Personal Clouds: What Are They? Should I Get One?

When it comes to backing up data, there’s always been the option of keeping data on a secondary storage devices, such as floppy disks, CDs, DVDs, USB drives, and even secondary hard drives. Recently, we’ve seen strong growth in the cloud business, allowing people to store their data on servers around the world, accessing it from anywhere with an internet connection. A lot of people have fears about these cloud-based services, however. Where is the data stored? Is it truly safe? Is it possible someone could gain illegal access to the service and steal data?

For those of you who love the idea of the cloud, but don’t want to hand over data to another company at an unknown location, it’s worth considering the option of a ‘personal cloud’. Only a few years ago, the words ‘personal cloud’ would probably sound like the worst pet ever, but these days they’re a very viable means of storing data safely and securely. So, what are personal clouds?

A ‘cloud’ isn’t as exciting as it first sounds. Clouds are server farms dedicated to storing data. If you imagine a room used purely for storing hard drives that anyone can use, you’ve got a very rough idea as to what a ‘cloud’ is. When you use a cloud service, you’re using a portion of this server farm to store your data. So, if cloud services aren’t too far-off the hard drives found in regular PCs, doesn’t it seem feasible to take one of those hard drives and keep it in your own home? That’s exactly what a personal cloud is!
What do they do?

So, what’s so good about personal clouds? Well, they do everything a normal cloud does, but you have more control over them. They come in a wide selection of choices, from 1TB of space to a whopping 12TB. If you’re using the cloud to store word documents and photos, you may not need more than 1TB, which keeps you on the cheaper side of the spectrum. They come in all shapes and sizes; some look like tiny PCs, some look like a DVD player without the tray, and some even come cone-shaped!

When you get a personal cloud, they’ll look like a portable hard drive. However, instead of plugging them into your computer via USB, you can set them up so that they connect to your WiFi connection. This allows you to access the cloud from whatever PC you have connected to the WiFi network, and even online from a different location. They work just like a normal cloud, except you can physically see the server where your data is stored.

In part two of this article, we’ll answer the most-asked questions about setting up a personal cloud.

~ Simon