LIFE GOES ON BAG - DATA IN THE BANK

Workbook page: None
Listening to Katrina companion page: HYST - Documents

Photographs

Let's start with photographs. If you talk to anyone who has ever lost everything, they all tell you the story in the same way. They say, "We lost everything.", and tell you what happened. When they start listing the things they lost, they always list the same thing first. "All our pictures." I've spoken to literally hundreds of people who lost their homes to Katrina, and those that did not lose a loved one all list Photographs at the top of the list. The goal of this project is to avoid that eventuality. There is another benefit to this in that you will preserve old photographs - which fade a little every day - for future generations.

If you own a digital camera, organize your digital photos into the folders you have created in any way you see fit. You can also arrange any pre-existing documents (like your resume), or any other digital media that you want to store any way you like. The idea is to be organized so that you can use your data store as a good reference.

The next step is to scan any old photographs or any photographs that you have prints of but do not have digital files for. You should read the manual that came with your scanner, and work out the best way to do this using your equipment and your software. I use Photoshop to scan all my images, but you may not have access to Photoshop. Here are some general hints to help you with scanning:

1. Always make sure the glass top is clean. VERY clean. You can use Windex or any other glass cleaner. I use a lens cleaning solution on mine.
2. Scan all photographs at at least 300 DPI (Dots Per Inch) in full color and save them using orderly file names. The larger the DPI resolution you use, the larger the digital file will be. 300 DPI is good enough to make reprints, so that's all you really need.
3. Save the files using JPG compression. This is also seen as JPEG sometimes. Refer to your scanner or software manual for instructions. Experiment with the compression ratio to determine the best results with your equipment. An 8*10 scan at 80% compression works well for me and produces a file that is usually less than a megabyte in size.

If you are scanning an old photograph that you display, put the original photograph in a file box or somewhere safe and away from sunlight. Re-print the photograph on your color printer from the scan you have just made, and put that on display. If you use good photo paper in your printer, nobody will be able to tell the difference between the original photo and the reprint once it is back in the frame.

Once you have all of your photographs scanned, share them with your family. They will appreciate copies of photographs of people, places, and things that they have not seen for many years. Copy the files onto a DVD or CD using your laptop (assuming it has a DVD or a CD burner) and distribute these copies. They make great gifts and provide extra security since you could always get the copy back if you are unlucky enough to lose all your data. I am going to show you various projects like this on another page.

Vital Documents

The next thing to scan are your vital documents. You should already have these assembled, based on the list in your Workbook on this page: WB001.PDF. The same hints apply to documents that applied to photographs. Keep the glass clean, use 300 DPI, and save them as JPG files.

Vital records and any documents that contain private or personal information should be stored in the secure volume you created with TrueCrypt (or some other encryption software that you prefer.) If you are in doubt about what to scan, scan *everything*, including the full contents of your wallet. If you lose your wallet, you will be very grateful to have a record of exactly what was in it. Replacing vital documents after an emergency or disaster may be difficult or impossible. Having digital copies will be a great relief, even though reprints may not be considered legal documents. In the process, collect other valuable documents - like your resume - into a folder in the TrueCrypt volume.

When you are finished adding documents to your encrypted volume, close it and copy the volume file into your MemKey/Documents folder. This creates an instant 'backup' of it on your drive, and readies it to be copied to your Flash Drive.

Digital photos can be very large, and not very many of them will fit onto your Flash Drive, as most Flash Drives are very small. We need to reduce the size of the digital files in order to fit more of them onto the Flash Drive.

Leaving your Photos folder as it is, copy the entire thing over to your MemKey folder. The example above is what mine looks like. We want to leave a full sized copy of the photos in the original location because hard drive space is plentiful, and storing the larger, higher quality files is not a problem. We are going to reduce the size of all the photos we are going to copy onto our Flash Drive. You may have software that works for you already, but being cheap I prefer something free. I use the ImageResizer from Microsoft Power Toys, which is free, easy to use, and very effective. Click on the Microsoft Power Toys and download the ImageResizer. It's in the download section, on the right side of the page. You'll have to scroll down a little. Go ahead and install it.

Once installed, go into the Photos folder in your MemKeys folder. You'll have to do this folder by folder, so if you have followed my method, you'll have to do this for each month of the year. Go into each folder where you have photos and click on one. It will turn blue. Now hold the CTRL key down on your keyboard and press the A key. All the photos will highlight. Now right click on the photos and select Resize Pictures. A window will pop up. Click the ADVANCED button and choose the following settings. Large, Make pictures smaller but not larger, and Resize the original pictures (don't create copies). Now click OK and the program will run. You can watch as it resizes all the photos. Do this for each folder.

This process will reduce the size of most of your images to be less that 100 kilobytes. I currently have 10,060 pictures, which take up 1.00 GB (1,080,586,240 bytes) after being resized. That's an average of 107.4 kilobytes per image - and as you can see, I can get 10,000 pictures to fit on a 1GB flash drive. I use 2GB Flash Drives, so I could store 20,000 pictures. As it is, I need some room for documents, so this works well for me. As time goes on - and technology improves - I will have to upgrade to larger Flash Drives, but for now I have plenty of room.