



Four Must-Have Applications for Your Computer

Applications to track and grow your business

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Remote Data Backup

By now, most computer users understand the importance of backing up their data on a regular basis. Whether it's a virus, a hard drive crash or simply unintentionally deleting that critical file, the damage from lost data can range in severity from losing the proposal you have to deliver tomorrow morning to losing everything. But still, only a small percentage of us back up our computers regularly. "It's too difficult" or "I forgot" may have been valid excuses in the past, but no longer.

Remote data backup services are numerous and easy to use. Once set up, the software will back up your data to a remote location somewhere on the Internet. Remote backup has two major advantages over a more traditional approach (like copying your important files to a CD every so often). First, once it's set up, you don't have to do anything. It runs on its own on a schedule that you created. Second, your backup is located somewhere else. So you never have to worry about a catastrophe resulting in the loss of both your computer and your backup.

When selecting a backup service, you often get what you pay for. Look for one with the ability to encrypt your backup (keeping it safe from prying eyes), easy setup and excellent customer service. (Some reliable services include [backupmyinfo.com](#), [mozy.com](#) and [steelgatetechnologies.com](#))

RSS Reader

RSS is an Internet technology that allows you to easily stay informed of new content on websites and blogs. But instead of having to visit each site individually, an RSS reader will pull the latest content from your chosen sites into one place. You can easily review all of the new content in one application, reading, deleting or flagging each item as you want. RSS readers do not require you to join each site's e-mail newsletter and they don't send any information about you (i.e., your e-mail address) to the site.

Let's say there are a few websites or blogs that you check (or would like to check) on a regular basis. Rather than visiting each site individually, you can add the site's RSS feed to your reader. The steps involved vary depending on the reader you use, and the site has to publish an RSS feed, which most sites now do. Now, whenever the content changes, the new data will be pulled in to your reader. Think of it as an inbox, but instead of e-mails, you're getting new information from your selected websites.

There are many RSS readers available. Some are online services; others are applications that run on your computer. Search for "getting started with rss" for a list of articles to help you, or see [RL 323](#).

Desktop Search Tool

Even if you're highly disciplined about how you store your data (e.g., file names and folders), information will very quickly spread out into every area of your computer. Some data may be kept in files stored in folders for specific clients or projects. Other data will be in e-mails, organized in their

own separate file structure off your inbox. Still other information might reside within larger applications, like spreadsheets or databases.

To save time searching for the specific data that you're looking for, or to help you find information that you might not even remember you had, use a desktop search tool. Like an Internet search tool, a desktop search tool will index the information on your computer and allow you to easily search it. Good tools will search not only by file name, but will also search the data within the files, your e-mail and even the Internet as well, with the results displayed in an easily readable and customizable window. Desktop search tools can save you time and eliminate the need for you to remember where you've stored everything.

Data Management Software

Some might think this is obvious, but it does bear mentioning. By data management software I mean any application that you can use to store data about your business. It can be a spreadsheet program like Excel, a database like Access or FileMaker or a Web-based application like JotSpot. The importance here is that you find a platform that you are comfortable with and you use it.

For example, one business owner has developed a series of spreadsheets that he uses to track the key information of his business. One sheet lists each client and how he acquired them. Another shows how much revenue each client generated by month. A third sheet keeps track of how much time was spent servicing each client. With this data, he has been able to analyze his business for the past year and quickly determine his month-by-month revenue growth, which clients are the most profitable, and what referral sources bring him the most business.

This is just one example of what you can do with data management software. There are many ways of addressing the example above and many other things that can be done.

If you're comfortable working with applications like these, think of how you can use them to track and grow your business. If you're not, pick up a book or talk to a consultant to get started.

Related Links

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