

Choosing an External USB Hard Drive

A computer's hard drive is where all of your files and settings are stored ready for when you need to run the PC again. Like all equipment though, hard drives can fail and often quite crucial data can be lost. Over the years there have been many solutions to the need to keep important data safe. This has ranged from expensive tape drives through to the humble floppy disk. These days though the floppy is usually far too small for serious backup purposes.



External Hard drives mainly come in two types. Those that contain 3.5" drives and those with 2.5" ones. 3.5" will typically cost less for a given capacity, but require an external power supply. These are ideal where they are used to back up large amounts of data, though more awkward if used to carry the data around with you (with a laptop PC for example).

2.5" drives are more expensive for the same capacity, but are much more portable. They are typically powered through the USB cable that connects them to the PC.

3.5" External Hard Drive

Another type of USB drive that deserves mention is extremely small though restricted in capacity compared with the hard drive variety. These have no moving parts and so can withstand quite harsh treatment. If they have a weakness it is that their size means they can easily get mislaid. These drives are commonly given 'snappy' sounding names such as pen drives, flash drives, thumb drives, jump drives or key drives.



USB 'Pen' Drive

Here's some suggestions how you might go about choosing the right type of external drive.

1. Decide upon the capacity you need to back up. Pen drives come in sizes up to 8GB. If you just need to carry around a few spreadsheets and documents, a 1GB model will probably suffice. For videos or graphics, you'll need much higher capacity. Choose a 'hard drive' variety of at least 60GB, especially for Video which uses a lot of space.
2. Decide on style. If you want to back up your PC and you need lots of capacity, choose a drive based on a 3.5" drive (see above). If you need to carry your video data with you, it may be best to choose a drive based on a 2.5" hard drive. If you just need to carry a few word processing files around, choose a pen drive.
3. Do you need to store sensitive files? Read up on the security features in the USB drive before choosing it.
4. Plan your budget as prices vary widely and the choice of features is getting larger.
5. If your backup data is critical look for a well known name and check whether the USB drive comes with a warranty.

Well known USB drive manufacturers include:

<u>Hard Drive Type</u>	<u>Pen Drives</u>
Maxdata	Kingston
Freecom	Corsair
Lacie	Sandisk
Iomaga	PNY
Seagate	Sony