

Re: EMERGENCY! Offline Files Disappearing / Vanishing

Source:

<http://www.tech-archive.net/Archive/Windows/microsoft.public.windows.server.sbs/2006-08/msg04109.html>

- *From:* "ALeghart" <aleghart@xxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 21 Aug 2006 07:28:14 -0700
-

Basic statistics here:

What are the chances of a hard drive failing versus the daily frustrations of staying "online" with the domain on a laptops, and keeping files and folder available?

Both as the admin and the user, Folder Redirection, Desktop sync, Offline files...not ready for prime time.

I'm tired of deleting profiles. I'm tired of watching all of my desktop icons disappear, then pushing F5 to redraw the desktop. I'm tired of disabling the empty QuickLaunch from the taskbar and re-enabling it to get icons back.

I'm tired of locking and sleeping my portable and losing the connection in the morning. Only printers and cached files are available, unless I explicitly browse to \\server\d\$\folder.

Microsoft is at least 5-10 years behind user needs when it comes to roaming of any sort, and the need to hot desk and/or log in at multiple physical or remote sessions.

One advantage to going to a Mac portable: no pretense of roaming actually working. You know that you have to take it all with you, and you can decline from logging in at someone else's Windows workstation.

If I have to perform a morning ritual voodoo dance to join the network and find my icons, I'd rather do it with a machine that runs OSX and WindowsXP.

—
Alan Leghart

Dave Nickason [SBS MVP] wrote:

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One "problem" with SBS is that we don't have a huge sample size to give our experiences statistical significance (and I dropped statistics twice anyway). I have two users who use offline files just about daily, including one with an approximately 10 GB My Docs, and they don't generally have issues. Several others work offline less often.

Any real sync issue I've had has turned out to be normal, as—expected behavior that was misunderstood by the user. I have some files stored on a server that will be critical if my network or server goes down, and I sync those to my desktop for added security. Again, no issues.

But who knows – if I had a thousand users doing it, I could have dozens of problems. The one thing I think everyone would agree on – including Macker's client, and even if he switches to a MAC – don't put all your eggs in one basket. This guy could have as easily had a drive failure or other unpredictable event that calls for him to have a backup when he travels. That will not depend on brand or platform – he should be doing it regardless.

If he wants a MAC, why does that involve changing vendors? He can run a MAC as a client on his SBS network. Eriq Neale's book has a section on MACs in SBS.

Microsoft Small Business Server 2003 Unleashed

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0672328054/sr=8-1/qid=1155922463/ref=pd_bbs_1/103-6318704-0179

"CO-DBA-SC-EL" <dx6490@xxxxxxxxxx> wrote in message
<news:uA1NmRpwGHA.5064@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>

We use offline sync but it feels like a crap shoot. A maddening problem with offline files sync is how poorly the feature documented (unless you have something like 2 months of your life to waste to read through the spaghetti of docs and tech notes) and that there is no simple way to log and debug what is happening. Then there are the ridiculous lists of which files offline sync considers "unsafe" to synchronize—the time for a serious update there was something like a couple of years ago. So far we've been lucky—but it does feel too much like a matter of blind luck. SyncToy is not much better—a toy. For manual sync, we have had good results with SyncBackSE, although it sometimes asks for a little too much of the user's participation in the process. For our critical stuff, we use offline backup through an Internet service, straight off the workstations. At least that way we can go back and retrieve deleted or trashed stuff. The Microsoft file recovery method is just too hard to set up and explain to normal human beings.

-- C_O

"Macker" <Macker@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote in message
<news:0E0B38D7-C8E3-48F8-B697-4BC13F4ACA4C@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>

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I spoke too soon. It would appear we've lost our client.
Thanks Offline
Files!

Macker. I am going to be talking with Peter (guy who does
Macs) about
going
totally Mac if such a move will give me more security with
KNOWING that
when
I leave town, I will have all my files. I have to admit that this
last
episode really spooked me.. Let's discuss pros and cons. ---
Joe.

"Macker" wrote:

Dave – you might be onto something here:

On consideration, I agree with you: It is
complete overkill to reinstall
the
server, and there is no guarantee of a fix.
What if there were fifty
users?
So, obviously the problem must be
diagnosed/discovered, or else I have
to go
another path, such as Second Copy. Sounds
like that might be the way to
go.

As I intimated, you've switched on a bit of a
"lightbulb" though:

The one common event is THIS LAPTOP.
The user previously had a different
laptop, and he did not have this problem.
When the video card went out
on his
old laptop (an Inspiron 8500), we gave him a
the "standby" laptop – this
one
– a D600 Latitude.

A week or so after he got the D600, this
problem happened. When it
happened
the second time, that was when I re–imaged
the D600 and the problem

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"seemed"
to go away – I thought the re-image (and
the other steps outlined in my
post)
did the trick. About a week after that, the
Inspiron 8500 was repaired,
and
we gave it back to him, and the D600 then
went "on ice" for a while...

