COMPUTER NEWS from the

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Computer Backup Power - What You Need to Know

What do you recommend as a backup power supply for computers? During the last storm, we lost power for several hours. If I had a battery backup, I could have gotten online to check email and weather updates. Is an 'uninterruptible power supply' what I need?

What Kind of Backup Power Do You Need?

A sudden loss of electrical power can cause your computer to shut down or reboot. Of course, you will lose anything you were working on at the time of the power glitch. But power failures

can also cause head crashes in hard drives, which can damage a disk and the data on it. To guard against power failures, get yourself an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) to provide a **backup power** source for your computer.

A UPS, at its core, is a battery backup power supply. It includes circuitry that instantly switches from line power to **battery power** in the event of a power outage. The simplest and cheapest type of UPS, called a standby UPS, does nothing more. But power outages are not the only hazards your computer faces.

Fluctuations in line power quality are much more common than blackouts. A voltage spike or its opposite, a voltage drop, can adversely affect your equipment's performance and lifespan. Protections against this type of electrical power hazard should be part of your UPS.

AskBobRankin.com

A line-interactive UPS is also relatively inexpensive; it filters and conditions line power as well as providing **battery backup**. An on-line UPS provides the highest quality line power and the greatest protection against power outages. Most home computer setups require no more than a standby or line-interactive UPS.

What Features Do You Need in a UPS?

A UPS may include other features as well. Monitoring ports on a UPS can tell attached equipment to shut down gracefully in the event of a power outage, in case no one is around to shut things down manually. Fax and modem telephone-style outlets may be provided on a UPS to give these devices surge protection. Some unprotected power outlets may exist for printers and other devices that do not need battery power but should be protected against power fluctuations.

The capacity of a UPS is measured in **volt**-amperes (VA). How much capacity you need in a UPS is a function of the power needs of all the components you wish to protect and the amount

of time that you want to be able to run on battery power. APC, a major UPS manufacturer, has a handy calculator that can help you determine what the capacity of your next UPS should be.

One of the most popular consumer-level UPS models is the $59 APC Back-UPS ES 550, which provides battery backup and surge protection for home computers, and your phone/fax/modem/DSL line. Automatic system shutdown software is included. This model gives you about 10 minutes of battery backup with a 200-watt load. That's enough time to save your work and shutdown, but not a good solution if you want to stay up and running during a longer power outage.

A similar model is the CyberPower CP550SLG uninterruptible power supply. Other popular brands include Tripp Lite, Eaton, Liebert, and Minuteman.

Don't Forget About Your Internet and Phone and TV

During a storm or other hazard, it's quite possible that the electrical supply lines might be down, but the telephone, cable or fiber optic lines are just fine. A battery backup unit can power your landline phone's base unit, as well the modem/router for your Internet connection. My phone and internet service is Verizon FIOS, so there's an interface box with a battery backup unit in my garage. That battery will only last about 15 minutes, but it plugs into a wall socket to keep it charged up. So during power failures, I plug the FIOS battery backup into a UPS so I can continue to make phone calls and exchange electrons with the Interwebs. (For outages longer than a half-hour or so, I use a gas-powered generator.)

It's important to conserve every watt of power when running from battery backup power. So if you have your computer and other gear connected to a UPS, I recommend turning off the printer, speakers, external hard drives and other non-essential items unless you're actually using them. I have a dual-monitor setup, so I power one of them down, too. Laptops and tablets use a lot less power than desktop rigs, so consider moving to a smaller screen when running on auxiliary power.

But I Already Have a UPS...

I had a Tripp-Lite TE-600 UPS for many years, and there were many times when the lights flickered in the house, causing televisions and alarm clocks to shut off or reset. My computer never even flinched. Even during power outages, my trusty computer plugged away, while the rest of the house was dark. But during the winds that Hurricane Irene brought to my area, we lost power and my UPS failed when the internal batteries died of old age. Fortunately, I only lost the document I was working on, and I've since replaced that unit with a beefier model that'll run my desktop appliances for at least 30 minutes.

