All Computers Get Hiccups…

(…and can also get infections, blackouts, or even total amnesia!)

The modern PC is a powerful and hardworking beast, with great capacity and an apparent willingness to obey every command (from you AND from all others who come into contact with it).

From the day your PC comes out of the box it begins evolving into your own particular system, typically aimed at making your busy life more productive (and hopefully more fun) by looking after all the documents and other vital data in your home, study, business and recreational activities.

As each day goes by (and you start writing your first big thesis or expanding your business…), your PC develops an individual configuration very much more complex than the original set-up, as it takes on more and more of your favourite applications and individually-customised settings.

But beware - even the toughest PC gets sick sometimes!

Sooner or later, chances are that you (or someone else) will accidentally overwrite, move or delete something vital, or your system may become totally scrambled by such common threats as virus infection, hardware fault, power problems, malicious action, even "dodgy" software or bugs.

Of course, in a perfect world none of this would happen but your anti-virus software may be just one step behind the latest cunning threat; new security loopholes are always being discovered and "patched" in the operating system; your system mysteriously freezes in the middle of saving a substantial piece of school coursework, your 4 year old just discovered how to format hard disks; in fact, often the gremlins just creep in from who-knows-where…

So for those of us living on planet Earth in the 21st century…

How do we protect our busy PC?

Experience shows that you can employ all the protection devices going (firewalls, anti-virus, spyware-blocking, padlocks, barbed-wire fencing, etc.) but you are still pretty likely to need to reinstate a good clean image of your own perfect configuration at some point, along with all your latest "live" data.

You can of course revert to the manufacturers' recovery CD and start back at square one, but most of us don't have time for that amount of re-configuration (assuming we can

remember or even lay our hands on all the different software and drivers that usually need adding along the way.)

Keep a clean image!

At any point where you are certain that your system configuration is clean and running exactly as you would wish, consider making a recoverable snapshot of your C: drive using a program such as Norton "Ghost". (An image is a compressed copy of the whole drive, complete with boot record and hidden system files, etc.)

The image should be written to a separate drive, ideally a removable unit such as a USB 2.0 external hard drive if using Windows XP, or to a separate drive in the same PC (if using earlier versions of Windows).

This will allow you to run an easy and automatic rebuild of your individual system's core configuration to a clean re-formatted hard disk in the same PC or other IDENTICAL hardware in the event of disk corruption, hardware failure or disk upgrade.

You should only ever make a new image if you have made any substantial amendments to the configuration, but it is important to ensure that the system is still clean and stable at this point. It is also a good idea to keep a detailed log of new software added and other driver or configuration changes made since the last good image.

By keeping several good images taken at significant stages in your system's evolution, you can recover your "core" system to any clean state you prefer, subject to available space on backup drives.

But this does not look after the really dynamic part of a busy system – your precious "live" data.

Is there an echo in here?

In the old days… well we had simple MS-DOS machines (ask your Grandparents!) running one program at a time and if you were working on an important file, you made a backup copy on floppy diskette or very slow (and often unreliable) tape. You perhaps had a cycle of three or more and you were supposed to keep the latest version away from the building.

Now the modern system is so dynamic that it would be an almost impossible manual task to copy every data update and identify the latest (and earlier) versions of everything, even if they would fit on the disk or tape.

But in the 21st Century, we can all benefit from considerable inspiration and effort by major specialist developers (such as Attix5) whose clever software will identify even the smallest changes to all "live" data and automatically back it up for you (in uniquely encrypted form) to your own secure on-line storage "locker".

As you are the only person with the encryption key to unscramble your own data, you can now have a very cheap but safe and effective "automatic remote backup" solution, not only of your latest data but also of the last 30 days worth of previous "echoes", accessible instantly from wherever you happen to be!

If you think this sounds too good to be true, try it for yourself FREE of charge at www.recoverit.co.nz , a N.Z. based service devoted exclusively to providing an easy, low-cost, highly secure and reliable data backup service to home and business users alike. RecoverIT provides free backup software by Attix5 and top-security storage for a small monthly fee per user. Corporate customers may even consolidate many users into a single easily managed payment, with GST invoices automatically issued for standing order subscriptions.

Now you have no excuse for losing track of your valuable data and you should therefore be able to recover easily from almost any disaster in your system, with the added benefits of a totally confidential on-line data "briefcase" and the ability to easily reinstate earlier versions of the same data if necessary.

The recovery position…

Depending on the scale of disaster, you should now have most options properly covered.

If you have corrupted or lost valuable "live" data, you can recover this easily from your remote "locker", either overwriting existing files or saving to a different location. (See www.recoverit.co.nz for more details).

If your system itself has become corrupted and unstable (or you have had to replace or re-format your C: drive), you will be able to reinstate the last good system image and then retrieve your latest "live" data as described above.

Back up and running – no worries!

You get a lot of computer technology for your money these days. Faulty or stolen equipment can usually be insured and replaced without too much fuss. But valuable data can become priceless and irreplaceable if you don't put these basic and fundamental protection and recovery measures in place from the start.

The best time to take these simple steps is right from the moment you first set your system up. Free advice on "disaster-proofing" your PC (as well as free help specifying and choosing new systems) is available from Moduwise.

Remember, almost all systems will suffer hardware failure or data loss at some point so build in these simple protection measures NOW for easy and clean recovery of your valuable system, whatever the disaster.