Crashplan vs. Backblaze vs. IDrive

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First, I'll set the stage. I have been serious about computer backup for decades:

1. Writable and rewriteable floppy disks, CDs and DVDs in the early days.
2. Retrospect software, a mobile rack, and multiple hard disk drives (one always stored offsite).
3. Crashplan Home (four happy years, until discontinued) and local backups to mobile rack.
4. IDrive (two unhappy years, ending August 26) and local backups to mobile rack.
5. Crashplan for Small Business.
6. Backblaze (two trials, second ending October 3).

For decades, I have mirrored (RAID1) my hard disks, to reduce the need to restore from the actual backups – and to preserve my Windows boot disk configuration. I now also use Macrium Reflect Free to back up my boot disk to another disk on the system. I'm definitely a belt-and-suspenders type of guy, when it comes to data protection (family photos & much more). I have yet to attempt a boot disk restore, but it is conceivable to do so.

Our current internet connection is 75 Mbps FIOS from Verizon. Most other services are asymmetrical, with download speeds up to 10 times as fast as uploads. For most homes, this is OK, since downloads are what happen most. However, FIOS is symmetrical – same speed up and down. This is an advantage for network backups.

IDrive: With IDrive, our various computer systems were backed up on the same account. IDrive limited the amount of data that could be stored. I had an apparently sweet deal, with 5TB at the 2TB price, and $7 for the first year as an IDrive customer. (Copies of and changes to files increase the storage needed.) They offered me a substantial discount to stay, and then asked why I was leaving. My response:

> Managing these backups is a PITA, support requests get scant attention, most backups "fail," and some major data within a folder being backed up did not get backed up automatically – I had to specifically back it up. Basically, IDrive is a nuisance AND I don't trust it. 1/6 of my computer log book is devoted to IDrive problems – including the OS, all my 50+ apps, hardware and RAID issues, etc.

I used Crashplan Home for four years with very few notes, and am now subscribed with Crashplan Business – it actually works properly, unlike IDrive.

Backblaze (1): When changing backup systems, it makes sense to survey the field. Although I was familiar with Crashplan, I started a trial of the less-expensive Backblaze in April, 2019. 15GB from my C: drive was backed up promptly, but my data drive was ignored. My query to support was promptly and clearly answered: in order for a disk to be backed up, it must have its own drive letter. Well, in a fit of Linux-ism, I had mounted my data drive at C:\Data, and Backblaze would not back it up. Unwilling to change the architecture of the system, I uninstalled Backblaze.

Crashplan Small Business: In June, 2019, I started a 30-day trial. I installed the product, started the initial backup, and went away for over a week. The system backed up as expected.

Then I started having trouble with my eight-year-old computer. The system would crash periodically, sometimes with boot code B2. System log files indicated there were VSS errors. I suspected issues with backups, but was unable to correct them. I now believe IDrive (still running) and Crashplan were in conflict, but I needed both, in case Crashplan proved inadequate; few, if any, problems have occurred since I removed IDrive from the system; I might as well blame IDrive for that, too. However, I was not sure what was wrong at the time.

Anyhow, I started building a new computer. This time, I made D: the data drive. It's generally easier to use that way, anyhow. I installed Crashplan as a second computer, because I wanted to keep the old backups safe, until confidently using the new system. This doubles the cost, until I cancel Crashplan for the old system. When I do cancel, I won't be able to do a point-in-time restore of the data from the three months prior to building the new system. Crashplan has a way to continue backups from an old system on a new system, although with relocating C:\Data to D:, it might have backed up the data again.

The loss of history is a potential problem whenever you change backup software or move data to a new system. Accordingly, before I started copying data to the new system, I made a copy of the data on a hard drive, which I tucked away.

Crashplan on the new computer took 11 days to back up 835 GB (76 GB/day), 55% of my data. I had no idea what was not backed up. I disabled Crashplan, and started a 15-day trial of Backblaze on September 18.

