

It's sometimes easier to think about cloud computing in all or nothing terms – move everything into the cloud or leave everything as-is, on-premises. But, as most know, the emerging reality is more of a hybrid approach, combining both cloud and on-premises resources. Windows Server 2012 and System Center 2012 SP1 are embracing the hybrid model with services including Windows Azure Online Backup. It's a great example of how Windows Server, System Center and Windows Azure work together in what we call the "Cloud OS".

Currently in preview, Windows Azure Online Backup is a cloud-based backup solution enabling server data to be backed up and recovered from the cloud in order to help protect against loss and corruption.

The service provides IT administrators with a physically remote backup and recovery option for their server data with limited additional investment when compared with on-premises backup solutions.

In addition to cloud-based backup for Windows Server 2012, we are pleased to announce that Windows Azure Online Backup now also supports cloud-based backup from on-premises System Center 2012 SP1 via the Data Protection Manager component.

Windows Server 2012

Cloud-based backup from Windows Server 2012 is enabled by a downloadable agent that installs right alongside the familiar Windows Server backup interface. From this interface backup and recovery of files and folders is managed as usual but instead of utilizing local disk storage, the agent communicates with a Windows Azure service which creates the backups in Windows Azure storage.

Key features

Below are some of the key features we're delivering in Windows Azure Online Backup:

- **Simple configuration and management.**
 - Simple, familiar user interface to configure and monitor backups from Windows Server and System Center SP1.
 - Integrated recovery experience to transparently recover files, folders and VMs from the cloud.
 - Windows PowerShell command-line interface scripting capability.
- **Block level incremental backups.**
 - Automatic incremental backups track file and block level changes, only transferring the changed blocks, hence reducing the storage and bandwidth utilization.
 - Different point-in-time versions of the backups use storage efficiently by only storing the changed blocks between these versions.
- **Data compression, encryption and throttling.**
 - Data is compressed and encrypted on the server before being sent to Windows Azure over the network. As a result, Windows Azure Online Backup only places encrypted data in the cloud storage.

- The encryption passphrase is not available in Windows Azure, and as a result data is never decrypted in the service.
- Users can setup throttling and configure how Windows Azure Online Backup utilizes the network bandwidth when backing up or restoring information.
- **Data integrity verified in the cloud.**
 - Backed up data is also automatically checked for integrity once the backup is complete. As a result, any corruptions due to data transfer are automatically identified and repair is attempted in the next backup.
- **Configurable retention policies.**
 - Retention policies Configure and implement retention policies to help meet business policies and manage backup costs.

Getting started

Getting started with Windows Azure Online Backup is a simple two-step process:

1. Get a free preview Windows Azure Online Backup account (with 300 GB of cloud storage) [here](#).
2. Login to the Windows Azure Online Backup portal and download and install the Windows Azure Online Backup agent for Windows Server 2012 or System Center 2012 SP1 Data Protection Manager. For Windows Server 2012 Essentials, download and install the Windows Azure Online Backup integration module.

Once you have installed the agent or integration module you can use the existing user interfaces for registering the server to the service and setting up online backup.

Windows Azure Active Directory Management Portal

With today's release of the Windows Azure Online Backup preview we are also releasing a supporting preview of the Windows Azure Active Directory Management Portal. Customers can use the Windows Azure Active Directory Management Portal to sign up for Windows Azure Online Backup and manage users' access to the service. Administrators can now use the preview portal at <https://activedirectory.windowsazure.com>.

We'll have more details on how the new Windows Azure Active Directory Management Portal can be used to manage your organization's identity information in a separate blog post soon.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-6CxFDGvIk>