

Software Review: LIUtilities WinBackup, by Al Geia

Overview

The use of WinBackup was a positive experience. The program will meet the backup needs of the majority of users at a moderate cost.

Product Information

WinBackup, version 1.73, is a product of LIUtilities (LIU). Its price is listed on the LIU site as \$39.95 for the downloaded version and \$59.95 for the boxed version (including a limited-time offer of a \$10 discount). The product appears to be only listed as shareware, and was not found on sites such as MySimon. The following product information was extracted from the User Manual.

In WinBackup, all backups are created using Backup Jobs. A Backup Job is a template that tells WinBackup which files or folders to backup, how to store the backup and when to run scheduled backups. You can create any number of Backup Jobs for backing up different kinds of data. For example you might create a Backup Job named ‘my emails’ which is used to backup emails on a regular basis. By creating Backup Jobs you only have to specify once which files to backup and where to store the backup. The next time you need to backup your emails you can simply select the ‘my emails’ Backup Job and click ‘Run Backup’. A Backup Job does not contain any data. It contains a list of files and folders to backup as well as backup settings and scheduling settings.

When you select a Backup Job and click Run Backup, a Backup File is created. The Backup File contains copies of all the files added to the currently selected Backup Job. You can create any number of Backup Files using a Backup Job, and you can also update or replace old Backup Files to reflect any changes made to the original files.

WinBackup supports password protection as well as strong encryption. While password protection is probably secure enough for most home users, advanced users or companies might prefer to use strong encryption to protect sensitive files or emails even though this makes backup operations run a little slower.

Wizards can be selected to lead the user through the backup and restore processes.

The following list reflects information from the User Manual, LIU web site, my experiences and other sources.

- Takes advantage of 32-bit power of Windows 98/ME/2000/NT/XP and supports long file names
- Selectable options for compression and/or file verification, or neither
- Password protection and 128-bit or 256-bit AES encryption of backup files
- User selectable file level backup and restore

- Supports incremental backups (only by adding to an existing backup file, which seems a convenient approach)
- Run backup jobs instantly or schedule them for later execution
- Schedule backup jobs once or repetitively, on a daily, weekly or monthly basis
- Programmed selection of Windows Registry and other user files for backup
- Exclude specific file types from backups
- Stop specified program processes while performing backups
- Backup and restore logging
- Restore data to alternate locations
- Supports file level backup and restore, but not partition level (drive image) backup
- The following are issues relating to networked PCs (such as my tower PC and a second PC used as a portable unit):
 - Will back up to hard drives in networked computers
 - The license allows use only on a single PC, so drive mapping must be employed from all the other PCs on a network to the PC where WinBackup is installed
 - Backup or Restore across multiple CD-R or CD-RW discs (Media Spanning), but the CD drive must be in the same computer as the software is running (a workaround approach must be used if the CD-R/RW drive is not on the same PC as WinBackup)

Introduction

We are admonished to have and use an effective backup plan for our important documents and other hard-to-replace files. Like so much advice, it is much easier said than done. In the days of mostly small files that fit easily onto floppy disks, the writer did a pretty good job of saving files to a floppy, as well as the manual- and auto-saves to the hard disk. As major document tasks formerly performed by Technical Publications fell onto the shoulders of Engineers at the Writer's company, and scanning came into use, the floppy was largely supplanted by a Zip[®] disk. An available alternative was saving to a network drive, but it always seemed prudent to also have a backup that could be held in one's hand.

Since retirement, the writer has put together a computer system consisting of two networked PCs, with scanners available on each. The PC used for most applications is a SONY VAIO Slimtop, Model PCV-L400; which uses a 400 MHz Pentium II running Windows 98 (2nd Ed), 256 MB RAM and a 6 GB hard drive with about 500 MB of available hard-disk space. The 333 MHz Celeron tower PC configuration, running Windows Me, has two drive-bay frames with removable trays that each hold one hard drive. There is a selection of three new 80GB drives (one is 7200 RPM) and the original

8 GB drive in trays that can be plugged-in to the two available bays. The first partition of the drive in the upper bay becomes the C:\ drive. The intent is to use the 80GB 7200 RPM unit as the primary drive in the upper bay, while one of the two 80 GB, 5400 RPM drives can be in the lower bay for backup. These lower-bay drives would be used alternately for backup, with the drive not presently in use being kept off-site for safety. With hard drives now selling at about \$1 per GB, which is comparable to the cost of CD-RW disks, the convenience of the larger, faster hard drives led to acquisition of the large drives as the primary archival media. There is also a 32x12x40x CD-RW drive in the Tower PC. CD-R disks will also be employed for materials requiring maximum archival life and security.

