

## 2-Minute Expert: What is “Cloud” File Syncing?



CREDIT: [bannosuke](#)  
[View full size image](#)

As you become more mobile, social and digital, you're likely to carry several devices, such as a computer, smartphone or tablet. With multiple gadgets, it can be a challenge accessing all of your data from whatever you're carrying at the moment.

Cloud storage services fix that by syncing your computer and mobile devices through their Internet connections. In addition to Google Drive, which was introduced April 24, Apple iCloud, Dropbox, Microsoft SkyDrive and SugarSync can do the job.

### How does it work?

You install software on your computer, smartphone and/or tablet that allows specific file folders to sync with an account on a Web service. Multiple devices can be connected to your account so changes made from any device will be reflected automatically on the others. You can also download your files through a Web browser on other devices that don't have the client, allowing you to access your data from any computer.

### Why do I need it?

Getting the latest version of your data on all your devices no longer means emailing files back and forth or shuttling them on USB drives. Most services also provide revision tracking, which records changes to your documents, so you can go back to recover something that you deleted and wish you hadn't. And cloud services are a backup insurance policy: If you lose or break your computer or mobile device, you just sync the new one with the cloud to get everything back.

You also can share files with your family, friends and co-workers by simply sending a link in a message. (They don't have to subscribe to the service or have the sync software.)

### Is it secure?

No device connected to the Internet is perfectly secure, but the services take several precautions. Each requires an account with a log-in name and password, and each encrypts your files. Though services state that they need certain rights to your files in order to handle them, most say explicitly that you retain [ownership of your data](#) — no filching your great American novel.

### Do I have to pay for it?

Each service offers some space for free, and some, such as Dropbox, will increase your free space if you refer friends. You can get additional space for a monthly or yearly fee, with the maximum available space ranging from 50GB to 16TB.

### What are the top services?

#### Dropbox

Free: 2GB (up to 18GB through referrals)

Additional: From \$100 per year for 50GB to \$200 for 100GB.

Notable: Very popular, easy revision tracking, integrates into many apps to sync data with minimal setup.

#### Google Drive

Free: 5GB

Additional: From \$30 per year for 25GB to \$800 for 16TB.

Notable: Can open more than 30 file types and allow you to edit some of them right in a Web browser.

#### Apple iCloud

Free: 5GB

Additional: From \$20 per year for 10GB to \$100 for 50GB.

Notable: Built in to iOS and OSX, backs up contacts, calendar, mail and notes and makes purchased media available even after being deleted from your device.

#### Microsoft SkyDrive

Free: 7GB

Additional: From \$10 per year for 20GB to \$50 for 100GB.

Notable: Will integrate with Windows 8 and Windows Phone so files in the cloud are accessed the same as local files. Can optionally share files from entire computer instead of just one folder.

#### SugarSync

Free: 5GB

Additional: From \$50 per year for 30GB to \$400 for 500GB.

Notable: Available on a broad range of devices beyond Apple and Android phones, including BlackBerry, Symbian and Windows Mobile. Can sync any folders you choose.

Follow Joseph Fieberon [Google+](#), [Facebook](#), or [Twitter](#), or contact him through his website, [JosephFieber.com](#).