

# Vetech View

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## Backup, Backup, Backup

By Matt Sanregret

Ah yes, this article is published at least once or twice a year with some different twists. The main idea is to relay the importance of backing up your valuable practice data. As you use your Advantage software, the value of your data quickly exceeds the value of your computer hardware.

### Inside:

- Backups
- Words of Wisdom

Why Backup? Several reasons, here are the top few.

1. **Hardware Failure:** At least a couple times per month we are the lucky recipient of a phone call from a practice that has experienced a hard disk failure (crash) or some other major hardware problem. With several thousand computers running Advantage software (approximately 1000 practices at this time, most with multi-user systems) this type of problem does represent a very small percentage of computers, but the damage can be devastating with no backup.
2. **Solving/Researching a Problem:** We receive backups from users on a regular basis to research an issue that can't be resolved over the telephone. Reviewing data from a practice lets us make suggestions for Advantage setup changes and duplicate first hand issues that have come up in the field that we cannot test with sample data. Occasionally, when our staff requests a backup, we get the response from a user that they don't have one, the CD is broken, etc. This is like driving without auto insurance; it's very inexpensive until you get in an accident.
3. **Turn Back the Clock:** Have you ever "accidentally" deleted any data on your computer? Or increased all your prices by 50% instead of 5%? And you just want to go back to where you were a little while ago. A backup lets you quickly recover from such incidents.
4. **Take your data home:** VETECH offers a free backup license of Advantage for any user wishing to install Advantage on a home computer for backup purposes. A side benefit of this feature is the ability to access all your Advantage data from home. Lookup patient histories, a client's phone number, even print any Advantage report all from the comfort of your home office.



### Types of Backups:

The main purpose of this article is to motivate you to have a backup strategy. We have gone into backup details in previous articles and will again in the future. For now we will briefly mention several different backup options.

**Backup to your hard drive:** This is the simplest, but most risky backup option. It is simple because there is nothing to setup or purchase. It is risky because you are putting all your eggs in one basket, a single hard drive. If this is the only type of backup you make, it is a significant improvement over no backup at all – but I would highly recommend supplementing (not replacing) this with another backup option.

**Removable media:** Zip drives, CD-RW drives, DVD-RW drives, flash memory drives, etc. A removable drive strategy is the most common method that Advantage users backup their data. Devices such as a Zip drive let you use multiple backup disks (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc) creating a redundant set of backups, rather than just a single backup. If you use removable media, you should have different backup media for each day the practice is open and at least one extra for taking off-site.

*Thought for the month: Happiness makes up in height for what it lacks in length – Robert Frost*





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**External hard drives:** This category of backup has become very easy and affordable the past couple years. External hard drives are very fast, reliable, and separate from your main server computer. External hard drives are an excellent choice for backup, but should be supplemented with a removable option.

**Computer to Computer:** Most of our users have multiple computers running Advantage on a network. This makes backing up from computer to computer a very easy task. Simply run the standard Advantage backup from a computer other than your main server computer and select a backup destination someplace on your C: drive (ie: C:\Advantage Backup\).

**Getting greedy – multiple backup strategy:** No matter what your primary backup method is, our overriding recommendation is to have multiple backup options/destinations in place. This may sound like twice as much work, but really is not. It's a much better feeling when the power goes out to know that you have multiple backups in multiple places, rather than all your data in one place. For instance if you choose to backup to another computer or to an external hard drive each day, then perhaps every Monday and Friday, at least once per week, copy the backup file from this computer or hard drive to a zip disk or CD-RW disk. If you backup each day to a CD or Zip disk – then on a regular basis copy the backup file to another computer. Certainly if you backup to your servers hard drive, copy this file to removable media or another computer on a regular basis.

**Off-site storage:** It is a very good idea to take a backup off-site on a regular basis. Having a backup off-site protects your data from events such as computer theft, fire, flood, or other catastrophic events at the practice. Once a week, slip a backup disk into your pocket and take it home, perhaps rotate this strategy between multiple employees at the clinic. . You can simply store the backup in a safe place or actually restore this on a home computer (recommended), then return the backup to the clinic and bring a more current backup home.

**Automatic backups:** This sounds great doesn't it? Configure backup to run every day at 2:00am and never worry about it. Setting up an automatic backup is great, but I would recommend this only to supplement, not replace, a manual backup strategy. Over the years we have been sent several blank CD's created by an automatic backup. I have also seen backups of "My Documents" or the Windows system folder rather Advantage data. If you do use automatic backup, make sure you are checking the backups it creates at least monthly. Even if it was originally setup correctly, data on computers change with application and Windows upgrades, and hardware changes.

**Strategy for life:** Often times a great backup strategy is implemented with a new system purchase and lasts a few months or even a year or two. Then things like employee turnover and computer upgrades happen and the backup strategy gets lost in the shuffle somehow. Or you experience some type of failure that you recover from and you say "Now I will make backups" and you do – for several months. The fact is that a computer failure for a new computer is very, very rare. When does equipment fail? Usually when it's over three years of age. Three or more years for a computer in a veterinary clinic is like 15 dog years!! Backup strategy is much more important for older equipment than new equipment.

Ok so now you are backing up and hopefully to at least two different devices. How do you know if your backups are valid? The real test is to actually restore a backup to another computer. See #4 above (take your data home). You can also simply view your backup files to make sure they have a current date stamp on them and are a significant size. Advantage automatically compresses (zips) your backup, and puts the date (YYMMDD format) in the backup file name.

While we have optimized Advantage backup to be very fast, backup should also take a minimum of 30 seconds to complete. For users that have been running Advantage for over a year, backup should take a several minutes to complete. We are always very skeptical when we speak with users that claim backup only takes "a few seconds". If this is the case, most likely your backup is not valid.

If you have any doubts about your backup, send us one. We are happy to test a backup for you and make sure it is valid. Just call ahead to let us know its coming and send to our office. Media such as a zip cartridges, external hard drives, or flash memory drives will be returned to you promptly. CD's or DVD's will be discarded unless you request them to be returned.