

Backing up digital files on flash drives

Floppies are gone, tapes are disappearing, and CDROMs are dying.

Digital content is delivered on DVDs, MS Office can be downloaded now and most backups are done on external hard drives. Storage and delivery systems have

grown and evolved over the past few years which has brought about numerous benefits but has also created a few new problems along the way.

Flash memory and thumb drives are more marvels that many of us use every day. I have had a thumb drive hanging around my neck for three years now. It started out as a 512 MB flash drive and has been upgraded multiple times morphing into a whopping 8 GB thumb drive containing all of my networking tools, software installation packages, and even emergency client data backups.

Before 2004, I had all this stuff on dozens of CDROMs packed in a black carrying case. There were a couple of times I had misplaced the case and my heart stopped.

After finding it for the second time, I duplicated the CDROMs over a weekend just so I had backups.

Now that I can carry even more data and programs on my flash drive, I still back all that stuff onto my hard drive located on the primary business desktop at my office. This is just in case I leave it plugged into a USB port at some client's PC, it gets lost or even goes bad.

When you take a picture with



John Deans

your digital camera the image is stored on a small card called flash memory. These digital memory sticks have the same flash memory as your thumb drive but they are in a smaller thinner component so it can be inserted into a digital camera.

During vacations or big family events I, like many people, can take dozens if not hundreds of digital pictures of the kids, pets, places, and other things. On our last big vacation to the Pacific Northwest my wife and I on our two digital cameras took a combined 1,000 pictures during that week.

Here's a scary scenario: You just returned from your big expensive vacation and you are getting ready to view and print all those hundreds of digital pictures which captured and documented your travels and after extracting your flash memory from the digital camera you find that the memory stick has gone bad and no pictures are showing up — they're gone!

On a small scale, that happened to me 10 years ago after taking a stock car driving class in Ft. Worth. I had dozens of cool pictures of me driving a Winston Cup stock car over 150 mph by myself with three other cars just feet from my door and bumpers.

These pictures were taken by other class members of Team Texas (TeamTexas.com) on my digital camera which were saved on the internal flash memory.

When I got back at the end of the two day class consisting of 90 laps at the Texas Mo-

tor Speedway I was pumped to view and print the great shots. Then my heart sank when I saw that someone had accidentally erased all the pictures from that weekend while they were viewing them at the end of the class. Major bummer!

Back then I knew of no way to recover them so I was out of luck. The only saving grace was the in-car VHS video tape I bought which had to serve as my only visual documentation of the thrilling event.

From that point on I have made it a practice to take a flash card reader and/or a USB cable to connect the camera to my laptop and perform downloads of all the digital pictures taken that day to the hard drive serving as a picture backup.

I also leave all the pictures on the camera so there are two copies of everything just in case something bad happens to my laptop during the travels.

Just last weekend I had a similar situation with a client of mine. He had just returned from a two week business trip to Egypt and the Middle East (the last place I would like to go) with hundreds of pictures of critical equipment and site locations.

During his digital picture migration process and cleanup he accidentally deleted over 300 important pictures from the original flash stick in his camera BEFORE they had been copied to the PC's hard drive.

After receiving his panic striking call on the weekend, I had to break my no-weekend-work rule and pick up the comprised flash stick from him and try to recover the deleted digital images.

Luckily he had not formatted

the stick but rather just deleted a group of the pictures which basically removes them from the master index file on the memory stick. That means the raw data for the pictures still exist on the flash drive, but they just need to be reorganized and relisted on that master index.

BadCopy Pro to the rescue! This 12-year old program has grown and matured into an excellent suite of recovery tools which can recover deleted, lost or damaged files from hard drives, CDROMs, DVDs, flash drives and many other types of storage media. Available from www.JufSoft.com for \$39.50, it is a must-have for techs like me dealing with lost files.

In less than an hour using BadCopy Pro I was able to recover and restore all those lost digital pictures for that client and delivered it to him that next day. The look on his face and relief in his voice was almost payment enough, though I still billed him for my rare weekend work.

I just wish I knew about this recovery program back in 1998 so I could have recovered the pictures of me driving Dale Jarret's green Interstate Batteries number 18 stock car turning high on the banks at speeds that put my chin to my chest and tightened every orifice in my body. Now that's fast!

Bottom line: On your pricy excursions, make sure to backup

your digital pictures to a laptop and keep in mind you can recover most lost or deleted digital images with BadCopy Pro as a last resort.

Next week's column: MacOS Jaguar.

John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233 or John@DeansConsulting.com for questions and comments.