

What External Drive Should I Get?

One of my very frequent recommendations is that you purchase an external hard drive for back-up purposes. Backing up to an external drive is probably the most important first step in getting an overall back-up strategy in place.

The question that inevitably comes up then is just which external drive to get.

The problem, of course, is that it's an answer that keeps changing. Technology evolves, and as a result, so does my recommendation.

Let's give you a few guidelines, and then a few current examples.

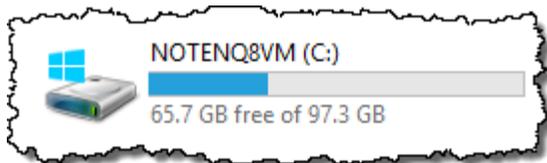
External drive capacity

It's pretty easy to say you can never have too much capacity: bigger is better.

Of course, more capacity also means spending more money.

A rule of thumb to use is this: get an external drive that is *at least* three times as large as the amount of data you expect to back up.

For example, one of my Windows 8 machines has a roughly 100GB (gigabyte) drive, of which around 65GB are used:



Thus I would recommend a drive with *at least* three times 65GB, or around 200GB, capacity. That would be enough to hold two complete and compressed full-image backups, along with overhead information such as recovery partitions, and a healthy collection of incremental backups as well.



As I said, that's a *bare minimum*, and there are certainly situations where it could end up not being enough, depending on how you configure your backups. If you want extra safety and breathing room, double or even triple the recommendation.

In most cases, the good news here is that your back-up requirements – even after tripling my recommendation – will likely be smaller than the average external hard-drive size currently available.

External drive technology

There are, naturally, several different types of external drives. Connection methods and even power options vary. Some choices are easy; some depend at least a little on your personal setup.

USB3

There's simply no reason not to ensure that your new external drive comes with a USB3 interface, even if your computer doesn't support it.

If your computer does support USB3, then backups will be faster – potentially much faster – than the previous USB2 standard. If your computer doesn't support USB3, that's okay; USB3 is backwards compatible, and will simply operate at the slower USB2 speed.

Someday, when you get a new computer that will, in all likelihood, have a USB3 interface, you'll have your external drive all ready to take advantage of it.

Power

There are two approaches to powering an external drive.

- No additional connection: the drive is powered entirely by the USB interface.
- An additional external power supply.

The choice is yours, but when making your decision, consider that USB-powered drives are typically small, portable, and slower. Drives with external power



supplies are typically physically larger as well as having more capacity, and are able to transfer data more quickly.

Other characteristics

Physical size: USB-powered portable drives are generally small, and the drive with external power (and possibly higher capacity) will be physically larger as well.

Rotation speed: It's not necessary to pay attention to this for external drives, particularly back-up drives.

Just do this

If you don't have one already, get an external hard drive for backing up. Either of the two I've mentioned above, or similar, will do.

And then start backing up.

