

Software solutions to PC switches

Transferring to a new computer means moving your data, settings and programs from the old one. A range of options exist to make the job easy



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Last weekend, my eldest daughter asked if she could use one of my ultra-lightweight laptop personal computers for work when she travels. I have two, so I was happy to oblige. But all my data, settings and programs were on the one my daughter would take, so I needed to get them on to the other laptop.

There are several ways to achieve this, depending on what you need to transfer. If you simply need to move a few documents or files that take up less than a few gigabytes of space, the easiest approach is to use a USB flash memory drive or burn the files to a set of CDs or DVDs.

You can buy a 2Gb USB thumb drive for about \$20, which will hold as much data as three CDs, or about half one DVD.

Using a USB flash memory drive or even a small external USB hard drive is simply a matter of plugging it in and dragging and dropping files from the old PC on to the portable storage device, then adding them into the new machine.

Burning the files to CD or DVD discs takes a little longer and requires that both PCs have the appropriate optical drives but it does have the clear advantage of giving you back-up copies.

Another option, if you already have a home or small business network, is to connect both machines to the network, designate the folders for sharing (left-click on the folder and select "sharing and security" in Windows XP), open the source folder on the old machine and the target folder on the new one and drag and drop files as required.

Alternatively, if you have a large volume of files to move – say, 10Gb or more – a better option may be a dedicated file transfer option such as the **Belkin** (www.belkin.com) USB 2.0 file transfer cable or the Belkin Easy Transfer Cable for Windows Vista, both of which cost about \$30 online and are designed to be easy to set up and use. These "crossover" cables connect the two PCs via their USB ports and enable users to copy files from PC to PC without installing drivers or setting up a complicated network, which makes them ideal for transferring photos, music, videos, documents and so on. Typically it takes about 10 minutes to transfer 500Mb of data.

Detto's **IntelliMover** (www.detto.com) software and crossover cable package goes further by letting users quickly and easily transfer computer settings – including internet bookmarks, desktop shortcuts and e-mail settings – as well as files and folders from one computer to another. The latest version, IntelliMover 4.5, is compatible with Windows Vista and costs \$25 discounted. It features a step-by-step wizard and automatically locates and identifies personal files that you might accidentally miss.

However if, like me, you want to move complete software applications to a new PC, you need a different approach. One option is to use the original discs to reinstall the software. Unfortunately, reinstalling software means tracking down the original discs (and licence key). Even if you find the discs, the reinstallation process is likely to be slow and time-consuming and you will lose any personal changes you have made – such as changing the default document settings in Microsoft Office.

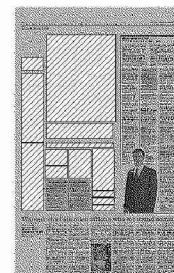
Simply copying whole software packages from one PC to another is not usually an option either because normal software installation procedures put pieces of the software in several places on a hard drive and most store settings

and program pointers in the registry, a crucial part of Windows.

Specialist PC migration software such as my favourite, **LapLink's PCMover** (www.laplink.com), is designed to solve this particular problem. Using PCMover is simple. The first step is to install a copy on the old PC and a second copy on the new machine – something that took me just a few minutes. One note of caution, however: if you are upgrading to a Vista-based machine, as I was, you must use the latest version of PCMover, which costs \$50 to download. Once installed, you connect the two PCs using the supplied USB crossover cable (you can also use a network-connection or parallel cable). PCMover scans the original PC and users can then allow PCMover to decide which programs, files and settings to move to the new machine, or choose the programs manually. I took the latter option because there were some applications on my old laptop that I no longer use.

Then you click "next" and the transfer begins. I had about 45Gb of application software and files – mostly documents, pictures and music – to move over and the process took about 10 hours, so it is best to plan the transfer and set it up to run overnight. While most software applications can be moved this way, a few, including some security software and communications software such as the built-in wireless data card application I had running on my old machine, cannot be transferred easily and must be reinstalled. In my case, PCMover moved two dozen applications, including Microsoft Office.

Once PCMover had finished, the new laptop was ready to roll with the minimum of fuss and bother. Most impressively, all my file settings, Firefox bookmarks and software moved over without a hitch.



As a bonus, I took the opportunity to clean up the old PC by “uninstalling” unwanted applications and deleting unwanted files. Then I ran PC optimisation

software and a file defragmenter to speed up the old laptop before handing it over to my grateful daughter.

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