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## Dropbox hits two million Windows, Mac and Linux users

by David M Williams  
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Earlier this month cloud storage startup Dropbox celebrated its first anniversary, and has now hit another milestone with its two millionth user. Dropbox is a solid example of how the cloud can bring efficiencies in this modern ultra-connected world. It's also a service that has genuinely changed my life for the better.

Dropbox is, in a nutshell, a dedicated folder which automatically synchronises between all your Windows, Linux or Macintosh-based computers. Web access is also available and an iPhone client has now been released on the iTunes appstore too.

Dropbox is superb for keeping data in sync while working among laptops, desktops, netbooks, smartphones and across office and home computers.

The power of Dropbox is in its simplicity. It performs one task and does it well. Dropbox doesn't purport to convert files between different formats, serve up web sites or any other non-core feature. It doesn't intrude in the ordinary running of your computer.

It merely provides a regular old folder that you can drag-and-drop files into with one key difference; files you drop will be swiftly copied to the Dropbox cloud-based file storage and then becomes available to your other systems.

Using Dropbox only makes sense. For me, it's proven invaluable to keep my important current projects accessible whether I'm working in Windows or Linux without having to worry about USB sticks and inadvertently overwriting newer files with old. Importantly, this also means my files are backed up and safe from disaster.

Dropbox uses Amazon's simple storage service (more commonly known as S3) for its storage meaning your data is stored on a massive, trustworthy facility.

Dropbox allows collaboration between users, permitting sub-folders to be shared. Depending on the size of your files and available bandwidth changes can be shared almost immediately.

Clever users have twigged that they can configure key files for important pieces of software within their Dropbox folder, for instance, your Firefox bookmarks, or a password and identity repository if you use such tools.

Corporations can also find value in Dropbox although, to my mind, what's lacking is a dedicated group space where the administrator can divvy up folders to specific users.

Such a facility would then make it a cinch to backup the data that amasses on laptops of travelling staff back to a central server, which may then still be backed up to tape or disk in a conventional manner. So long as the travelling staff connect

to the Internet at some point, somehow, their files will be safe.

Nevertheless, Dropbox does retain version information and consequently users can revert to previous versions in case of mistake. This is great for individuals but a true boon for company systems administrators meaning users can perform a measure of self service.

{mosloadposition david08}That said, version history eats into the available quota. Free accounts have 2GB of storage available but by performing a few simple tasks (watch a tour, install Dropbox on two machines, sync some files, post a promotional link on Facebook or Twitter) you can get 250MB more.

If you sign up via my referral link then both you and I get another 250MB up to 3GB additional space total, making a maximum of 5GB for a free account. (For a non-referral link [click here](#).) Alternatively, paid accounts begin at \$USD 4.99/month for 10GB to \$USD 19.99/month for 100GB.

It is also important to keep in mind that sharing folders will consume quota for all parties. Dropbox recognised early on the potential for misuse if (say) one person signed up for 10 free accounts and shared folders in such a way that they gained 20GB of disk space.

Such a situation isn't conducive to Dropbox's business model, and consequently the company determined that a shared folder ought to carry the same quota hit on all parties using that folder. This is a cause of chagrin for some, particularly if a paid account tries to share a folder with more than 2GB of files with a free account.

Of course, Dropbox isn't the first cloud-based storage provider on the market. Earlier this year Hewlett-Packard's Upline system closed down although it varied from Dropbox on two major points.

First, Upline had pricing which was more attractive &ndash; topping at \$USD 8.99/month for unlimited storage &ndash; but which was clearly less sustainable as a commercial venture.

Additionally, Upline suffered outages almost right from the beginning, with downtime of an entire week just three weeks after commencement.

In a cycle of ups and downs Yahoo! also closed its decade old Yahoo! Briefcase service earlier this year while Microsoft launched Live Mesh. However, Live Mesh offers a Windows-only solution as compared to Dropbox's multiplatform support.

If you're living the modern tech lifestyle and haven't yet embraced the cloud then you owe it to your own sanity and file management regime to check Dropbox out.