

Use Dropbox to Easily Migrate Between Macs

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Credit: Dreamstime

Dropbox is a great, highly flexible service. Though its greatest strength is in syncing files between multiple devices, it can also function as a cloud-based file backup service. These two abilities make Dropbox an excellent tool for not only protecting your data, but also migrating it easily from one computer to another. We recently used this method to migrate from one [Macbook Air](#) to another, saving time and effort in the process.

Mac programs like Address Book, Calendar and Mail store their settings and data in hidden folders. Backing up and migrating this data can be tricky, but by syncing it to Dropbox, we can accomplish both in a few simple steps. By setting up “symbolic links,” which is like a pointer or referrer, your programs will use the data from your Dropbox folder, where it is synced with the cloud. Depending on how much data you have, the free 2GB Dropbox provided may not be enough, but an additional 50GB is available for \$9.99 per month.

[Read also [‘The 10 Best Notebooks.’](#)]

Preparing to move your files

The files we will be moving are normally hidden on your Mac. There are a number of ways to “unhide” your files, but one of the easiest is a free app called “Show/Hide Hidden.” [Download](#) and install Show/Hide Hidden, and then choose it from your Applications folder to reveal your hidden files. Choose it again and the files will be hidden.

Though the steps aren’t very difficult, you should have at least a basic knowledge of how your Mac works and an understanding of the Mac file system. Use caution, if done incorrectly, you could lose important data.

Moving your files to Dropbox

Let’s start by moving your AddressBook data to Dropbox. Be sure the AddressBook app and any programs that might rely on it are closed before beginning.

Use Show/Hide Hidden to reveal your hidden files. Go to `/Users/username/Library/Application Support`, select the AddressBook folder, and choose Copy from the Edit menu. Go to your Dropbox folder and choose Paste from the Edit menu to create a copy there. Go back to `/Users/username/Library/Application Support` and rename AddressBook to AddressBook.old.

Next, open Terminal from your Applications/Utilities folder and copy the following, replacing “username” with your account name (note the “slash space slash” after the first Addressbook and the “backslash space” between Application and Support):

```
In -s /Users/username/Dropbox/AddressBook/ /Users/username/Library/Application\ Support/AddressBook
```

You should now see a `/Users/username/Library/Application Support/AddressBook` file with a little arrow icon on it, letting you know it’s a symbolic link. Start up AddressBook and it should work like it normally does, but it’s now getting its data from your Dropbox.

If everything is working fine, you can delete `/Users/username/Library/Application Support/AddressBook.old`. If not, delete the `/Users/username/Library/Application Support/AddressBook` link you created, rename AddressBook.old to AddressBook, and all should be back to normal.

Repeating for Other Apps

The process is similar for many other Mac apps. Here are some popular apps that we use and have successfully moved to our Dropbox, including the path of where their data files are stored. Repeat the same process as above and you’ll have all your important data stored in Dropbox.

- AddressBook: `/Users/username/Library/Application Support/AddressBook`
- Calendar (pre-Lion): `/Users/username/Library/Application Support/Calendars`
- Calendar (Lion): `/Users/username/Library/Calendars`
- Mail: `/Users/username/Library/Mail`
- Thunderbird: `/Users/username/Library/Thunderbird`
- Picasa: `/Users/username/Library/Application Support/Google/Picasa3`

After your files have been moved

Once you have a copy of your data in Dropbox, you can sync the new Mac to your Dropbox. With the files synced on the second computer, instead of copying the original folders as we did above, you’ll simply rename them by adding “.old,” and then create the symbolic link. If the programs work fine and find the data, delete the renamed folder and you’re set.

We used this method to migrate from one Macbook Air to another, which greatly simplified the process, taking what might have been days worth of hunting for settings and copying files and turning it into a few simple steps.