The computers are networked with 10/100 MHz network interface cards and a 100 MHz hub.

The Reviewer's motivation for this effort stems from his current activity of producing archives of professional, family and personal materials that can be stored compactly, located and searched, retrieved effectively, and be shared with others. Another motivation was a house fire as a teen-ager, where just about the only thing saved was a box of Grandma's photos.

The Reviewer's interest in WinBackup was mainly in its advertised capability for producing backups to a networked PC's hard-drive. The capability of upgrading the main backup file with the incremental backup feature also seemed attractive. Reviews of WinBackup have appeared since the program was obtained for review: in *Computer Shopper* (July 2003, p. 124) and in *PC magazine* (June 17, 2003, p. 87). Note that WinBackup's costs have increased from those listed in the reviews.

Requirements

WinBackup version 1.73 is available for Microsoft versions of Windows 95, 98, ME, NT and XP. A Pentium 400 MHz or higher processor, 32 MB of RAM and 10 MB of hard-disk space are minimum requirements. The program can be downloaded from the Internet, or a packaged version is available directly from LIU. These are version 1.81 (only one new feature was listed that would have affected this review – faster backup speeds.)

Installation

The review copy of WinBackup has been successfully used on both of my networked PCs during the course of testing. A 26 GB partition on the second removable hard drive was used for backup files and folders where restore-test files were placed. Installation was uneventful, requiring less than 5 minutes. The CD-RW drive was recognized without problems in the Tower PC installation. No system instabilities have been noted as a result of the software installation.

Features

Features of WinBackup are summarized in the above Product Information Section. The password and encryption features were not evaluated.

Application Experiences

The Reviewer will relate his experiences with using WinBackup for five tested configurations and modes:

1. Full backup of 5.13 MB from the SONY PC 6 GB drive to a hard drive partition on the Tower PC (with and without compression), then restored selected files to a new folder on the Tower PC drive.
2. Incremental backup of Case 1, after about 2-weeks use. Backup size 0.44 GB, compressed to 0.22 GB (automatically appended to the original full backup).
3. Backed-up 1.5 MB (User File selection) from the SONY PC 6 GB drive to a hard drive partition on the Tower PC, with the file broken into file sizes that would fit onto CD-Rs. Files were then copied onto CD-R disks using the Tower PC CD writer. These CDs were then tested on the SONY's CD drive.
4. Full backup (3.0 GB) from the Tower PC drive C: to a hard drive partition on the 2nd hard disk in the Tower PC (with compression), then restored selected files to a new folder on the Tower PC drive.
5. User Files backup (1.5 GB) from the Tower PC drive C: directly to the CD-RW drive in the Tower PC, using CD-R disks (with compression), then restored selected files to a new folder on the Tower PC drive.

WinBackup was running on the Sony for Cases 1 – 3, and on the Tower for the other cases.

Case 1: Full Backup of SONY PC to Tower PC hard disk

The 5.1 GB compressed backup was successful. Time required was 1:58 hours for a compressed backup, including verification. There were error messages for the files in the recycled folder and for the backup log file. The Recycled folder should have been emptied before backup, and the Backup Log files in this, and the other, backups may fail to verify because they are written to between backup and verification. A restoration of single files and a 0.73 GB data-file folder to a new folder on the Tower PC disk appears to be without error. The restoration of a 0.73 GB folder required 1.07 hours. When an uncompressed backup of the 5.1 GB was attempted, it failed initially. After 4GB was processed, a Backup-Cancelled message was given, with 36, 524 warnings (one for each file in the attempted backup). Apparently, WinBackup does not automatically handle file spanning for backups to a hard disk when the 4 GB file size limit for FAT32 disks is exceeded. A successful backup (split into two files) was obtained when 4,000 MB was specified for file splitting. This backup required 58 minutes, including verification. The Scheduled Backup feature was verified to work properly.

