

PCmover

LapLink's PC Mover makes transferring programs, files between PCs possible



What if your entire computer system crashed and you needed to buy a new system? Assuming you have an image backup, it is a cinch, right? Well, yes and no. If you are restoring to the same operating system and pretty much the same hardware, especially the motherboard and chipset, you should be up and running in less than an hour if you planned for such a disaster. The key phrase is “if you planned.”

However, chances are very high that your new hardware will be very different from your old one, so it will be unlikely that your new system will boot right away. You try XP's Windows Repair. The Windows Repair is the second ‘R’ when booting from a Windows install disk. Oops, you just remembered that this Windows system was an upgrade, but you do find an OEM boot disk and give it a try anyway. The repair install fails. You cringe as you attempt the Recovery Console's (the first ‘R’) fixboot and fixmbr, both to no avail. You've done it dozens of times before, but this time, curse you, Microsoft, you are doomed.

The above scenario, in part, led me to search for a better way to migrate from one machine to another. The search ended with an amazing program, PC Mover. PC Mover moves all selected files, settings, and programs from one PC to another. Let me repeat that: it moves PROGRAMS. Ever since that evil amulet, the registry, Microsoft made it difficult, in fact, impossible to simply copy a program from one pc to another. I have heard of and even tried some real hardcore registry hacks to circumvent the need to reinstall programs myself, but for years now, I say to my clients, “I can copy your data, but we need to reinstall your programs, yes, ALL of your programs.” Now, go find your install disks, your product keys, and “Sorry dear, but we can't go out for dinner and to the movies tonight.”

Speed does matter

Speaking of my wife, my wife's computer was old and slow, running XP Professional with a ton of legacy programs dating back to at least Windows 95. I was asking for trouble if I were to move her files to a new PC with Vista, so the game plan was to move my XP to Vista and then move her XP system to my XP. A PC Mover license is good for a single pair of computers, so I needed a

second license to accomplish my mission.

I spent a solid week planning my move. I highly recommend anyone contemplating a migration to read the 16-page Quick Start Guide, which I read and reread. I also had an online chat with LapLink to help clarify some technical issues in advance. I figured that any program messing with the registry needs to be treated with respect. As part of my prep, I did a disk cleanup and ran chksk and defrag on the hard drives. I removed all trialware, programs that weren't being used anymore, and multimedia programs that I knew were on the new computer. I created an image backup of both systems.

I loaded PC Mover on both the new Vista machine and the old XP. PC Mover first runs on the new machine to determine what programs are already there. From what I could tell, it does this by searching uninstall files, msi files, ini files, log files, short-cuts, and the registry. Then PC Mover runs on the old computer and creates a snapshot of files and settings to be moved. My first migration consisted of 144 eligible programs with over 200,000 settings, which I manually pared down to around a 100 programs. Still that is a lot. Imagine the time and cost to do that for a client who doesn't have a nice comfortable futon nearby! I could never justify charging a client for staring at a screen and repeatedly clicking next, cot or no cot.

Some or all?

PC Mover has an option to move all users or selected users to the same or mapped users on the new system. Likewise, in the other XP to XP migration that I did, I mapped the drives as well. This gets complicated, but my second migration had Windows and programs installed on the D drive of the old computer. Therefore, when I did my transfer, I mapped the old D to the new C and vice versa with the other drive. Like I said, this was very difficult to think through, but easy to accomplish with the software.

PC Mover can migrate over a USB crossover cable between computers, over an Ethernet network, or from an external storage device. I used a 100 Mbps network. With this arrangement, it took 7½ hours to move the 100+ programs

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consisting of two 60 GB partitions. My second migration, XP to XP, took over 14 hours, but this was from an old system pushing only 400 MHz. I, of course, wasn't around during this time. To speed up the move, antivirus programs and firewalls are turned off and screen savers and power options are disabled. In fact, antivirus and spyware programs as well as hardware drivers as a norm are not transferred and must be reinstalled. During the transfer, PC Mover did some compression. I did not quite understand the need for that as I would think that compression and decompression would add more time than a straight uncompressed transfer. I think too, that it makes sense to upgrade to a 1 Gbps network when using PC Mover in a business environment.

OMG, it works!

So how did it go? To my amazement and I must say, relief, it worked. Nothing crashed and I considered the weekend time well-spent. As expected on the Vista move, I had to reinstall a few programs. One was Microsoft Access 2002. My QuickBooks 2006 had to be upgraded to be compatible with Vista. Vista's Windows Mail transferred over all of the Outlook Express mail boxes, but did not port over the email passwords. Fortunately, I remembered all of the passwords of my numerous accounts. My address book also did not transfer over automatically. On the second migration, I exported email account settings in advance as part of my preparation.

It is important to keep in mind that everything on the original computer remains intact; however, some settings become disabled. In fact, you can undo the entire migration if you want. I expected more problems migrating to Vista, however,

the XP to XP move with my cross mapped drives took a lot more time to straighten out. Short-cuts appeared with lost target references. My old C:\My Documents got moved to C:\Documents and Settings\User\My Documents, causing several problems until resolved. The only real problem I had was that I had been unable to share my networked printer until I remembered that I had to reinstalled the printer driver. I still have a problem accessing the shared XP printer from my Vista machine, but this may very well be a problem unique to Vista, or a permissions problem.

Before and after the migration, I was looking to print out the programs that I was moving. After the migration, PC Mover displays a StartThis dialog box, similar to msconfig, whereby you could enable/disable questionable migrations, but I couldn't find a way to print this out. Customer support directed me to the log files, and eventually I found a report that came close to what I was looking for. I think reports could be a bit clearer, although they could be saved as comma separated files (csv) and then manipulated in Excel.

Not every migration requires PC Mover, but without question this a powerful tool to add to a technician's arsenal, especially when upgrading a machine to a new operating system. It saved my eyes staring at over 100 reinstall programs, and for a client who doesn't have his original disks, I don't have to question his integrity. A successful move requires ample time to plan for the move and plenty of time afterwards to check out program functionality, configurations, and some reinstalls. The time in between is PC Mover's magic, — and besides, the wife gets to go out to dinner and to a movie to boot. ☐

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