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As the clouds gather

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Synchronising data across many devices used to be a complicated process with DVDs, pen drives and hard drives cluttering work spaces.

Synchronising data across many devices used to be a complicated process with DVDs, pen drives and hard drives cluttering work spaces. All that changed when cloud services like Dropbox came along. These do not claim to be hard drive replacements yet, but they collate your data across devices very well. Almost all services offer around 2-10 GB free space. Beyond that, users can pay a fixed monthly amount.

Most of these services come with a version for Windows, Mac and sometimes Linux and an app for Android and iOS. Accessing and transferring data across devices has become easier.

Google Drive

Google Drive is an extension of the company's cloud-based services like Gmail, Picasa and Google Docs. Google Drive offers 10 GB storage space free of cost with applications for Windows, Android and Mac. A version for iOS is yet to be launched. After you sign up for the service, it shows up as another drive in Windows. Google Drive allows users to create and edit new files, folders, and sub-folders. You can save a file on Google Drive and view it on the web, without downloading it. The service has a feature which makes it easy to share documents with other users.

On an Android device, the application works the same way. Files on the drive can be accessed and modified by tapping the My Drive tab and Google's cloud synchronisation takes care of the rest.

To cater to multiple OS platforms, many third party applications like WeVideo, Nivio and AutoCAD have integrated with Google Drive.

It is a good service, but its terms of use are worrying, especially for those who create content. By signing up, Google gets the licence to do practically whatever it wants with your content. This includes the right to reproduce, modify, host, create derivative works, communicate, publish and distribute your content. These 'rights' extend beyond the duration of your association with Google Drive. Keep this in mind before signing up.

Nivio

Nivio works for device-free users, those who prefer not to carry laptops or other devices. Simply upload your data on the cloud and access the

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files using any modern browser anywhere. Nivio creates a Windows-based virtual desktop. It also lets you integrate your account with Google Drive.

Synaptop

Synaptop is a personal computer on the cloud. It lets users store and share files, run apps and collaborate with contacts. It has several free apps and users can drag contacts to apps if they want to collaborate. Facebook and Twitter integration make this more social than other cloud services.

Dropbox

This is one of the most popular cloud services. Dropbox offers free 2 GB storage and paid users can get up to 100 GB for around Rs 1,000 a month. It is one of the first cloud services and its friendly terms of use make it a viable option for those who do not like Google Drive's conditions. The only real downside to using Dropbox is that it does not have integrated apps. So every time you want to make a change to any document, you will have to use an office app on your phone or PC. Sharing is easy with Dropbox. You can put files in a shared folder and invite friends to access it. Users can even create links to specific files to share it with others.

Ubuntu One

This cloud service offers 5GB of free storage space and up to 20GB for paid users. It has several integrated apps which let users edit their documents, and photos on the web. It also offers music streaming subscriptions. Users can save music to their cloud and offline stream it on their Android phones or iPhones.

Beyond these, Apple users have an excellent built-in cloud service called iCloud. It allows them to take a backup of their iOS device on the cloud. In case an iPhone dies, users can access a backup directly from iCloud. Microsoft also offers SkyDrive with 7GB free storage. With SkyDrive, sharing and collaborating is easier. You can share via email and decide whether recipients can edit the documents you shared. You can also post content on Facebook, Twitter and other social networks directly from SkyDrive.

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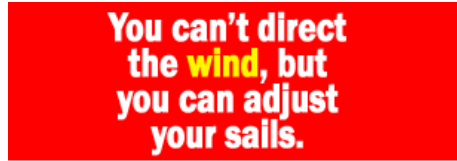
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