Case 2: Incremental Backup of SONY PC to Tower PC hard disk

The incremental backup was made after about two-weeks elapsing after the full compressed backup of Case 1 was made. The backup was successful, with 443 MB of files compressed to 224 MB appended to the original backup file. The backup required 48 minutes. As a test, one of the new files from the backup was successfully restored to another location. It was noted that files deleted from the SONY since the initial full backup were still in the backup file. A major advantage of the WinBackup approach is

that only one file is needed for backup restoration rather than a succession of restores. There are pros and cons to the WinBackup approach. In the more common approach of successive restores, the initial full backup is restored, then each incremental backup is restored in the order that the backup files were made. This is more time consuming and prone to operator error than the WinBackup method. The risky aspect of the WinBackup method is that a good older file could be replaced by a potentially defective, newer version.

Case 3: SONY PC User File backup to Tower PC hard disk

The User File backup selection feature is another novel feature of WinBackup. This backup allows selection of Outlook or Outlook Express E-mail, Address Book, Favorites, Desktop, My Documents and System Settings. A single click on each selects these user files for backup. This is an effective way to exclude program files from your backup, while getting files appropriate to each user backed up. The backup of 1.0 GB, broken into 0.5 GB maximum file sizes, was successfully written to a partition on the second hard disk in the Tower PC. A total of 0.73 GB was written. Time required was 16 minutes. These files were then copied to CD-RW disks using the Tower PC. A file restoration was made from these CD-RW disks to still another blank partition on the 80 GB drive. No problems were noted in the restoration.

Case 4: Full backup from the Tower PC Drive C: to the PC's second removable hard drive

An evaluation copy of WinBackup was installed on the Tower PC. A full backup of 3.0 GB compressed to 2.35 GB required 31 minutes. File restoration tests were successful.

In another approach, a 586 MB folder was backed up from the mapped SONY drive C: in just under 19 minutes. In this case WinBackup was running on the Tower PC, where the backup file was recorded on a partition of the 80 GB drive in Bay 2 of the Tower PC. This demonstrated that all of the needed backups could be performed with WinBackup installed on only one of the networked PCs – if the drives to be backed up are mapped to the PC running WinBackup.

Case 5: Tower PC User File backup directly to CD-R disks

The User File backup of Drive C: on the Tower PC was made directly to the CD-RW drive on the Tower PC, using CD-R disks. The capability of WinBackup to write to the CD-RW drive directly, without using other software (such as Easy CD Creator), was employed. The User file backup of 1.5 GB, compressed by only 0.05 GB, was written to three 720 MB disks, with automatic disk spanning for the one backup file produced. This proved that WinBackup has the capability, in this case only, to break large backup files into multiple files appropriate to the size of the CD-R media. The file names on each disk are the same, but the file extensions on each of the CDs are unique. In the file restoration test, it was found that the complete backup file record was on the last disk, as expected. There was no problem in restoring selected files. The total backup spanned 3:07 hours, but no effort was made to start each disk promptly (The actual backup time was probably under one hour.). In another test, backing up and verifying a 633 MHz folder of MP3 files (which did not compress) to a 24X CD-R required 16-1/2 minutes. Although testers who evaluated a number of backup programs reported two to three times longer for CD-R

backups when using WinBackup, these times may not be a problem to many users, and LIU indicates that the new untested Version 1.81 offers reduced backup times.

Wrap-up Comments

Installation of the product was quick and easy. The interface was intuitive and easy to navigate, and an available wizard serves as a tutor to lead you through the backup and restore processes. The log files gave clear and useful information. Appending incremental backups to the original full backup, which maintains a single file to deal with in restores, is a novel and very useful feature of WinBackup – with the slight risk mentioned in the Case 2 discussion. Backup to a CD-R on the same computer was easy to set up, and disk spanning in this mode was automatic. In some of the more complex situations, however, it was necessary to estimate maximum file sizes and manually input these limits in setting up the backup. The scheduler worked well. While encryption was not evaluated, other testers have reported good results.

The program, unfortunately for another of the reviewer's needs, does not have a capability for partition-level backups.

At \$40 for the downloaded version, the program is a good value if the encountered limitations are of minor or no consequence to the user.

Documentation

An 23-page *User's Manual* printed manual was included in the packaged version (on-line in the downloaded version). The same manual is included as an Acrobat file. It seemed easy to use, and the inclusion of a hard-copy manual is much appreciated. More information, such as the file size input needed for the handling of large backups to hard drives, should have been included in addition to basics.

Product Support

A thirty-day trial period is available for products purchased directly from the LIU site. Evaluation copies of the full software, usable for 30-days, can also be downloaded. E-mail help is available from LIU. Since the Reviewer does not own the product at the time of review, the product was not registered, and no attempt was made to use this service. Some useful information is available on-line in the form of FAQs and "white papers".