

Acronis True Image 8.0

BACKING UP IS HARD TO DO — NOT!

REVIEWED BY MIA C. GOLOY

BACKING up a hard drive may not be on the list of fun stuff you can do on a PC, but that doesn't mean that the entire process should be difficult.

With Acronis True Image 8, creating an image of a hard drive or one of its partitions becomes an almost enjoyable task. Its XP-like interface is easy to understand, and presents everything you need up front. The main program area is divided into three: Disk Imaging, where you can create an image of a hard disk or partition, or a combination of both, restore a previously created image, and explore an image as a virtual drive; New Disk Deployment, where you can format and prepare a new hard drive that's been added to your PC, as well as "clone" the contents of the old hard drive and easily transfer them to the new one; and Tasks, where you can set up scheduled backups and restores.

On the left side of the screen is the list of tools you can use; these are also accessible as icons on a toolbar at the top of the screen. Manage Acronis Secure Zone lets you create, resize, or delete the Acronis Secure Zone

which is a special, hidden system partition where disk and partition images are stored. Activate Acronis Startup Recovery Manager switches on the function that will run a standalone version of True Image to restore damaged partitions in the event that Windows won't load for some reason. Check Image checks the integrity of an image after its creation or before its restoration. Create

Bootable Rescue Media lets you make a bootable CD (or a set of seven diskettes), although you're normally prompted to create this immediately after you've installed True Image. Show Log lets you check the operations performed by the program.

Acronis True Image 8 will run on any Pentium-based or compatible system with 32MB of RAM, and will work with any version of Windows. We tested the downloaded version on a Pentium 4 2.00 GHz PC with 256MB of RAM, an 80GB hard drive, and a 52x/24x/52x CD-RW drive, running on Windows 2000.

For our tests, we added a second, 2GB (1.96GB) hard drive which had 634MB in use. We measured how long it would take to image the entire drive, how long it would take to make an incremental image, and how long it would take to restore it.

When creating an image of a drive or partition, True Image lets you specify the level of compression (None, Normal, Full, Maximum) and based on this, it tells you how long the process will take and how large the resulting file will be. You can also specify whether or not you want the image to be saved to another hard drive or to removable media; if you choose the latter,



Behind True Image 8's XP-like interface is a powerful disk-imaging program.

True Image will also give you an estimate of how many discs you will need. The program warns, however, that creating an image directly to removable media would take much longer than if it were imaged to a hard drive.

In our tests, True Image estimated that creating an image of the 2GB drive on the PC's primary drive would take 1 minute, 10 seconds and would generate a 379MB file at normal compression. The process actually took 2 minutes, 14 seconds, while the image file turned out to be 420MB.

We added 6.8MB of files to the drive then ran an incremental backup, which saves only the changes made since the last image was created and thus generates a smaller file. The incremental backup, also estimated at 1 minute, 10 seconds for normal compression, took nearly as long as the full backup at 1 minute, 58 seconds. The file size, initially estimated at 380MB, was actually only 6.9MB.

We also tried backing up directly to a CD-RW drive. At normal compression, creating a complete image was estimated at less than a minute, with an estimated file size of 379MB and a CD count of 1. The actual time to create the image took much



True Image 8 makes fast work of backing up an entire drive.

longer at 14 minutes, 29 seconds, with the actual file size at 420MB.

The incremental backup, estimated at less than a minute and 384MB at normal compression, took a more acceptable 4 minutes and 7 seconds and resulted in a file size of also 6.9MB.

Restoring the image, on the other hand, didn't take very long. It took 2 minutes, 34 seconds, to restore the image from the hard drive, while restoring the image from the CD-RW took 5 minutes, 2 seconds.

A nifty feature of the program is the way it lets you access an image file as a vir-

tual drive through the Explore Image icon. This command adds the image file to the list of drives on your PC, so that you can access it just like any other drive. You can then use Windows Explorer to view the folders and files in the image, and copy them to a real drive — an easy way to restore individual folders and files. The files in the image are read-only, so there's no danger of accidentally changing them.

Other noteworthy features are the option to add lengthy comments to the image file before it is created so that you'll know exactly what it is you're restoring when the

time comes, and the option to password-protect the image file so that not just anyone can restore it.

Priced at \$50, Acronis True Image would make a great addition to your toolbox. A free trial download is available at www.acronis.com/homecomputing/download/trueimage/. ●

ACRONIS TRUE IMAGE 8.0

PROS: Easy to use; good features.
CONS: Actual imaging time is usually longer than estimated.
PRICE: \$50, \$30 upgrade
CONTACT: Acronis Inc., www.acronis.com

AskSam Professional 6

DATABASE FLEXIBILITY.

REVIEWED BY PEGGY WATT

IF your idea of a free-form database is an enormous Word document of names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses, then it's time to meet AskSam. A longtime user of the venerable app, I recently tested the new version 6 and found plenty to like — although first-time users will face a slight initial learning curve.

AskSam is a sophisticated organizer that lets you drop just about anything into a database, and then easily find it later (files can hold up to 16 terabytes' worth of data). The app's free-form structure means you don't have to parse

a file's contents and reenter information into traditional database fields. Instead, it imports into fully searchable fields most document formats: text files, e-mail messages, PDF files, instant messaging transcripts, and even Web pages. It also accepts numerous database files, including dBase, FoxPro, Access, Paradox, and delimited text.

I started by importing a giant Word file of names and numbers into the \$395 AskSam Professional 6 shipping version I tested (the \$149 Standard version lacks full text indexing, so it's not quite as speedy as Pro). The app's ability to retain the document's original appearance impressed me. My Word file remained familiar, editable, and — even better — searchable. I could also sort the results in ways that shame Word's simple search-and-find function.

Along with a new interface, version 6 adds versatile folder-management

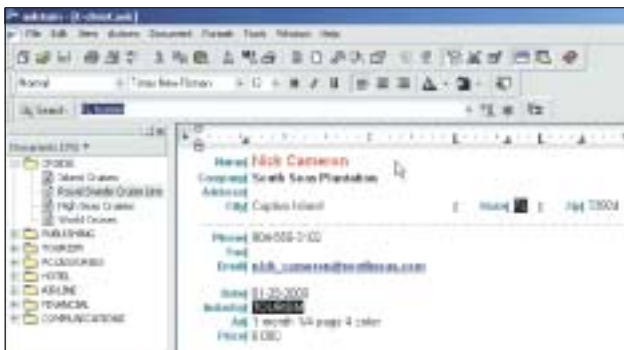
tools that let you group records by any field. Simply enter a new category into a field, and AskSam generates subfolders for each sortable field. You can view these dynamic folders from many perspectives, such as date, content, and keywords. New as well is the ability to import messages from PocoMail (joining Eudora, Netscape, Outlook, and Outlook Express).

AskSam comes with dozens of templates, including addresses, recipes, home inventory, wine lists, and movie lists. My favorite: templates that let you import, annotate, and organize Web pages. Just make sure you close the database while you merrily surf and save sites. AskSam and Internet Explorer (the only supported browser) don't share nicely, which causes IE to crash. AskSam says this problem exists only in the single-user version and will be patched.

Organizing desktops and data is an ongoing struggle for PC users. Luckily, AskSam makes it easy to search, sort, and organize info the way you want. ●

ASKSAM PROFESSIONAL 6

PROS: Powerful and flexible.
CONS: First-time users will face a slight learning curve.
PRICE: \$395 Professional, \$149 Standard
CONTACT: AskSam Systems, www.asksam.com



Enhancements to the folder settings provide more choices for organizing and viewing data.