Windows Live Mesh: A Better Way to Synchronize
"A new tool from Microsoft is about to go mainstream."
by Pete Choppin

Some time ago I came to the realization that trying to manage my e-mail on one computer was not only futile, but it was driving me insane. I downloaded all my e-mail to a simple client like Outlook or [Thunderbird](#), and there it would stay—on my hard drive. If I wanted to access my e-mail, say at work or school, I had to remember to check the box that says "Keep messages on the server." If I remembered to do this when I configured my e-mail client, then I could access my e-mail from about anywhere. If not, then I had to go through the process of sending myself the e-mail I had on the one computer, assuming I had not deleted it.

This was my early attempts at mobile computing and synchronization, albeit inefficient, complicated and not very much fun. The result was having e-mail stored at multiple locations. I often found that I had lost or deleted messages.

Now I use a PDA, laptop and desktop computers at home and work. E-mail is only one of my dilemmas. What about my files? From maintaining Web sites to writing ComputorEdge articles, I often find myself going from one place to the next, trying to keep things organized, and confusion to a minimum.

It was driving me insane and I wondered, "Isn't there a way to easily and efficiently make my files available wherever I go?" Now, there is a way.

Introducing Windows Live Mesh

Online storage services such as [Box Net](#), [Xdrive](#), and [Mozy](#) are readily available and easy to set up. Microsoft has one called [Skydrive](#). All of these services are nice for what they do. They simply provide storage space. But if you want an efficient system that not only stores your files, but also synchronizes between your work computer, home computer, laptop and other devices, you need to take a look at Windows Live Mesh.

How Live Mesh Works

Mesh works by installing a small piece of client software on your computer that synchronizes your files with your online desktop. You can have it sync to multiple computing devices, but as of now you are limited to 5GB of space.

Also, you can specify the folders on your computer you want it to sync with your online desktop. This will make these files available via a Web browser and your Live Desktop.

Windows Live Mesh is still in beta testing for some of its full functionality. But if it catches on and people like it, we might see the ability to install applications to the online desktop in the future.

Getting Started

First you need to go to the [Live Mesh](#) Web site and login with your Windows Live ID. If you don't have a Windows Live ID, you will need to create one to continue.

Also, make sure you are using Internet Explorer, as some of the plug-ins don't function properly in other browsers yet.

Once you have created your Windows Live ID and signed in to Windows Live Mesh, you should now be at your online desktop.

Figure 1. Windows Live Mesh sign in.

Here you can add new devices to sync with, and you can also upload files to your online desktop.

Let's start by adding a computer to sync with. Click on the orange Add button, choose your operating system, and then click Install.

Figure 2. Windows Live Mesh Add device for installation.

This will start the installation process for Windows Live Mesh.

Figure 3. Windows Live Mesh installation.

You will be prompted to enter your Windows Live ID and password into Mesh. You can also check the three boxes underneath to Remember me, Remember my Password and Sign me in automatically.

Now give it a friendly name so you can recognize it easily. You can use something like "home PC" or "work PC."

Figure 4. Windows Live Mesh computer name.

Synchronizing Files and Folders

Now that we have everything installed, let's start synchronizing some important files and folders. The easiest way to sync a folder is to right-click the folder you want to sync, and choose Add folder to Live Mesh. In this example I'm using a folder called "ComputorEdge."

Figure 5. Windows Live Mesh Add folder.

This opens the Add Folders dialog box

Figure 6. Windows Live Mesh Add Folder dialog.

You can also expand the synchronization options by clicking the down arrow in the bottom left corner of this window. This allows you to control how the folder you created synchronizes with your devices.

Figure 7. Windows Live Mesh sync options.

The folder will turn a light blue color, indicating it is a folder that syncs with Live Mesh. Any file or folder that I add to the ComputorEdge folder will automatically upload to my online desktop.

Figure 8. Windows Live Mesh synced folder in light blue.

Accessing Your Files from a Web Browser

We have a folder setup to synchronize to the online desktop, so now what? How can you access these files remotely?

It's pretty easy. Open Internet Explorer and login to mesh.com.

Once you login you should see all your devices and your Live Desktop. Click Live Desktop to view your synchronized folders.

Figure 9. Windows Live Mesh devices.

Your folders that have been set to synchronize will be displayed on the Live Desktop.

Figure 10. Windows Live Mesh desktop.

Notice the ComputorEdge folder I created earlier is on my Live Desktop. When I open the folder I can see the files that it synchronized.

Figure 11. Windows Live Mesh folders.

Remotely Controlling Your PC

In addition to synchronizing and storing your files, Windows Live Mesh also allows you to remotely log into your computer using a Web browser. While logged into your Live Mesh

account, click Devices from the top buttons. This will take you to your home screen with your devices and Live Desktop.

Click the computer you want to remotely control and click Connect.

You will be prompted to install an ActiveX Control on your computer. If you don't allow this to install, you will be unable to remote into your PC. Click on the Information Bar and choose Install ActiveX Control.

You also might be prompted a second time to install the plug-in.

Figure 12. Windows Live Mesh Active X installation.

You will then be connected to the remote computer. An additional connection request box should appear. You can click the check box to disable this message in the future.

Now you should be remotely controlling your computer.

What's in Store for Windows Live Mesh?

Windows Live Mesh is still in beta testing for now and has its limitations. Pretty soon you will be able to install Mesh on your Mac, and on your Windows Mobile phone. I'd also like to see applications run in Mesh through the Web browser, just as if you were using your computer.

Applications like Office would be great to see in Mesh. Even better would be a full-screen mode that fills your screen for easier usability.

Keep your eyes peeled on this new technology from Microsoft as it makes its way mainstream. More storage, more synchronizations options, and applications running on your Live Desktop should be coming very soon.