

Photo Safe II storage prevents catastrophe when columnist's laptop crashes

I learned a valuable lesson in the last few days — practice what you preach.

Time and again, I've talked about backing up your computer. I've said it here, I've told my friends, I've told my family and I've even told my co-workers. Backup regularly, at least once a month. You never know when something will happen.

Well, as it turns out, I was absolutely right. My laptop, which I practically live off of, went belly

TECH SPOTLIGHT



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up this week. The main board, essentially the central nervous system of the machine, went kaput. I'm actually happy about this, only because it means that hopefully the hard drive is still OK.

Why am I so concerned? Because I haven't practiced what I preach lately. I haven't backed up my computer since November. And I just dumped all the photos from the holidays on my machine.

Ouch.

While I'm still waiting to see how the rest of my data will fare (my computer is undergoing major surgery as we speak), I am extremely relieved to know that all those great photos from Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's are not lost. I loaded them on a new product I've been testing. A product designed for just such a catastrophe.

Digital Foci recently released the Photo Safe II. I reviewed the previous model a while back and was impressed with the features, but I wasn't sure how much better they could make it.

Actually, it's a lot better, from

design to execution.

The Photo Safe II comes in three models: 80GB, 160GB and 250GB. That's double or more from the previous model's sizes of 40GB, 80GB and 120GB. That's a good thing, since digital camera improvements mean photo sizes are growing by leaps and bounds. I know I couldn't survive on just the 40GB anymore.

The device reads all the major memory card formats: Compact Flash Type I, MultiMedia Card (MMC), SD/HC, MiniSD, Memory Stick (MS), MS Pro, MS Duo, MS Pro Duo and xD-Picture Card. The MS Duo and MiniSD support are new to the device.

The Photo Safe II comes with a dual-plug USB cable so you can charge the battery and move data to and from the computer. It also includes an AC adapter and carrying case.

The new Photo Safe has some design changes from its predecessor. See **JONES**, Page 3D

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 sor, and they greatly improve the product. The device still weighs just six-tenths of a pound, but the slanted edges make it easier to grip than the old rectangular product.

The designers also put rubber flaps over the card slots on the Photo Safe II, which is a welcome improvement. Though both came with a carrying case, it wasn't terribly difficult for dirt, dust and other things to make their way into those unprotected card slots. Then you end up with dirt on the memory cards, which eventually could lead to failure of the device or the card.

They also changed the two buttons slightly, putting labels below the buttons instead of just symbols on them. This makes the labels far easier to read, which makes the device easier to use.

The other new feature is the battery compartment. It's easy to open this device, thanks to the new battery door on the front cover. The lithium-ion recharge-

able battery inside can be replaced when it wears out, which for most rechargables is after one to two years of regular use.

The Photo Safe II is easy to use. It recognized each card I inserted, let me know how much data was on the card and copied it to the built-in hard drive quickly. Once finished, I could just remove the card. My photos and even videos were safely tucked away on the device.

The feature I really love about this device is what happens when it's hooked to a computer. It takes on two roles. First, it can serve as a memory card reader, so you can look at the photos directly on the card using this device, and drag specific photos from the card to the computer if you choose.

The Photo Safe II also becomes an external hard drive. It can be formatted and divided up, so you can have a drive for photos and a drive to back up data. Trust me on this, anything that helps you back up the computer is a good thing. This little device did a great job with it. Plus, it charged the battery from the computer's power while it was hooked up via USB.

The Photo Safe II may have some subtle improvements, but they're good ones. Sure, it could use a full screen, instead of just the simple LCD screen. But I'm guessing that would add a lot of cost and weight. Frankly, it does the job just fine, and the size and design improvements really add to its usefulness.

It did a great job of backing up my photos and videos, thank goodness. Otherwise, I would have lost some great memories.

Just goes to show. Practice what you preach. You better believe when my computer gets back, I'll be spending the day doing just that.

Back up, back up, back up!

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Where it's @



The Digital Foci Photo Safe II requires Windows 2000 or later or Mac OS 10.4 or later and a USB port. The product retails for \$119 for the 80GB model, \$149 for the 160GB model and \$199 for the 250GB model. More information is available at www.digitalfoci.com/photo_safe.html.