not included in his backup. After adjusting his backup all his new data was now included.

Have you checked your backup recently?

Your Hard Disc's Capacity

Many new computers come with two partitions: one for Windows and programs, the other for data. *Partitions* can be thought of as the moveable walls in an office building which are installed for each new tenant. The total area remains constant, but the area set aside for each partition differs. The same can be done for a computer's hard disc, and the result can be either a great improvement or a major disaster, depending on how the computer is used.

For most people the best way to setup a computer is to have just one partition which stores Windows, all programs and data. This is the way that most people use a computer, so is the best way for them.

Many computers are setup incorrectly with two partitions, and all data is saved to the single Windows partition and it fills up. This means that you can get error messages saying that your computer has insufficient room to complete a task. If you check, you will often find that one partition is stuffed to the gills and the other partition has only the smallest amount of data. This is the time to repartition your hard disc.

There is a free program called GPartEd (short for GNU Partition Editor, where GNU is the name used for much of the best free and open source software (FOSS)). This is downloaded as a CD image file then burnt to a CD. This CD is then used to boot your computer into a version of Linux, so expect to see unusual screens when your computer boots. You can then remove the unused data partition, then expand the Windows partition to take up the whole disc. This, typically, will double the amount of space on your Windows partition, and will give your computer a new lease of life. For most people, this single action will give you enough free space on your hard disc so that you will not have to worry about having enough free space for some years.

There is one warning: you should ALWAYS make a backup of your Windows drive before doing anything as dangerous as partitioning your hard disc. If your computer loses power during the operation you run the risk of losing everything (and I mean EVERYTHING) on your hard disc. This process is not for the faint-hearted: there is the strong possibility of your hard disc becoming corrupted. Please ensure that you have a UPS to provide battery power to cover you if your electricity supply is lost.

Websites

GPartEd   http://gparted.sourceforge.net