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TECH & YOU

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Should You Put Your Estate in the Cloud?

Software that lets you share important financial data with a spouse or an heir may test your faith in Web 2.0

Just how much should you trust the cloud? It's a question you'll need to ask yourself as software and data slip the confines of your hard drive and take up residence on remote servers thousands of miles away.

I've been using a new program called InformationSAFE (www.infosafe.com) that has forced me to confront the issue in stark terms. The software, which I like a lot, is a simple way to organize your most sensitive personal data—log-ins for bank accounts, insurance policies, even your will—so a spouse, heir, lawyer, or accountant will have all they need in one place should something happen to you. The question is: Where should that one place be?

InformationSAFE comes in two versions. The first you download and install on your PC, and it stores your encrypted data. The other version, which has most of the same features, is an online service—meaning both the software and your data reside on InformationSAFE's servers. You or anyone you authorize can access them on the Web from any computer.

The trade-offs are where you learn a little something about yourself: Information that's stashed locally is under your direct control but vulnerable to fire, flood, or a crashed hard drive if it isn't backed up. As for trusting information to the vast Out There, it's always available, but you must have faith in a small company's security procedures to make sure the bad guys don't grab it.

and you'll be asked to specify the kind of account. Then you fill out a form that includes fields for financial institution, account number, Web address, user name, password, and the like. You can provide as much or as little information as you choose, and attach files from your computer—anything from a spreadsheet of current investments to a digital copy of your will.

There are a number of ways to allow access to the data. InformationSAFE can print a booklet in Adobe's PDF format or generate a secure link for e-mailing files that expires after 30 days. The online edition allows you to track the documents, and lets you

control who else can access the account and what they're allowed to do. It sends you an alert whenever one of your designees logs in.

The decision on desktop vs. cloud could be a generational thing. Older consumers may balk at entrusting sensitive data to something as amorphous as the cloud (not to mention a small startup whose future is uncertain). Younger users may have a vastly different notion of privacy in the era of Facebook and Twitter, to say nothing of Foursquare and Blippy. InformationSAFE's publisher says that about 75% of its users have opted for the desktop version.

Personally, I've decided the cloud is out for now. Besides the higher costs—paying a fee every year, vs. just once—the benefits don't outweigh the risks. I'll make sure my wife knows my password for the desktop version, and I'll print out a report for the safe-deposit box, and maybe for my lawyer. The closest I'll come to the cloud is making sure data is backed up to a remote online service I'm comfortable with. Guess I'm just old-school. **JBW**



The desktop edition of InformationSAFE, which runs on PCs and Macs, costs \$49.95 from the company's Web site. The Web version costs \$4.50 a month, or \$49.95 for a year of service. Both employ advanced 256-bit encryption—the type used by the U.S. government. The company provides assurances that data is protected no matter which option you choose.

The software is pretty intuitive. Your information is organized into seven main categories—Personal Info, Financial, Insurance, Legal, Health, Property, and Key Contacts—and multiple subcategories. Choose Bank Accounts under the Financial tab, for instance,

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