



Aren't All Online Backup Services Really the Same?



At first glance, it would seem that most online backup services are pretty-much the same. They provide software you load on your computer to identify files for backup. They establish an Internet connection to a cloud-based storage server. Finally, they transmit an encrypted version of your data to offsite storage for safe-keeping.

So, all things seemingly equal, it's not surprising that some businesses go "price shopping" for service. But can (or should) the vendor who has the cheapest price, or the largest storage package, be the one to trust with your most valuable asset...your critical business data?

Perhaps not.

Generally speaking, there are two classes of online backup offerings available in the marketplace: **self-managed** and **provider-managed** – and they are significantly different.

Self-managed offerings tend to be very inexpensive and are directly marketed to home users and students. They are simplistic in nature, easy to install and require a very low level of user sophistication. You've probably seen them advertised on television.

When operating properly, a self-managed online backup seems to do a reasonable job of backing up simple data files such as word documents, music downloads and digital pictures.

Home users don't typically own Windows servers, don't care about backing up SQL databases or Exchange message stores, don't use complex financial software and don't have regulatory concerns. For these folks a very simplistic backup service, at a very low price, seems reasonable. It's certainly better than no backups!

A self-managed online backup service is often referred to as an "unmanaged service." It's unfortunate when the user of an unmanaged backup service naively assumes that a charge on their credit card equates to a properly functioning backup. (**Yikes!**) If a data disaster occurs, there's a very real possibility that supposedly protected data could actually be lost.

Any business that uses an unmanaged service risks permanent loss of critical customer or financial information that could devastate their organization. (Ouch!) Businesses should **strongly** consider opting for the safety-net offered by a provider-managed online backup service.

Managed online backup services are marketed to small-to-medium businesses that have critical data - but may not have the time or in-house expertise to implement and manage a business-class backup service.



A “**S.M.A.R.T.**” managed backup service helps ensure critical data is safe by augmenting fully-featured software with these five essential service components delivered by specially trained technicians:

Setup Service – Proper setup of the initial backup is critical. Not only must software be installed, but critical data including: files, folders, email stores, databases, vertical application data and more must be identified. Then backup jobs can then be defined, schedules set, and appropriate data retention policies established. No two computers are identical so it’s important that the service provider and customer work closely together during the setup phase.

Note: Rather than taking days or weeks to perform an initial data upload, managed service providers often choose to use portable media to physically transport encrypted data to offsite storage servers. This is referred to as a “seed” backup.

Monitoring Service – Managed service providers understand that there is no such thing as “set it and forget it” in the computer world. Servers, PCs and laptops are in a constant state of change. What works today, may fail tomorrow. Log files must be regularly examined for errors, storage usage must be tracked and PC health problems (such as low disk space) must be reported.

Alerting Service – Proactive notification of problems is the cornerstone of any managed backup service. When backups run with errors, run “empty” or do not run at all, the managed service provider must alert the user, and in many cases, directly assist in issue resolution.

Recovery Service – The full benefit of a managed online backup service is often not realized until disaster strikes. It’s at this time that users are most vulnerable and often unable to think clearly. A managed service provider will calmly walk the user through the recovery process and actively assist in data restoration.

Testing Service – Periodic “end-to-end” testing of online backups is one of the best ways to assure you are prepared for a disaster. A managed service provider can help perform a “fire drill” restore of critical data files. This can help establish a realistic Recovery Time Objective (RTO) and Recovery Point Objective (RPO) for the organization. Known recovery procedures and timelines generally lead to a smoother and more predictable restoration service.

In summary, the combination of fully-featured backup software *plus* the value-add of a **S.M.A.R.T.** managed backup service provider helps ensure that important data is backed up properly – and can be restored when the business needs it!

These days, a top-notch **managed** online backup service with a healthy allocation of online storage can be purchased for about \$2-\$3 per day.

Isn’t your business data worth the cost of a good cup of coffee?