Backblaze (2): Backblaze went on just fine. I told it to back up all my drives by letter. I also set it to use four threads (on my 8-core, 16-thread Ryzen 7 3700X). In three days, it backed up 875 GB (250 GB/day), 60% of my data. Backblaze

appeared to be backing up files by size, smallest first, a nice touch. *Backblaze outperformed Crashplan roughly three to one!* Time for another trip out of town: I turned Crashplan back on, and let both backups continue at the same time. Both backups completed while I was gone. (Crashplan and Backblaze are running concurrently now, without causing any problems.)

Backblaze has excellent online help, which explains that they encrypt the data with AES-128 (US Secret level), which uses a single key to both encrypt and decrypt data – a fast method. They then use public key encryption to send the AES key, when necessary. Crashplan uses public key encryption to encrypt the data – a slow but more secure method. I used LastPass to generate a private key for Crashplan. Without it, backups cannot be decrypted, so I keep it safe in LastPass. Backblaze also has the option to use my private key, but this time I chose to use their default key.

Our internet capacity does not limit backup speed. Backup speed seems to be reduced for both programs, when they are running concurrently. My fast CPU appears to be the limiting factor for both methods. For most home users, the difference in protection is immaterial, but the overall speed may be important.

Backblaze lets you select one folder at a time, which will then be excluded by that name from all disks. It also lets you specify file types to exclude from all disks. Both lists have many defaults and could be pit traps for power users, but they are fully customizable.

The table on the next page compares the features of the programs which are most interesting to me. They are listed such that a star (★) indicates a positive feature and a dash (–) a negative one.

The number of times I have needed to restore something from online backup has been quite small. Disk mirroring has saved my butt three times over the years. I also make occasional local backups. A major restore from Crashplan would be painfully slow, but this would be a last resort. The permanent file retention and point-in-time restores provided by Crashplan are important. As the last resort, it should indeed be comprehensive. Also, specifying folders to back up is straightforward and more flexible with Crashplan, just check the boxes and no pit traps. So, I chose to stick with Crashplan. (Too bad they don't seem to offer USB restore by mail.) My conclusion: *Backblaze appears to be the superior solution, for many or most home users* (just not for me, at that time).

Accordingly, I removed Backblaze from the computer on October 8. They asked, I told them the essence of the above, and they replied that Backblaze 7 had been released that very day. I immediately signed up for a subscription at $6 a month, planning to replace Crashplan, which I kept for one more month. I was able to recapture my existing backups at Backblaze.

The main new feature is extended version history. For an extra $2/month, I will get a full year of retention for everything. I could keep things beyond that, at a monthly charge, but I think a year should suffice.

Backblaze has been highly responsive during my trials of the software. Their policy has been to consistently provide the best quality, reliable service over their entire history. (Crashplan [Code 42] already ripped the rug out from under me once.) And Backblaze is three times as fast!

Key Features of Considered Backup Software			
Feature	**Crashplan**	**Backblaze**	**IDrive**
Version	7.2.0.1641	6 and 7	6.7.1.36
Profitable business	★	★	(?)
Price	$10/mo	$6/mo, $60/yr, $110/2yr +$2/month for 1 year/★ +$0.005/GB/mo over 1 yr	$52/yr, $75/yr
Unlimited storage	★	★	(2TB, 5TB)
Unlimited systems	(1)	(1)	★
Unlimited file size	★	★	(4GB max)
Backup mounted disk	★	–	★
Bare metal restore	–	–	(separate, non-RAID)
High reliability	★	★	–
Low Maintenance	★	★	–
Open file backup	★	–	Who cares?
Triple Speed	–	★	"
Encryption	★	★	"
Select backup items via GUI	★	(select disks to include; identify folders to exclude on all disks, one at a time)	"
Exclude files by type	–	★	"
Retain deleted items	★	30 days/1 year/★	"
Email reports	★	★	"
Data summary chart	–	★	"
2-factor auth (2FA)	★	★	"
Point-in-time restore	★	30 days/1 year/★	"
USB restore by mail	–	($)	"

Details and issues have been omitted. For example, I have a separate, detailed backup plan that I may post at some time in the future.