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Remote Access to all your Data – Use an App right under your nose

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By now, most of us know about the “Cloud Storage” services like Dropbox, Google Drive, OneDrive, SugarSync, Evernote, Box, etc. All these services will give you a limited amount of free cloud storage, so that you can have access to whatever you put into the cloud, once you are on the internet with any device. This is great for accessing large files and sharing many files (think pictures or videos) with others. But with all the services, the free storage is limited, so you could probably never put all your pictures, or all your videos, or all your music, in the cloud. (Right now, my picture collection is over 110GB, and my video collection takes up more space than that.) These cloud services provide anywhere from 1 or 2 GB, on up to 10 or 15 GB. Earlier, OneDrive was giving 15GB, but now OneDrive will give you only 5GB; however, Google will still give you 15GB (with no limitation on pictures and videos). I guess if you added all the limits from six or seven services, you might get up to 50GB or so, but you would probably go crazy trying to keep track of what files are in which service – it would be a real nightmare.

So, what if you could get remote access to all the data on your computer using only a free popular App; would you try it? I know there are some applications available that can provide this capability. GotoMyPC can do this, but it has a monthly cost. LogMeIn is another costly application. Remote Desktop Connection, which is part of the Windows OS, also provides this capability. With Remote Desktop, you can connect to a computer running Windows from another computer running Windows. Remote Desktop is only for Windows to Windows; it will not allow access by a Mac or other device. TeamViewer is free and will work with non-Windows computers, so this is good alternative; but I’ve written about TeamViewer in the past, just a few years ago in the January 2014 edition of the Journal. The app under consideration here is free, and works with non-Windows computers, and is none other than (Drum roll please) ...OneDrive.

OneDrive gives you 5GB of space for your data, and access to that data can be accomplished by any device that can get onto the internet with a browser, such as Internet Explorer, Edge, Firefox, Chrome, Safari, etc. Additionally, OneDrive lets you designate any of the computers you use as “fetchable”. In other words, all the data on a computer that has been designated as “fetchable” can be accessed by any of your other computers (Macs included). The computer that is to be “fetchable” must be running Windows 7, or 8, or 10. You cannot fetch data on a computer running Windows 8.1 or XP, or Vista. (Although a machine running one of these Operating Systems could access the data on a “fetchable” computer using a browser.)

The computer that you want to be Remotely Accessed (fetchable) needs to have the OneDrive App running on it. (For Windows 7 download the OneDrive App:

<https://onedrive.live.com/about/enus/download>. The App is included in Windows 10.) Additionally, in the settings for the OneDrive App, you must check the box "Let me use OneDrive to fetch any of my files on this PC". (While you are checking that, it is good to also check "Start OneDrive automatically when I sign in to Windows". This will guarantee that the OneDrive App is always running.) You get to the OneDrive Settings by right clicking the OneDrive Icon in the Notification area (the right side of the Taskbar). On a Windows 10 machine you might have to look for the OneDrive icon by clicking on the Up Arrow to expose the additional notification icons. After you right click the OneDrive icon, select Settings (behind the three vertical dots), and then in the window presented, click the Settings tab on the top. These actions will give you the opportunity to check both boxes.

Once the OneDrive App is set up and running on the computer, the data on that computer will be fetchable from another computer. (Don't forget to leave the computer powered on if you leave your home, and you want to access the computer from another location.) To Remotely Access the data on the OneDrive, fetchable computer, just start a browser on another computer and log into your OneDrive Account. In addition to seeing all your Files (and Folders) on your OneDrive page, you will see the name of any computer that you have set up as fetchable. The names of these computers will be in a list on the left side of the OneDrive page under the heading PCs. Select the fetchable computer and you will see all the top-level folders on that PC. For Security reasons, when you select a fetchable computer, you will be asked to sign in with a security code. One drive will send a security code to your email address (a six-digit number). Use this code in the sign in process. If you will do this on this machine frequently, you can check a box that makes the sign in process automatic, and you will not have to go through the security code process every time. Selecting these folders will let you drill down to a desired file. All files and folders are represented as big squares, not nearly as neat as the graphics used in Windows File Explorer, but they get the job done. (Keep in mind that the access is via the internet and the internet speed at both locations comes into play, so if you have a slow connection at either end it might be a slow process.)

I have set this up on a few machines and it seems to work fairly well, although I have had some problems at various times. It seems like I had more consistent results with machines running Windows 10. Occasionally, I was not being able to get to a fetchable computer, although all the settings seemed to be correct. It is possible that I was not signed into my OneDrive account, when I thought I was. Restarting the fetchable computer usually corrected the situation. (Again, it may be obvious, but the fetchable computer has to be running before the fetching computer signs in to the OneDrive account.) Not only can you use this arrangement for Remote Access, but you can also use it in a location where you have multiple computers and you haven't set them up in a network. Further information from Microsoft can be found at: <https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Fetch-files-on-your-PC-70761550-519c4d45-b780-5a613b2f8822>.

Post Script - I eventually found a fix to the problem of not being able to see the fetchable PC. It involved making a small change to the Registry. On the computer that is

supposed to be fetchable, exit the OneDrive App. Then use Regedit to remove the "Claims" folder in HKEY\_CURRENT\_USER\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\OneDrive\. Next, start OneDrive on the fetchable computer, and then on the fetching computer, go to the OneDrive website and the fetchable computer should show up in the list of PCs and it should be fetchable. If you Google something like "Fetch files on OneDrive not available" it should lead you to the exact instructions. Remember, one should only venture into the Registry if one's system is backed up. Also, make sure to back up the Registry before you make any changes.

Post Script II - I recently tried to fetch one of my computers and for some reason was not able to do it. It makes me wonder if something in one of my computers has changed, the server software has changed, or this very neat feature is not quite ready for prime time.