

Medical Office Systems, LLC

February 2012 Newsletter

Internet Radio, Long-Term Storage

This month, I have two extended topics: I discovered a better way to listen to Internet Radio; and recently I learned some things about how long certain types of data storage last.

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Internet Radio

There's one aspect of my home that I have never been able to figure out: radio reception is, in general, pretty poor. Certainly I understand that the basement is not going to be good because radio signals don't penetrate underground or through concrete walls very well. But even the above-ground areas have quirks.

For example, anywhere in the kitchen or adjoining rooms, the signals are weak and subject to "buzzing" when the dishwasher, fridge, or microwave are in use. Conversely, I was receiving some FM stations in the basement that I could not get aboveground!

I don't listen to radio very much, but when I do, clicks, scratching, and buzzing are not what I want to hear. In search of a solution, I tried Internet Radio stations using my PC's. This worked pretty well, but the speakers in a typical laptop leave a lot to be desired. So, I figured I'd hook up my laptop to the stereo amplifier, which produced great sound, but then there was one more cable lying about that I have to un-hook and re-plug every time I go mobile.

I knew there were dedicated devices for Internet Radio, but never tried them until I happened to see a Logitech SqueezeBox Radio on sale at an office supply store. Geek that I am, I pounced on it. Glad I did, because I now have a perfect solution for my dilemma. There are thousands of Internet Radio stations online, and the Logitech SqueezeBox makes them easier to find than on a computer. There are presets for news, talk, sports, science, nature, and 24 different music categories. Plus with 6 presets, I can get my top favorites with one button press. Try that with a PC.

I now have BBC Radio 3 – Classical, Sky.FM Solo Piano and Solo Guitar, Bloomberg Business, and many other channels I'd never get on a typical AM or FM radio – all free. Some of the more obscure channels I have found:

- A dedicated "Webmaster Radio" channel for web designers – whoa, talk about geeky
- NASA channel – the entire Apollo 11 Moon Landing from launch to splashdown on a continuous loop
- Cricket Matches from England, 24 Hours of LeMans, and all the minor league baseball you can handle

The SqueezeBox connects to your internet signal with a cable, or via Wireless, and is very simple to use. I recommended it as the perfect solution if you have poor reception, or don't want to use a computer.

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Long-Term Data Storage

When you think of backups, do you consider that the media upon which your digital data is stored might not work some day off in the future? There are many facets to this question and not all of them revolve around the media itself. Let me explain: Think of the original floppy disks – let's say you stored them back in 1998 in a safe place: cool, dry and otherwise perfect for storage. Would you be able to use them? Probably not: even if the disk itself still has the data intact, you probably don't have a floppy disk drive on your computer anymore. You can get an old used floppy disk drive on eBay, but even that option may not be available 10 years from now. Like 8-track audio tapes, the technology has marched on.

Another take: if you stored the hard disk from an older computer, the disk may be OK, but newer computers don't have the old IDE ribbon cable connectors anymore. Again, there are some adapters or old computers off eBay, but how long will those be around?

So what is the solution? The answer is twofold: 1) select media that last for the long term, and 2) you'll need to monitor emerging technology in order to recognize when your data should be transferred from the old to new standards. A worthy example is the previously mentioned IDE hard disk. Currently IDE adapters and the newer SATA interfaces co-exist, so now is the time to transfer from the old technology to the new.

If you have CD's or DVD's the answer is more complicated. CD and DVD's can last for up to 200 years, but some only last as few as 5 years. The difference is in the quality of the materials and the method of recording. Commercially pressed CD's and DVD's can last up to 200 years. Your home-burned CD and DVD collection may last only 5 years if the disks were low quality, if labels or felt markers were used to label them, if you used a fast burn speed, or if they were subject to heat or humidity.

What about Flash Disks? This really gets complicated – if you copy your files one time, then store the Flash Disk in a safe place, it will last up to 8 years. If you use it frequently, it may only last 2 years. The reason is that Flash memory deteriorates quickly every time you save a file (opening it does not count). The 8-year limit is due to loss of electrical charge over time – flash memory keeps a tiny electrical charge to hold the data, but it too dissipates over a long time. Below is a guide to average lifespan of different storage technologies:

- Floppy Disks: 3 to 5 years
- CD or DVD: Commercially Manufactured: 100 years, up to 200 years for high-quality pressed disks
- CD or DVD: Consumer Burned: 5 to 10 years, up to 50 years if high-quality disks and slow burn speed is used
- Hard Disks: Static storage (shut off) 5 to 10 years
- Flash Disks: Static storage (shut off) 5 to 8 years

I hope you found this newsletter interesting, if you have any topics you'd like to see in upcoming editions, please send me an email: john@medofficesystems.com

-John Becker