

Windows Skydrive for Data Storage

“For easy document sharing and synchronization.”

by Pete Choppin

Have you ever arrived at work only to realize you left your thumb drive with your revised presentation at home? Or have you ever wondered if the document you received through an e-mail attachment is the most current? Have there been changes? Wouldn't it be nice to have access to your documents from any computer in the world? As well as sharing files with friends and workmates, in a way that everyone has the most recent version?

I attended a technical training some months ago and the instructor made one very valid point. We cherish and protect mounds of data, but how much of it is useful on a daily basis? Sure, we don't want to lose all those gigabytes (now terabytes) of digital photos. The inexpensive and easy solution is burn them to DVD—done! But when it comes down to it, if we lost all our old files, would we truly be in as much anguish as we believe? My conclusion is no. The majority of my archived data sits on CDs and DVDs collecting dust. If my hard drive crashed today, I would survive. A few important files would be lost, but life goes on.

Let's be pragmatic. If you were to consider the average life of a document or e-mail is about a week to 10 days, wouldn't it be smarter to store these in a system that is readily accessible, up-to-date, and can be shared with family, friends, or co-workers?

Solution—Internet Storage

The solution goes well beyond simply archiving data. In the real world, we must have access to our data from virtually anywhere. It does me no good to check my e-mail at home and then go off to work without any access to it. That's how the old POP3 e-mail clients worked. You downloaded your e-mail to a computer and there it sat. Step away from that computer and you have no access to that message until you return to that machine. It is the same with document storage. For decades we've been storing away documents in difficult-to-access archives, costing money and making the files antiquated and forgotten.

If I can store a document on the Internet, however, it is available from work, home, on my phone, and at my friends' houses. I can now use it, modify it, and then delete it when the lifespan of that document comes to an end. Internet storage is becoming more and more the standard for document sharing, storing, and access.

Mobile technology, cloud computing, and social networking are changing the way we use and access our data. The old methods simply no longer apply, and the Internet is now mature enough to handle a new way of storing our documents and messages.

Microsoft Live Office

Microsoft's recent contribution to the cloud world is Office Live Workspace with Skydrive. The idea is to be able to access and share your documents with others from anywhere. It can solve many of the headaches mentioned above. For starters it's free and setup is painless. Once you have your Windows Live ID, you are ready to get started.

Figure 1. Office Live Workspace Sign-in Page.

After you sign in to Skydrive, your browser opens into the Office Live main area. Here you can access your Skydrive and much more. All of the Windows Live services are now integrated into Office Live.

Figure 2. Office Live Workspace Main Area.

You can even create new Office Live documents online right in the browser.

Figure 3. Creating Office Live Documents.

To Share or Not To Share

You will want to decide if you plan to share documents with others or if you simply want to store documents for yourself. The left area of the Live Office Skydrive screen above shows three sections—Personal, Shared, and Shared with me. Shared are documents to which you will provide access for others, and "Shared with me" are those documents others have shared with you.

Figure 4. Office Live Skydrive Sharing.

Managing Documents in Skydrive

To add files to your folders in Skydrive you need to click the Skydrive link. For some reason the link sits right in the middle in your Recent Documents area. Microsoft really needs to rethink its design.

Figure 5. Office Live Skydrive Link.

However, this will bring you to the main Skydrive area.

Figure 6. Office Live Skydrive.

From here you can add files, create new documents and folders, and view all your synchronized folders. You can also see how much of your 25GB you have used on Skydrive. Once you go into your folders and find your files, you can perform other options, such as opening and editing your files online, saving them as zip files, sharing them with others, and

many more. Additionally, because Skydrive, Live Office, and Windows Live are now all integrated into the same place, all your e-mail, calendars, Live Messenger and many other Windows Live services are readily available from any location in the Skydrive Web site.

Windows Skydrive not only provides a convenient storage area for files you are currently working on, it also provides all the services you need to share, collaborate, synchronize, and keep all your files current and relevant. It is far more efficient than sending old, out-of-date files by e-mail or trying to keep files updated in multiple locations.

Our Internet capabilities as well as how we use the Internet are worlds apart today, as compared to just five or 10 years ago. Mobile and cloud computing are becoming as common as the PC, which makes document sharing and synchronization much more of a necessity. Services such as Windows Skydrive make this easy.