

Early last week during a computer restart, the process halted with "The Blue Screen of Death" on the screen with messages about a dirty disk and disk errors. I turned it off and then back on with the same result. My mind became filled with dread. I remind and chide clients to backup their most important data, but I had not done that myself. All those photos and email addresses and bookmarks might be lost. Device drivers and program setups might have to be redone. If the hard disk was injured, it would have to be replaced and the operating system installed and configured to work with my hardware. It could take over a week and much would be lost. What to do?

If a computer disk will not boot up, it cannot be accessed and fixed. The hard disk would not boot. However, my tool kit includes a CD with a boot track. During the early part of a boot up, there is a quick prompt to press F2 to do a system setup. This brings up a screen where boot devices can be reordered and I pushed the CD drive up to the top of the boot list. If startup data can be found there, that's what will be used. If not, it will look to the next on the list, in my case, the hard disk.

The CD boot disk worked and it contains a Windows Explorer like program to use for looking around the hard disk. Yes, my data was still there. I quickly backed up my email address book to a thumb drive. The CD also contains chkdsk.exe, a program which repairs bad hard disk sectors. It actually does not repair them, but moves retrievable data elsewhere and sets bad disk areas aside as unusable. The process is slow and took about 90 minutes for the 80 gig disk. The program command was chkdsk C: /r. Chkdsk is the program name, the C: tells it which device to check and the /r tells it to repair any problems. The process found many errors. I removed the CD and tried a restart from the hard drive.

Lo and behold! It worked!

When a hard drive has physical errors such as bad sectors, it is likely to get even more errors in the near future. This drive has seen hard use over about four years. It was time to be replaced.

I ordered and received a new disk from <http://www.newegg.com/>, a favorite geek online computer and technical supply house. I cannot believe how cheap disks storage is these days, only \$60 for the huge, 500 gig disk. I also ordered the Acronis True Image program used for disk cloning for about \$40. Both items arrived within a week.

I mounted the new drive as the second drive in the PC and used Acronis to copy everything including the WinXP operating system from the old disk to the new disk which took over two hours. I then switched the cables from the old disk to the new hard drive and prayed for a successful startup. It worked, I'm running on the 500 gig drive.

The old 80 gig disk is still in the machine, but there are no cables attached. It is not powered up, but still available if something happens to the new disk. Yes, this was an extreme backup measure, but I'm sleeping better for it.