A UPS contains a battery, of course; typically, a lead-acid battery much like the one in your car. Such batteries are generally good for several years, but eventually they do need to be replaced. UPS units and replacement batteries are available online, but pay close attention to shipping

charges; these things are heavy and expensive to ship! It may be a better idea to shop locally, when purchasing a UPS.

Do You Need a Download Manager?

Category: [Software](#) From "askbobrankin.com".

A reader asks: "I download files often, and sometimes wonder if I should be using one of those 'download manager' or 'download accelerator' programs that are promoted online. What exactly do they do, and should I use one?" Here's what you need to know...

What is a Download Manager?

A [download](#) manager is a program that makes downloading files faster, easier, and more reliable. Most people don't need a download manager, but under the right circumstances such software can be very useful.

If you routinely download many files, a download manager will save you significant amounts of [keystrokes](#) as well as time. If you live in a rural area with relatively slow and unreliable Internet service, a download manager will make the best use of your scarce resources. Here is how download managers work.

First, a download manager helps you prioritize, schedule, and organize your downloads. You may want a particular file that's updated daily in the wee hours of the morning. Or you might want to download a [large file](#) while you're away from the computer, so it doesn't slow down anything else.

A download manager can be scheduled to start a download at a specified time, and even shut down your PC when the download is completed.

Some download managers can detect when a file has been freshly created or updated and download it automatically. Download managers can save files of different types or name patterns to different folders automatically.

In these and other ways, a download manager can save you personal effort and thought.

Hitting the Accelerator...

Downloads on third-party sites are often bundled with adware or other unwanted programs, and may even be infected with malware. Be careful during installation to uncheck boxes that permit installation of toolbars and other unwanted software. See Downloading? Watch Out For These Danger Signs to learn more about foistware and safe downloading.

And of course, make sure you have a dependable anti-virus program before downloading anything. Here are my recommended Free Anti-Virus Programs

The worst part of downloading is the wait time, of course. All download managers include "accelerator" techniques that make more efficient use of the bandwidth available to your PC. Many Web sites limit the amount of bandwidth they allocate to a browser's connection, so a download manager may open multiple connections and use their combined bandwidth allocations to download a file faster. A similar technique opens connections to multiple sites on which the same file resides, downloading parts of the file from each and assembling them on your hard drive.

Dozens of download managers are available online. Five of the most well-reviewed download managers are:

Download Accelerator Plus by Speedbit promises to boost your download speed by 300% and integrates seamlessly into the Internet Explorer browser. DAP starts automatically when you click any download link, and includes an optional video player that lets you watch video files as they are downloading.

Flashget for Windows is reputed to download files up to six times faster than an unassisted Web browser. It supports Bittorrent peer-to-peer downloads, too.

Internet Download Manager features error recovery and the ability to resume or restart downloads that are interrupted by network problems, or unexpected computer shutdowns. IDM captures YouTube and MySpace TV streaming videos to files. It integrates with most browsers and has a simple user interface.

Free Download Manager is an open-source project maintained and supported by volunteers. They're all geeks, so the user interface is geeky and untidy. But the program has lots of geeky options including capture of Flash videos and Bittorrent support.

[GetRight](#) can resume interrupted downloads when they left off, a handy feature if your Internet connection (or the download site) is unreliable. It even supports automatic launch of dial-up Internet connections, and includes its own browser.

A word to the wise: I've given the developer website links for each of the download managers listed above, so you don't accidentally download a fake or adulterated version of the software. I encourage you to use those links, to be sure you're getting the real thing.

Sandisk

Sandisk has made giant leap in microSD storage capacity with a new model that holds 200 GB and transfers data at 90 MB/second. It will cost $400.

How to speed up your computers BOOT-UP.

I bought a new SSD (solid state drive) and moved my old "C" drive to it using an ISO copy of the "C" drive. You might consider doing the same if your boot-up time is taking forever. I went from 1 to 2 minutes to just 33 SECONDS! Now all my programs seem to just jump on the screen! I highly recommend the move to a SSD. NOTE: I kept the old "C" drive as a backup/

Bob

Quote of the month.
When a man opens a car door for his wife, it's either a new car or a new wife.
~ Prince Philip