

Recovering Obsolete Data

by Vanessa Kier

While reorganizing my closet recently I came across two small plastic file boxes filled with floppy disks. According to the labels on the floppies, they contained stories I'd penned many years ago before I became serious about pursuing writing.

Some of the discs were formatted for Windows, some for Mac OS. With files that old, however, recovering the data became a tricky exercise.

Hardware

First of all, most computers don't come with floppy drives any more. Luckily, I still have my old Windows desktop computer, which does have a floppy drive. I was able to successfully transfer most of my Windows formatted files to my desktop.

However, my Mac OS laptop doesn't have a floppy drive. What to do?

Whether you have data stored on the old black flexible 5.25" disks, the more recent 3.5" hard cased floppies, or even some other disk storage such as a zip disk, a search on the internet will very likely lead you to an external drive that will be compatible with your current computer. I located and purchased a relatively inexpensive external floppy drive that connects to my laptop via a USB cable. Thanks to this drive, I was able to transfer all of my old Mac OS files, some dating back to 1995, to my laptop.

Software

When I inserted the floppy disks into my Windows desktop machine, I discovered that several of my old story files were in WordPerfect format and password protected. Luckily, I found the password on a notecard in an old jewelry box, go figure. Unfortunately, while Microsoft Word is able to open files saved in a variety of other formats, I wasn't able to open any of those old password protected files.

My solution? I downloaded a free trial version of the current WordPerfect software. This program opened my old files with no problem and I was able to save the files into a format that I can use going forward.

Difficult Cases

If you can't find either an appropriate piece of hardware to recognize the disk your files are stored on, or you can't find any current software capable of opening your old files, what can you do? First, check with your local computer store. See if the place where you bought your computer offers any services to pull data off of old disks or recover data from obsolete programs. If not, see if there's a public business center, such as FedEx Office, that might have an older machine with the drive/software on it that you can rent time on.

If you still can't get those files open, check the internet. I did a search on the phrase "transfer data from

floppy to cd” and found a link for the site www.datarecoverymasters.com which offers services that include transferring data off of old data storage devices onto a cd and converting files from certain obsolete programs to currently usable formats. I haven’t used their services, so can’t comment on their effectiveness, but it’s reassuring to know that someone out there can retrieve old data.

The Future

As technology continues to evolve, it makes sense to keep an inventory of critical files and their passwords if applicable. Make certain that you save copies of these files in whatever programs you’re currently using. That way you’ll never have the heart-stopping moment when you fear that you’ve lost some precious files because their format becomes obsolete.

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