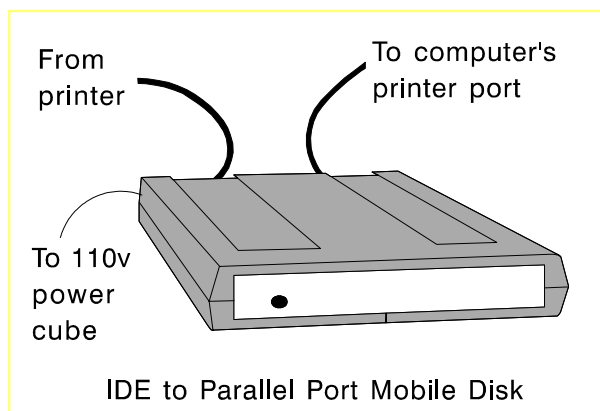


A Unique Tool for Backups

XT, 286, 386, 486 or Pentium, tower, desktop or laptop, Windows or DOS, IBM or MAC, it doesn't matter. Whatever you use, wherever you use it, you just have to do backups. I always kiddingly say that there is a gremlin in every computer. He watches what you do. If you back up your system, he is unlikely to bother you. If you don't, he most certainly will trash your data and programs. You just must back up if you are a serious computer user.

Well, the other day, he got me, even though I do regular backups. The 500 Mb hard drive in my second computer went down - the one I use for packet, some word processing, graphics and general messing around in DOS and Windows 3.1. I tried everything, including a low level format (you are not supposed to do that to IDE drives, so don't try it). Even that last ditch attempt failed. Later, I discovered it was not the hard drive at all, but rather a faulty hard disk controller. When I replaced the controller, the hard drive came back to life again. I replaced the partitions with F-disk, high level formatted it, and put the system and program files from IBM DOS 7 on it (IBM PC-DOS 7 is considerably better than MS-DOS 6.22, and more recent, too). Now, I was faced with either re-installing all the programs from their original floppies, or using a backup. Of course, I chose the latter.



A couple of months ago, my parallel port tape drive failed, and I had to send it back to the factory for warranty repair. In the meantime, I purchased a neat device to take its place. It is called an **IDE to Parallel Port Mobile Hard Disk Transformer Kit**. It includes a 5" X 8" X 1½" plastic case, a parallel cable and a power cube that plugs into the wall. Inside the case is a PC card, but most of the case is empty. You connect your own IDE (or EIDE) hard drive up to 2 gigabytes to the cables inside the case, then fit in the drive and close the case. I used a spare 240 Mb drive for this

application (you should be able to pick up a 100 Mb IDE drive for around \$10 at the next swapfest). Next, turn off your computer, unplug the printer, plug it into the back of the mobile disk's case and plug the mobile disk's cable into your printer port. That's it for the physical installation; power up.

The kit comes with a floppy containing software for DOS, Win 3.1 or Win 95 (286 machine or above). Software installation is a snap, and takes only a few seconds. Thereafter, you run a supplied batch file that sniffs out the mobile drive and installs it in the operating system as the next drive letter. For example, if you have floppies A: and B:, hard drive C: and CD-ROM drive D:, the software will install the mobile drive as E:. Once that is done, you can access it just like your main hard drive (assuming, of course, that the mobile drive has already been partitioned and formatted). You can copy files from C: to E:, or E: to C:, or to and from any other read/write drive. Now, you are ready to back up your system.

The simplest approach is to just copy your files to the mobile drive, but don't forget that the mobile drive's size must be large enough to accommodate all your files. Perhaps you will want to copy just your critical data files, and use the original program disks for a full reinstallation if you ever need it. Just 10 days before my system went down, I had used PKZIP to make one big monster backup file of everything on my hard drive (96,358,173 bytes!), and I copied it to the mobile drive.

It took only about an hour to copy and restore everything - about 200 Mb of programs and data after decompression. What a lifesaver!

The kit cost me exactly \$99 with shipping and handling, but you may be able to find it cheaper. Valuestor, Inc., makes the unit I purchased: 1609B Regatta Lane, San Jose, CA 95112-1116, Phone (408) 437-2300, Fax (408) 437-9333. Their technical support hotline is (408) 437-2310, though it seems unlikely that you will need to contact them. A small but excellent manual comes with the device, and it really takes you through installation step by step. My installation was a snap and worked the first time. You can also reach them at ValuStorTS@aol.com, [FTP://users.aol.com/ValuStorTS/download](ftp://users.aol.com/ValuStorTS/download).

How about leaving it on-line? Of course, when your backup is done, you can easily unplug everything and put it away in a safe place. On the other hand, if you are low on free space on your main hard drive, you can leave the mobile device plugged in and use whatever space is free after copying your backup to it. Unlike a tape drive, you can copy files to it in their native state - no compression is required. You can even run programs from the mobile drive, just as you can with your main hard drive. The device's features make it extremely flexible, and worthy of your consideration and your hard earned money. I like mine very much, and it has already paid for itself by saving me the many hours of labor required to re-install and set up all my software. Happy computing!