

Backup Review Rating



Reviewed on 11/13/07

Summary

It's not clear that SwapDrive really wants to be in the market of selling directly to end users. Their web site says that "SwapDrive provides aggressive wholesale storage pricing to our Partners, allowing our Partners to determine appropriate retail prices, packaging, and marketing strategies for their product or service." Their retail pricing, posted on the web site, is off the scale compared with most of the other services we tested: \$500 per year for a mere 2GB of storage. It would seem that SwapDrive is being careful not to compete with their resellers who market SwapDrive under their own brands and probably at much lower prices. 2GB per year for \$500 doesn't stack up very well against vendors like Carbonite and Mozy which both offer unlimited backup for \$50-60 per year. So we'll put aside the issue of value and concentrate on product features and performance. If we were to take seriously the pricing on SwapDrive's web site, we would probably give SwapDrive a much lower rating since it would represent one of the worst values of any backup service on the market.

Overall we gave SwapDrive 3 stars as a backup service. They put a lot of work into their web interface and while that's useful if you need to get access to a backed up file from an Internet café or somebody else's computer, it doesn't really help you much with protecting the data on your PC. That's where their downloadable PC client software comes in, and that software is not of exceptional quality from either an ease-of-use point of view or freedom from bugs. It's fairly easy to install, but they made some strange decisions regarding functionality.

Pros:

- File sharing
- Online file access
- Straightforward, easy to use, client

Cons:

- Limited backup quota
 - Utilization gauge is often incorrect
- Ridiculously pricey (\$500/yr for 2GB)
- No free trial
- Scheduled backup only (not continuous)
- Does not back up open files or locked files
- No Mac support for client
- Does not appear to do block-level incremental backup
- Slow – backup speed was 1hr 10 min for 100MB (190kbps), restore 1 hr 15 min for 100MB – about 1/3rd the speed of the fastest services we tested
- No multiple versions of backed up files
- No telephone support

Company Information

Location:	Washington, DC
Est. revenues:	\$3.0 M 2007
Employees :	20
Financing:	\$8.9M in financing
Subscribers:	150,000
Stored data:	20 terabytes (133 megabytes/customer)
Positioning:	"Leader in file sharing and backup services." SwapDrive's services allow customers to remotely backup, store, and access critical information more easily, reliably and efficiently than ever before, with the highest levels of security and availability"
Sales channels:	Partnered with broadband providers, service providers, software & hardware companies.

Pricing

Single User

	Monthly	Yearly
10 MB	N/A	<input type="radio"/> \$20.00
100 MB	<input type="radio"/> \$7.50	<input type="radio"/> \$75.00
250 MB	<input type="radio"/> \$15.00	<input type="radio"/> \$150.00
500 MB	<input type="radio"/> \$25.00	<input type="radio"/> \$250.00
1 GB	<input type="radio"/> \$30.00	<input type="radio"/> \$300.00
2 GB	<input type="radio"/> \$50.00	<input type="radio"/> \$500.00

Multi User

Administrative controls let you add and manage multiple users you want to share your data with and allocate how much storage space each user can have and which files they have access to.

	Monthly	Yearly
1 GB	<input type="radio"/> \$36.00	<input type="radio"/> \$360.00
2 GB	<input type="radio"/> \$65.00	<input type="radio"/> \$650.00
3 GB	<input type="radio"/> \$96.00	<input type="radio"/> \$960.00
5 GB	<input type="radio"/> \$150.00	<input type="radio"/> \$1,500.00
10 Gigabytes	<input type="radio"/> \$280.00	<input type="radio"/> \$2,800.00

Getting started and initial backup

It doesn't appear that SwapDrive is very serious about attracting individual users through its web interface. Beyond pricing (which is off the scale compared with their competitors), they have no free trial whatsoever, so you have to put in your credit card even to try it. When we tried it, the signup process produced an error. Once you enter your credit card, you get an order confirmation screen:



The screenshot shows the SwapDrive website's order confirmation page. At the top, the SwapDrive logo is on the left, and navigation links for 'how it works', 'sales', 'partners', 'security', 'media', 'support', and 'login' are on the right. Below the navigation is a banner with the text 'protect. share. secure.' and a 'Sign Up Now! CLICK HERE' button. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column, titled 'Sales', contains the following text: 'Your order was successful. Thank you. Welcome to SwapDrive data backup and fileshare.', 'Date: 11/27/2007', 'Order ID:', 'Quantity purchased: 100 Megabytes', 'Amount Paid: 7.50', 'Name: Peter Low', 'User Name: PeterLow', and 'Your SwapDrive account is ready for you to start using. You have 100 Megabytes available for storage. Your data backup account allows you to upload, share, and send your important files.' Below this text is a blue button labeled 'Go to Your Account'. The right column, titled 'SwapDrive', lists features: 'Simple, Wizard-based Installation', 'Fast, Easy Data Recovery', 'Automatic Backups', '24/7 Web Access', and 'Affordable'. At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with copyright information: '© 2007 SwapDrive.com. All Rights Reserved. Return to SwapDrive.com Home' and links for 'Contact Us', 'About Us', 'EULA', and 'Privacy Policy'.

Clicking the "Go to Your Account" button resulted in a web error:



The page cannot be displayed

The page you are looking for cannot be displayed because an invalid method (HTTP verb) was used to attempt access.

We were able to go to their home page and log in. However, we noticed that the default for login is not a secure https link, but rather regular old http – not a good practice. If you want to log in securely, you have to click a “Secure” button as shown below. Problem is, it didn’t work.



Note: Secure (HTTPS) login is not the default



LOGIN

USERNAME > peterlow

PASSWORD > []

DOMAIN > swapdrive

remember me

Secure login needs to be selected (and is not highly noticeable)

LOGIN

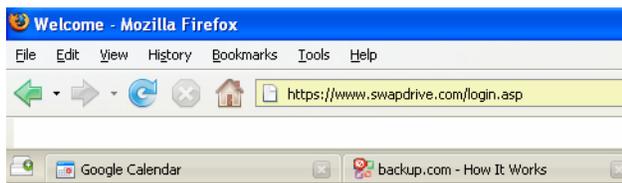
Standard | **Secure**

[forgot password?](#)

We tried selecting the “Secure” login, but got an error:



Selecting “Secure” brings up a dialog box...



...and then, an error

Invalid User ID and/or Password

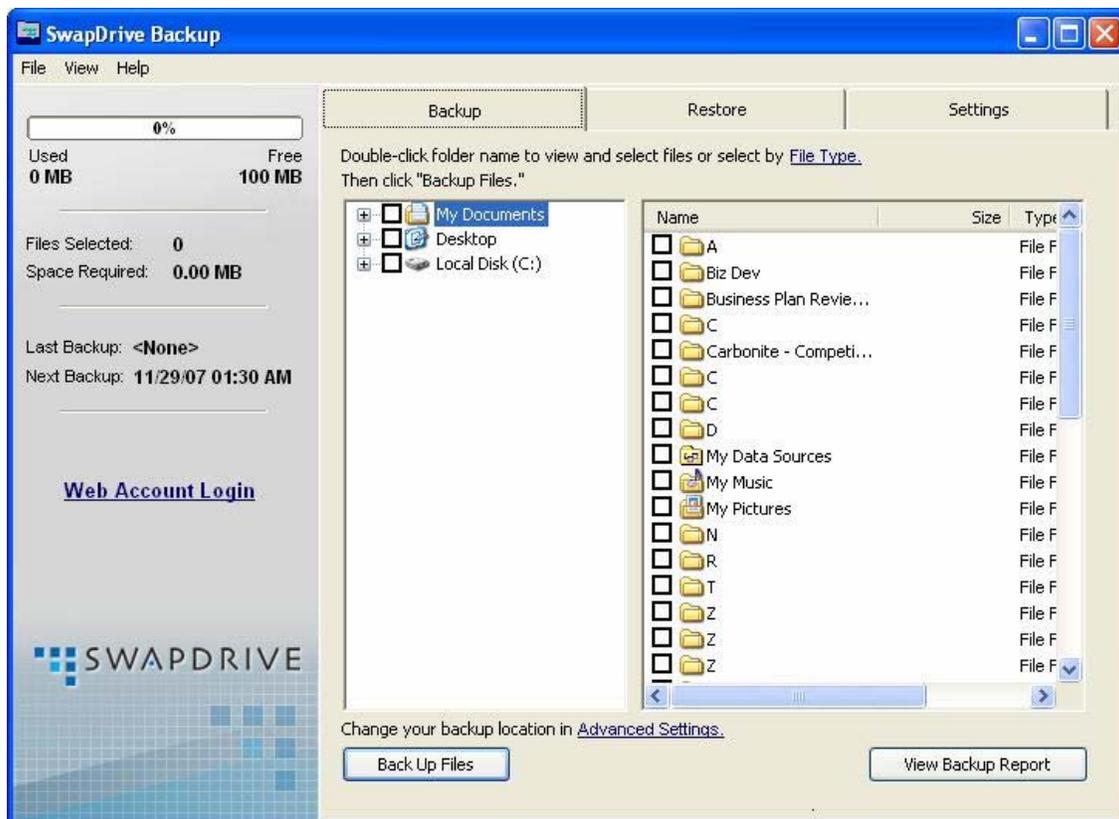
Some browsers attempt to store pages into cache (memory) which may cause you some difficulty logging into the site. If you are certain you are logging in properly with the correct username and password, try closing your browser and launching it again before attempting another login.

