

The Dog Ate My Homework or disks, don't fail me now

Departmental users have traditionally relied on the tried-and-true floppy diskette to store their unclassified documents. They have, for the most part, graduated from the old 5.25 inch floppy diskettes to the newer and more durable, 3.5 inch diskettes (still called "floppies" even though they seem substantially less "floppy" than their predecessors).

Waaaay back in the bad old evil days, folks traditionally stored their data on floppy diskettes, breaking out a second diskette as their first one filled up. Apocryphal stories abound of unnamed "users" who, upon being told to use a "clean floppy disk," promptly removed the diskettes protective plastic cover and washed it. Other guaranteed, non-apocryphal favourites include folks who would take work home and, upon its completion, attach the diskettes to their refrigerator with a fridge magnet so they wouldn't forget it in the morning — not realizing that the magnet would wipe out large swaths of data on the diskette and leave them understandably frustrated.

These days, users have several different options to choose from in terms of where they store their unclassified data. Users may continue to store their data on floppy diskette. This has several drawbacks — these days, floppy diskettes are probably among the most unreliable of media. A floppy diskette will "go bad," on average, long before a hard disk.

Another drawback is that it can become very difficult to catalogue your floppy diskettes, and to easily and promptly retrieve the data you're after. The big plus to using floppy diskettes is, of course, that you can lock them up and know they're safe from inquisitive eyes.

Another option is to store your data on your local hard disk — on the C: drive. Most SIGNET-D machines have a C:\DOC directory designed for WordPerfect documents, and a C:\SPSHEET directory designed for Quattro Pro files. You can easily store your documents in C:\DOC creating subdirectories as required. For example, you could create a subdirectory of C:\DOC for your memos, and call the directory C:\DOC\MEMOS. That way, if you're looking for a memo you wrote, you can easily find it in that directory. Access to your files is easier and quicker; all your data is in one place, and hard disk failure rates are extremely low these days. The big drawback is that your data is accessible by anybody who has physical access to your computer. This may or may not be a concern, but realize that you do not have to log into your SIGNET-D account in order to access your local C: drive — so neither does anybody else using your computer.

The third option is to store data on your SIGNET-D server — either the I: or H: drive. These "drives" are actually simple directories on a server

(a high-powered computer designed to "serve" multiple users). Your I: drive is typically shared among your entire branch, so don't put anything there you're not comfortable with others seeing. Your H: drive, on the other hand, is normally accessible only by you and the SIGNET-D Systems Administrators. The biiiiiiig advantage to storing your data on the I: or H: drives is that they get "backed up" each night onto tape. If you should ever accidentally delete or overwrite a file, you can ask your Systems Administrator to have the file restored from the previous day's backup. Server drives are also extremely reliable, and don't tend to fail often. When they do, the replacements are loaded with the most current backup to ensure a minimum of data loss. The big drawback to using server drives for data storage is that you're competing with hundreds of other users for space on that server, so the operational folks tend to want to limit your available storage space on the drive — understandably so.

Three options, from which you can choose the scenario that makes the most sense for you and your requirements. By knowing as much as possible about the options and their relative pros and cons, you'll hopefully never find yourself in a situation where you have to explain that you don't have your data because your "dog ate your homework."