

Stories of anticipating dead computers: Windows Home Server

devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20091109-01

November 9, 2009



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Like most geeks, I have a bit of history with dead computers. In the past, I used the “wait until it breaks, and then panic” model, but recently I’ve begun being a bit more anticipatory, like replacing an old laptop before it actually expires. Anticipating another future dead computer, I bought an external USB hard drive for backing up important files, but upon reading the description on the box, I started to have second thoughts. It came with its own backup software that reportedly installed automatically when you plugged in the drive (!). I didn’t want that; I just wanted a boring USB hard drive. One of my friends (who used to work with USB devices) cautioned me: “Those things are evil. Some of them enumerate as a keyboard and ‘type in’ a device driver so they can own your machine even if you have autorun disabled.” Wow, that’s a level of craziness I previously had not been aware of. Upon further discussion, I was convinced to return the external hard drive unopened and instead get a copy of Windows Home Server. I went for the Acer Aspire EasyStore H340 instead of trying to build my own reduced-footprint low-power quiet-fan computer. And amazingly, the EasyStore comes with only two pieces of shovelware, the excellent LightsOut add-in, which I kept, and some annoying trialware, which was easily uninstalled. I felt kind of weird getting a Home Server since I have only one home computer of consequence, so I’d basically have a one-computer network. (I do have that laptop, but I’m careful not to keep anything on it that isn’t already backed up somewhere else.) And because the Home Server would easily be the most powerful computer in the house, even though all it does is sit there doing nothing most of the time. But the convenience is hard to beat. It just sits there quietly and does its job of backing up the other computer every night. (And seeing as I had the machine anyway, I also have it back up my laptop, even though there’s nothing really important on it. Most nights, the laptop backup takes only five minutes. And just because I can, I even back up the old laptop that doesn’t even do anything any more aside from surf the Internet!) Of course, the first thing you do with a new gadget is tinker with it, and I installed Whiist and created a photo album. It was so easy to do, I feel like I’m losing my geek cred. I mean, this sort of thing is supposed to involve hours of staring at the screen, scouring the Internet for information, and groveling through hundreds of settings trying to get things working. If anybody can get a home server up and running with automatic nightly backups and an online photo album by just clicking on some fluffy GUI buttons, then what will I have to feel

superior about? I'm kidding. My hat's off to the legendary [Charlie Kindel](#) and the [Windows Home Server team](#). They hit this one out of the park. It's an awesome product. Now that backing up is so painless, it has set a new baseline behavior: Now, I feel kind of uneasy making large-scale changes to files on my home computer unless I have a complete backup. (Backups are the reason I bought the server. All the other features, like the photo album, are just gravy.)

And yes, every few weeks, I [restore a randomly-selected file from backup](#) just to make sure the backups are working.

FTC disclaimer

: Although Windows Home Server is a product of Microsoft Corporation (my employer), no compensation was tied to this review. (I didn't even get an employee discount.) I'm just a happy customer.

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