[Click here to go back](#)

SwapDrive's backup is fairly simple. Once you have installed the PC software, you have a choice of ways to select what you want to back up. The "Basic" choice, which is probably what most people would choose, would be a lot better if it backed up your whole Documents & Settings folder, not just your My Documents folder. The "Basic" setting would miss your desktop and many other settings files that you'd probably like to recover in the event of a disaster.

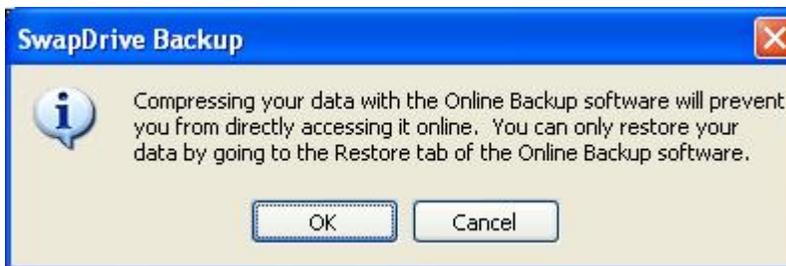
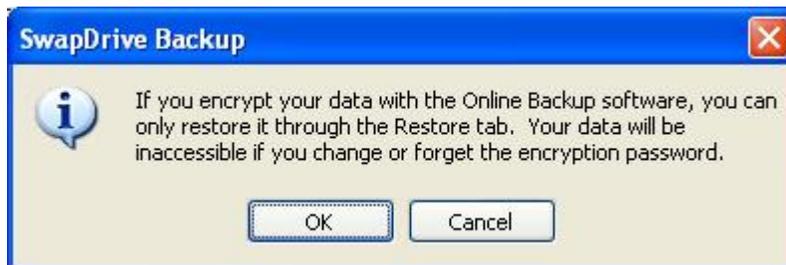


You can click the "Advanced" option and select folders and files yourself, as shown:

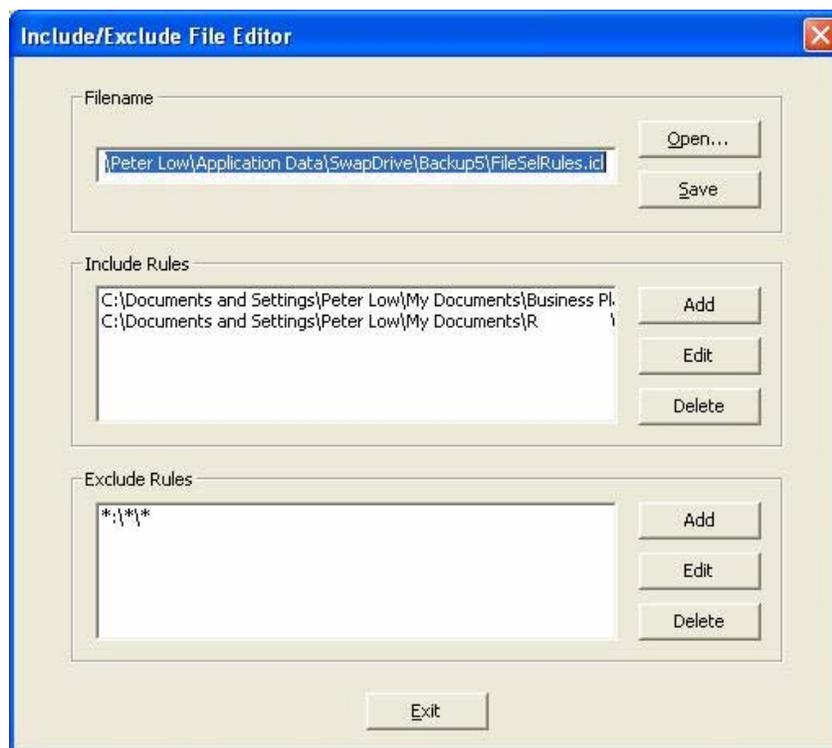


It's tempting to just want to backup the whole "My Documents" and "Desktop" folders. For this test, we bought the 100MB for \$7.50 per month plan.

First, beware of security. By default, your files will not be encrypted unless you set that option on the Advanced tab. The interface warns that if you want to access your files using their web interface, the backup can be neither encrypted or compressed. If you are backing up any sensitive, such as Quicken files or email, you would certainly want to turn on encryption. Unfortunately, then, you won't be able to use the web interface to restore these files.



There is an editor that lets you set up rules for what is included and excluded. We view this as being far too techie for the average consumer user:



There is also a scheduling screen that lets you select when you want to back up. Scheduled back ups are not as convenient as continuous backup. Some of the services we tested back up continuously in the background, automatically adjusting CPU utilization to whatever else is happening on the PC. The problem with backing up at say 1:30 AM is that you have to leave your computer on and connected. If you get disconnected from the Internet, then your backup doesn't happen. If you're traveling, your access to the Internet is unpredictable. It's nice to know that backup happens automatically whenever you're connected to the Internet. We don't know why services like SwapDrive still force users to make these unnecessary scheduling decisions.



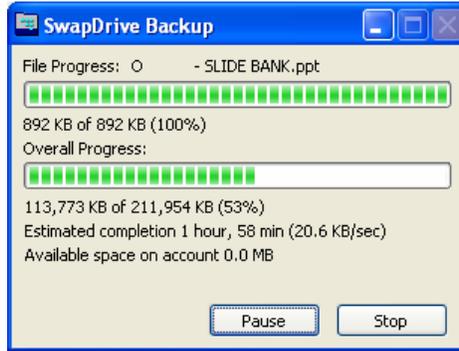
For my first test, we selected files that totaled 133MB – more than my 100MB quota. Sooner or later, you're going to add enough files to your backed up folders that you will hit the quota, so we wanted to see what happens.

When we tried to back up the 133MB, it started but then gave me an error message:



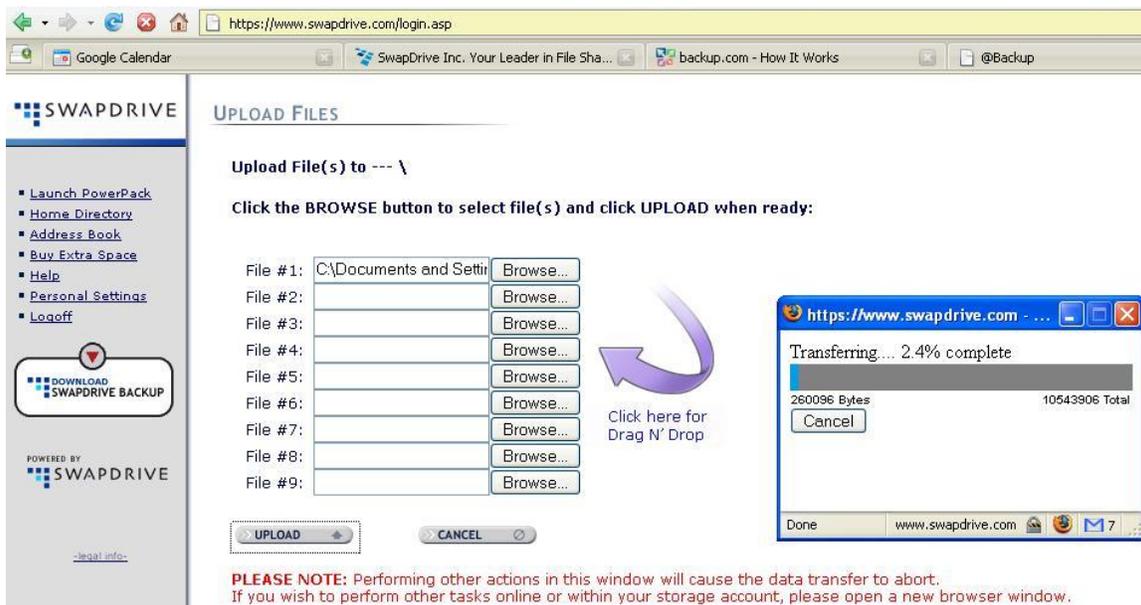
Neither the error message or the error log explained that the error was due to being over quota, however. We tried again and this time it worked. When SwapDrive came to a file that would put the user over quota, it would try to backup that file four times (with pauses of 2, 8 and 32 seconds between retries), then go to the next file; this continued until it found files small enough to fit in the remaining space. The problem with this is that the user would really have no idea what was backed up and what wasn't unless they went and looked.

Once the backup went over quota, the status window froze. There were no changes over several hours. However, Windows Task Manager did not show the application as “Not Responding.” The application just sat there until we killed it.



We reduced the size of our backup set so that it was less than 100MB. This wasn't so easy because the client did not update the “space required” number. Restarting the application, however, produced the right number and the backup appeared to have completed successfully.

The web interface worked, but it's mostly useful for accessing individual files. The “uploading” part of the web interface is clearly oriented toward backing up individual files. It has no encryption or compression. It looks a lot like the photo-sharing web sites like Flickr where you browse for a few files to upload:



Uploading a large file that pushed me over the quota produced a strange result: The “thermometer” indicated that we had backed up 104% of quota. *However, the file was not actually backed up.*

The drag and drop interface worked as you would expect, except that it didn't work with Firefox:



Conclusion

PC Magazine reviewed SwapDrive in 2004 and gave them 3 ½ stars out of 5. In 2004 this was probably a fair evaluation considering that current market leaders Carbonite and Mozy weren't even around back then. Today their product doesn't stack up quite so well any more.

On the plus side, SwapDrive has been around for at least 7 or 8 years, so the service is mature enough that it ought to be pretty reliable. We didn't get any hint of instability in their server software. However, since it has been around for a long time, it's starting to look a little long in the tooth compared with some of the other services we tested. Also we wouldn't be surprised if they had a relatively high cost infrastructure based on technology designed many years ago. That's only speculation, however. On their website they allude to redundant data storage – if they really mean a second copy, this is not a very cost-effective way to achieve high reliability.

For the consumer or small business seeking out a service for their own use, SwapDrive is not the right product, at least not if you are buying it directly from SwapDrive's web site. They claim to offer Swapdrive under 60 partners' brands, including:

- Inet Online Services – announced in 2002
- IntelliSpace – announced in 2002
- PROMENET – announced in 2002
- REON – announced in 2002
- Shea Network Solutions – announced in 2002
- ToadNet – announced in 2002
- MegaNet – announced in 2001
- Subsystem Technologies (systems integrator) – announced in 2001
- Blackboard – announced in 2000
- Central Databank – Ireland;

We haven't heard of most of these, but I'm sure you can chase them down on the web if you're interested.