

When you should get your back up

By Charles Wright
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Because technology has a way of obscuring one's view of the timber by growing new crops of forest giants outside your window, Bleeding Edge forces itself, every now and again, to mount a wood-detection mission.

The question we ask in these voyages of discovery is: do we need to change the way we operate to take advantage of new technologies?

At the same time, we try to keep in mind that any changes we may contemplate need to be time and cost-effective, and more than marginally productive.

It was during one of those reassessments that we decided we could get a lot more out of our broadband internet connection.

Like many people, we've been using Optus Cable solely for email and information gathering; the speed and convenience of the always-on connection more than justifies the monthly fee. But we couldn't help but wonder, particularly when service providers have adjusted charges to provide considerably more bandwidth at lower rates, whether we were missing some of the potential.

We'd already started to think about putting up a website for Bleeding Edge, and we'd decided to invest \$149 a year for a web-hosting service from [SmartyHost](#), which has recently moved from Adelaide to the Information City IT incubator in Collins Street. That investment buys 150MB of storage space, which is more than the average website will ever need, and SmartyHost offers cheaper packages, but because it offered us a cheaper rate to renew the [bleedingedge.com.au](#) domain - it threw in a .com or .net domain registration with the bigger package - it suited our purposes, particularly because we had other things in mind.

The most important of these was off-site backup. As we have written several times, data does not really exist until there are several copies of it, at least one of which is kept safe from theft, fire, viruses and suicidal hard drives in a different location.

In the past we have carried a collection of CDs, and more recently a pocket-sized Momobay external Firewire hard drive, with a copy of our irreplaceable files. We try to automate the backups with a program called Second Copy 2000 (about \$40 at [secondcopy.com](#)). It has a simple interface that allows you to back up to another directory, hard disk or external or network drive. But because we either forget to take the drive with us or neglect to hook it up again when we return, it is not entirely foolproof.

Then we discovered a program called [WebDrive](#), from South River Technologies, which allows you to map an internet FTP (File Transfer Protocol) site to a local drive. You can also do the same sort of thing by following the instructions at [windowsnetworking.com/j_helmig/inetmap.htm](#), but we liked WebDrive enough to pay \$53 for it.

WebDrive uses the internet's SSL (Secure Socket Layer), so it transfers data securely, handles password-protected or anonymous FTP sites easily, has proxy support to ease access around firewalls, knows how to pick up after an aborted transfer and allows you to give each "drive" you set up a permanent letter. Once you have set it up, you can drag and drop files to and from the remote drive with ease.

Because WebDrive supports the WebDAV protocol, which allows you to lock files, modify them, then release the locks to allow other users to review and update the information, you can use the same technique for remote collaboration. Rutgers University, for instance, uses WebDrive to allow students to save their files to the server.

You will have to find out from your web host the name of your home directory to enter into WebDrive, along with your user name and password: in the case of SmartyHost, the directory is /var/www/html. We set up a backup directory there and testablished a profile in Second Copy to complete the backup schedule daily at the same time. We found it oddly exciting to be able to create new folders on SmartyHost's Unix servers by dragging and dropping. WebDrive allows you to use DOS commands on the folders.

If the server you use is also hosting your website, it's a good idea to password protect the backup directory, so that casual browsers don't have access to your files. You can set up user names and passwords if you want to allow collaboration.

The control panel interface at SmartyHost makes that sort of thing very simple - although you have to remember first to establish a group under its file manager.

Second Copy works well with WebDrive because it only backs up altered files. It took a little more than two hours for us to copy 60MB or so

of files when we set up the system - all of which proceeded happily in the background while we continued to browse the web and check for email - but after that, the daily backups are scarcely noticeable.

Now that we can see more wood around here, we are looking at other ways to bring the Bleeding Edge cave up to date.

We'd be interested in hearing any ideas our readers might have for getting more out of technology.

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This story was found at: <http://theage.com.au/articles/2004/04/21/1082395898748.html>