

editor's note



MSC is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year!

Send us an email with your favorite articles and memories from our first 50 years.

AS SHE BEGAN PREPARING FOR THE HOLIDAYS, MY WIFE DECIDED SHE WANTED TO MAKE A PHOTO BOOK FOR HER MOM. I'm sure you've all seen these wonderful gifts; you upload a series of digital photos to a website and in just two weeks you have a beautifully bound, hard cover journal of your memories.

There was just one problem. The external hard drive on which I stored the photos was broken (specifically, the USB connector had broken off). I dismantled the plastic container, looked over the device, and determined it was beyond my power to fix. However, my nephew Jason (or Big Jason as we call him to distinguish from my youngest child) came to my rescue when he pointed out the internal portion of the drive was a simple IDE hard drive and so he took it, plugged it in to a spare slot, and downloaded all of my files to a handy portable drive.

Of course, that still left me with the issue of how to save the photos for the future. I could burn them to CDs or DVDs (but they're easily lost or damaged in a house with small children); I could buy another external drive (but we already know what happened in my old drive); or I could look to the cloud.

Cloud computing is Internet-based software and data storage. Essentially, instead of having a program or your files residing on your own computer or your company's server, they exist on a group of servers owned and operated by someone else. The most common example of cloud computing is gmail, where your email is stored on Google's servers.

Well, it turns out that Google isn't just in the email and search businesses. They now offer 20 gigabytes of storage space at the reasonable price of \$5 per year. I don't have to worry about losing or damaging my storage medium—that's Google's problem. And I can access the pictures from any computer connected to the Internet (a nice feature when traveling).

I love cloud computing. I use Google Docs (docs.google.com)—a free online service com-

binging a writing program, spreadsheet, and presentation software) for a wide range of professional and personal needs: I keep NASCC: The Steel Conference files on Google Docs so the entire planning committee can access them at any time; I use it for referee scheduling so everyone can see what games they're scheduled to referee; and my daughter uses it to write stories so she can easily share them with me. (A similar program is available from Adobe at www.adobe.com.) And I use a cloud service called Doodle (www.doodle.com) to schedule meetings (it allows you to offer a variety of dates and invitees can indicate for which dates and times they're available).

And as great as cloud computing is, I'm also infatuated with free open source software. Perhaps the most common example of this among MSC readers is Mozilla's Firefox web browser (www.mozilla.com), a good alternative to Microsoft Internet Explorer or Google Chrome. But my absolute favorite program in this category is OpenOffice (www.openoffice.org). This powerful (and free!) program is a good alternative to Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and even Access.

I'd love to know what cloud-based services and programs, along with freeware, you're running. Drop me a note at melnick@aisc.org and let me know! (Or if you're at NASCC: The Steel Conference in May, we can trade stories.)

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