

How we tested

Our test set-up for this month's lab test was as follows...

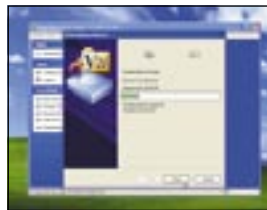
To put the back-up programs through their paces, we used a BenQ Joybook with 512MB RAM and an internal 60GB hard drive (partitioned) running Windows XP Professional. Our remote back-up devices were a LaCie Pocket 40GB hard drive (USB 2.0) and a LaCie external DVD±RW drive. We also used a Shuttle PC with 1GB of memory, a 60GB internal hard drive, an external Maxtor 120GB drive and a Linksys Network Attached Storage device/unit where applicable.

We took images of our two test systems in their current states and then installed a back-up tool. We then used it to see what features it offered, both for backing up and restoring data (tools won bonus points for any data-recovery techniques they were able to employ). How easy was it to use? Did it help you find and locate important files, or were you left to your own devices? Just because you know where your Outlook Express mailboxes are hidden, that doesn't necessarily mean you should have to remember to back them up.

For drive-imaging software, we wanted to see how much of your imaging could be done inside Windows without having to restart your PC; this wasn't just for convenience, as some external drives are inaccessible in

a non-Windows environment. We also tested each tool's performance – amazingly there were big differences between the tools when it came to how fast they copied and compressed data during a back-up cycle. Programs that crashed or refused to install were also frowned upon, although we tried them on both test machines to find out whether the problems were isolated or not.

Finally, there are the data restore and recovery angles to consider: how easy was it to get the data back onto your machine if required? And was it put back in its original location, or were you left to choose the location to which it was restored? What happened in the event of an emergency, such as if your system failed to start? We looked at each tool's disaster-recovery options, too. See the results for yourself over the following pages. ■



We took images of our test machine's hard disks to ensure accurate results.

ACRONIS True Image 7

INFORMATION

PRICE £35 (€29 ex VAT)
SUPPLIER Softjam
 www.softjam.co.uk
INFO www.acronis.com

BACK-UP OPTIONS

| | | | |
|---------|---|-------------------|---|
| File | ✗ | Ext HDD | ✓ |
| Image | ✓ | FTP | ✗ |
| CD/DVD | ✓ | Disaster recovery | ✓ |
| Network | ✓ | | |

PCPlus ratings

ACRONIS TRUE IMAGE 7

Value ●●●●●●●●●●

Features ●●●●●●●●●●

Performance ●●●●●●●●●●

OVERALL 8

True Image, as the name suggests, is an imaging utility. It was the first to support imaging of the boot partition without restarting in DOS, and this meant it could support a wide range of target media. But this is just the beginning of its versatility.

For example, the program actively encourages you to start the imaging process and then go off and continue with your work – once the image is finished, any changes made since the image was started are incorporated into it. Second, the program supports incremental image back-ups, so you can have a back-up that you update when you want.

If this isn't enough, True Image 7 is capable of creating its own hidden partition at the end of your hard drive

(the size is dependent on how much free space you have) for storing image back-ups that you can't access from outside the program itself. This Acronis Secure Zone can, if it's on your boot drive, be loaded before Windows if necessary, making it a useful fail-safe option if Windows becomes unbootable.

You can view your images directly from Windows Explorer by assigning a virtual drive letter to one of them – the 'drive' is read-only too, so the original archive is always protected. Finally, the program includes the MigrateEasy tool,



which can clone one drive's contents to another and even prepare a disk for that purpose.

The program is currently only available as an electronic download, but it's so easy to use that you won't need the electronic manual. The only drawback is that it's relatively slow.

CENTERED SecondCopy 2000

INFORMATION

PRICE £17 (US – VAT not applicable)
SUPPLIER Centered Systems
 www.centered.com
INFO www.centered.com

BACK-UP OPTIONS

| | | | |
|---------|---|-------------------|---|
| File | ✓ | Ext HDD | ✓ |
| Image | ✗ | FTP | ✗ |
| CD/DVD | ✓ | Disaster recovery | ✗ |
| Network | ✓ | | |

PCPlus ratings

CENTERED SECONDCOPY 2000

Value ●●●●●●●●●●

Features ●●●●●●●●●●

Performance ●●●●●●●●●●

OVERALL 5

SecondCopy 2000 was the direct sequel to SecondCopy 97, proving that this program doesn't get updated that often. However, it remains a favourite in the shareware scene, and it's easy to see why. It's essentially a file-copying utility that supports any drive that can be seen in Windows, including networks and formatted CD-RW and DVD±RW discs.

Data is split into profiles, and profiles can be further split into groups. Each profile can only handle a single folder, so it can be fiddly to set up all your important data. No templates are supplied, so you have to manually locate email and other key settings.

Each profile is set up via a choice of wizards: Express or Custom. Choose Custom for maximum control – it

includes options like back-up scheduling (daily, hourly, on set days or during start-up and shutdown) and what kind of back-up you want. By default, 'Simple Copy' is selected, which copies everything in its original state from one folder to another. But you can choose Exact Copy, which removes obsolete files among others. You can compress this into a Zip, and even set up the program to archive files deleted by an exact copy to another location – just in case.

Gripes include the lack of an incremental data option, so each back-

up is slow and painstaking. Not only that, but the program is unable to copy files that are currently open in another program, prompting you regularly to close the files in question.

Ultimately this is a competent tool, but it's distinctly average and is now looking a little long in the tooth.

