

Can I transfer my programs and files to a new computer

Introduction

This article explains what your options are if you wish to transfer your data to a different/new PC.

When you purchase a new computer, it usually is delivered with the latest version of Windows and drivers / utility software specific to your new hardware. It is reasonable to think that it would be nice to backup all the applications and all your user data on your old computer and restore it to your new computer, while leaving your shiny new operating system in place.

Unfortunately, this task is, in practical terms, impossible to automate. This is due to the diversity of application software, how it interacts and extends the Operating system and some design decisions made in the early days of Windows.

Read on to learn why.

How data and applications are stored

A computer system contains lots of stored data. This data can be split into the following types.

- The operating system (typically Windows)
- Installed applications
- User created data (documents, pictures, emails etc)

When you install a typical application, additional to copying the software to c:\program files, the install process can also modify the windows information store (registry), extend Windows (add background services and drivers) and carry out other actions specific dependent on your computer type and Windows version. This customization and modification of shared resource during installation makes the installed files non-portable between computers.

To further complicate matters, despite there being some standard places for applications to store their data, they are not observed by many applications. Hence, it is impossible to automate the backup / restore of all your user data.

Your options

1. Take an image of your old computer and restore it to your new computer.

This is a simple process, and you will get a computer that works exactly like your old one if all goes well. However, it will now have the operating system that was installed on your original computer. You will have to install drivers for your new graphics and network adapters and any other specific hardware. You will also need to run Redeploy to ensure it has drivers required for booting. You may also find that you have to re-activate Windows for your new hardware (this may not be available if you have an OEM license).

2. Reinstall software on your new computer and manually copy user data/documents.

This requires more effort initially, but you retain your new operating system with its installed drivers and customizations for your new hardware. We suggest you make an image of your old computer; you can explore the image on your new computer, copying files as you need them. This [article](#) explains how to access files from the backup image. All applications, however, will need to be reinstalled. You can also use the Windows Easy Transfer feature to transfer the most common files, email, pictures, and settings. It is available [here](#) for Windows XP, Vista and 7 and built into Windows 8 (use the win8 search, search for transfer and follow the wizard).

Note: There are utility programs that claim to automate the migration of your installed programs to a new computer. However, due to previously described complexity, they will typically cause issues with your new computer which may vary from simply being unable to uninstall some applications to, in the worse case, making your system non-bootable or unstable.