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Twenty-five years ago ...

I remember an event that looked a bit like the scene in “2001: A Space Odyssey,” when the primates awoke to the presence of the monolith at the center of their outcropping. It was a long time ago in a far away land known as Buffalo , New York . A friend of mine owned a store with the clever name, “ComputerLand,” in a strip shopping center on the north side of town. It was a store dedicated to the concept that people would go to a “computer” store to buy computers. This was a revolutionary concept 25 years ago. But I digress.

It was snowing. The UPS truck had just delivered around 10 boxes to the store from IBM — the same IBM that was the unquestioned leader of the really big computer market. These boxes contained the first generation of IBM’s Personal Computer, cleverly called the PC. We all watched in simian stupor as the proprietor unboxed the jewel of the shipment — The IBM PC-XT, a personal computer with an incredible 10MB Hard Disk Drive.

The discussion exploded.

“Ten Meg! Who will ever need all that storage!”

I reached out to touch the beige edge of the monolith. There was a sound (actually a beep) and a flash of light (a throbbing green cursor), and the machine roared to life.

Cut to the present day ...

What could I have been thinking in the early '80s? (I really shouldn't even ask myself that.) Since the IBM PC-XT arrived with PC DOS 1.0 and a few really useful applications like Lotus

1-2-3 and WordStar, we end users have taken a long ride on the “WinTel” Express.

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way), which has 1GB of storage in an object the size and shape of a hair clip. For the math challenged, 1GB is 100 times 10MB. This iPod cost \$80!

When I look around my home, I am stunned by how many gigabytes of storage are under this roof. I have several PCs, Laptops (Apples and Windows), eight iPods, six TiVos, an Xbox 360, a Nintendo Wii and who knows what else? I have more than a terabyte of storage in my house! There are thousands of pictures and videos and music files, years of important documents and files, and many of them are irreplaceable. The digital revolution has removed the need for prints of photos and even CDs and DVDs, but one inescapable fact has gone unexposed.

All of these files are in danger!

Hard drives can fail. iPods can be stolen. Digital cameras can fall into the Baltic!

Weather can blow your stuff away or drown it in water.

Fires can reduce everything to ash.

But wait! There is still time to repent!

Microsoft has come to the rescue with a new product known as the Home Media Server (HMS). With a brilliant campaign called “Stop Digital Amnesia” (www.stopdigitalamnesia.com), the Redmond Boys have offered a really cool tool for all of our digital proliferation. The HMS is actually a server much like those that already exist in the data center at work. While the “professional” server at work needs “Administrators” to run, the Home Media Server is simple enough for anyone to use. It's so simple, in fact, that you merely have to turn it on, configure it and walk away.

Once running and connected to your wired or wireless home network, the HMS

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...not necessarily with you, so you will be able to access any file from anywhere on the home network, but you will be able to access files from the Internet via remote access, as well. In fact, you can use the HMS to back up your HMS to another HMS anywhere in the world. You can thus reduce your risk of loss due to any conceivable local catastrophe in an almost-painless, low-cost manner.

Speaking of cost, the HMS (soon to be sold by HP), will cost less than \$500, and additional storage is also available (a terabyte of external USB storage is less than \$500 at Best Buy.) It is thus possible for you to protect both your home media and document files as well as your office files by buying two HMSs and using standard Internet connectivity.

What you get from this exercise is the peace of mind that you will never again lose your daughter's birthday party pictures or a key client data file. You will be able to show off your latest trip to Mexico to your in-laws even if you didn't bring your laptop or Video iPod to family dinner.

Best of all, your media and files will be available and redundantly safe for the rest of time, which should finally allow you to get a good night's sleep.

Thank you, Microsoft.

Sweet dreams!

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