Dropbox has been around for a year or so. Recently it has been gaining some very positive reviews. I have been using it for a month or two and have found it faultless.

Dropbox performs two tasks simultaneously and very well. It works on PCs, Macs, Linux computers and on mobiles

- It invisibly and continuously backs up files that are in a special folder on your computer to online storage (ie in "The Cloud")
- It invisibly synchronises all the files in that special folder to all your computers that have Dropbox installed. It will even do this "across platforms" (eg Windows computers and Macs can share the same file. Whether or not they can both read the files depends on what types of file they are and what software is installed). So, the same contents are always available in all the computers.

What does that mean in practice?

- You can have free automatic online backups of up to 2gb. This aspect of Dropbox could be invaluable even if you only use one computer.
- If you use more than one computer and find that you have to copy important files between them (using a USB pen drive, for instance) then all of that messsing about can be a thing of the past. Simply store those files in your special folder and they will automatically be backed up to "the cloud" and downloaded to the same special folder on your other computer(s).
- The potential for file collaboration with co-workers, students etc is enormous. As a teacher you can, for instance, hand out assignments by placing them in a shared folder. You can then set up individual shared folders with your students to receive their work back.

I've been using it for a couple of months now and have found it invaluable for making sure that my notebook computer always has the latest versions of my most important files – spreadsheets, pdf files, databases, project administration files etc. You can't think of this synchronising to other computers as a method of backing up files because a change or deletion on one computer is propagated to all the places where you have Dropbox installed. However, the online storage keeps up to 30 days worth of previous versions of files so you should be able to restore changed or deleted versions from the online backup (available via your web browser). I haven't tested this yet, and would do so first if I ever thought I might need to rely on it.

I tried to break it today by having the same file open on two different machines and then changing each file separately. I wanted to see if it could cope with this and fully expected it to just retain whichever of the two files I saved last. It impressed me, though, by anticipating

the problem and saving BOTH files, making it clear which machine had originated which version. I realise that this is a situation that won't crop up for a lot of people, but the fact that they had not only devised a sensible resolution to such conflicts but also made it unambiguously clear to the user what had happened gives me confidence in the solidity of this product.

I have only shown this product to two clients so far and both of them immediately asked me to install it for them.

You can join Dropbox and receive 2gb online storage for free. If 2gb is not enough data storage, you can upgrade to a paid subscription account to get even more storage.

Use this link – http://db.tt/hsQlQNB – to create your DropBox account and install the software. If you use this link then both you and I will receive an extra 250mb free storage space (this referral system works up to a maximum amount of free storage space of 8gb).
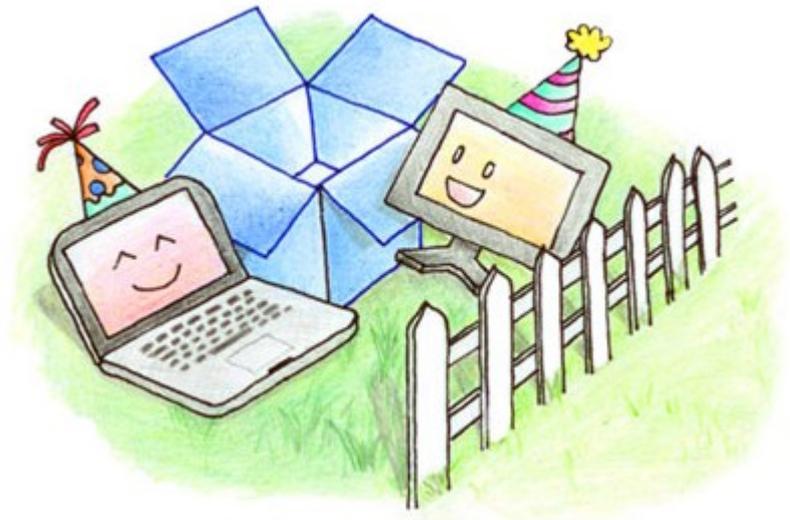
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