He had no problems on his Inspiron
8500...until the LCD screen went out!
That was when I switched him back to the
D600 again (what he is using
now).
He was on the D600 for about a month,
when the problem came back.

So, maybe it's something to do with the
D600? A NIC issue? I don't know?
Sounds like we might be onto something
though...

Incidentally, there is another post in the
forum, "My Documents
Redirection"
(8/17/06 also). I have added a question to
that, as a poster (Owen)
suggested
the possibility that the Folder Redirection
policy of "Subfolders always
available offline" be enabled on the server. It
is not enabled is SBS by
default. See below:

I wrote in another forum: "Owen – As you
stated, the "Subfolders always
available offline" policy is DISABLED on
SBS by default. That is
correct.
However, I have never enabled this policy
for any of my clients – yet
their
subfolders ARE always available offline.
What is the purpose of this
policy
then? Is it a way of forcing the
issue, and kind of "making sure"? I'm
wondering if it could have
anything to
do with the problem I'm having?"

"Dave Nickason [SBS MVP]" wrote:

Probably a poor choice of words on my part – when I referred to "administratively cached" I meant those that were set for caching in the properties of the share on the server, as opposed to those set for caching manually by the user. IOW I was trying to say the same thing the KB says.

FWIW, I would not even consider an undertaking like reinstalling a server as an attempt to resolve an undiagnosed problem. I don't agree that you know that a reinstall will fix it – I had an instance where we had an undiagnosed problem that was so bad we considered replacing the server. Turned out to be a really obscure issue with a 3rd party driver that would have been reinstalled on the new box.

I've used both Second Copy and SyncToy. IMO Second Copy is a lot more elegant a solution for this, especially the newest version. It's only something like \$30 and it's much easier to automate and much more

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configurable than SyncToy.

I'm not clear on how the permissions could be to blame for this – aren't you saying the files disappear from the CSC but not the server? You should be able to rule out permissions just by looking in Advanced to make sure nothing strange got left behind.

Have you seen this KB?

How to re-initialize the offline files cache and database
<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/230738/en-us>

"Macker"
<Macker@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
wrote in message
news:7CD5DDE4-5766-4609-B03F-296481E37861@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

I greatly appreciate everyone's input here, but I'm afraid I am no closer to solving this

(maddening) mystery.

Looking at each contributor's advice, one by one:

Dave
Nickason:

Dave – one
thing you
said in your
first
paragraph:

"XP will
limit the
number of
files to the
size
specified in
Windows
Explorer
Tools ->
Folder
Options ->
Offline
Files."

I believe
this is
untrue. This
refers to
'temporary'
caching,
and
not to
files
manually or
administratively
cached. See:
<http://support.microsoft.com/?kbid=904676>

Also, when
(My
Documents)
folder
redirection
is
administratively
set
in
SBS
2003, it
WILL make
all
sub-folders
available

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offline.

On user
error: I have
considered
this, but I
have ruled it
out. The
user
has
an excellent
understanding
of Offline
Files, and is
ultra-careful
and well
instructed!
He is
certainly
not deleting
all his
folders.
Additionally,
I
have
enabled the
Group
Policy
"Remove
'Make
Available
Offline' " so
he is
unable to
pick and
choose what
to
synchronize
–
everything
in My
Docs is
set
to be
available
offline, and
he cannot
change that.

Quotas, free
space, disk

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errors – all
ruled out.

The one
thing I
haven't been
able to look
at this time
(because he
is
away)
are the
client event
logs...something
may lie
there. I'm
really
UN-hopeful
at
this stage
though.

Lanwench:

You helped
me before
with
something –
thanks.
Point taken
on Offline
Files.
I'm starting
to feel the
same way.

My client
seems to
be taking
this okay.
However,
he wants to
"talk
about
it" when he
gets back.
He will
want
answers
though, and

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will want to
be
CERTAIN
that this
never
happens
again. At
this stage,
short of
hosing the
entire server
and every
machine –
literally
building the
domain
from
scratch
– which I
may do – I
can't think
of a way
around this
one, and
nobody
seems
to have an
answer.

I think I
will take
your advice
and give
SecondCopy
a second
look.
Also,
I'm
thinking
about
SyncToy in
the XP
PowerToys
kit. There is
a guy from
Microsoft
– Jonathan
Hardwick –
who has a
blog
dedicated to

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Offline

Files

(<http://blogs.msdn.com/jonathanh/archive/category/6957.aspx>),

and I

got

the

recommendation

from there.

kj:

There are

no related

entries in

the server

event log,

because he

is

never

connected

to the server

when this

happens!

This always

occurs

when

he is

away

from the

office, and

not

connected

to the

server. As I

noted above

though,

I

have not yet

seen the

event logs

on the

laptop

itself.

Ethan:

We can rule

out Window

Washer.

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There are
no other
unusual
third-party
apps
on the
machine,
just the
standard
faire of
Office
2003,
Acrobat
Reader,
etc.

Thanks for
your
suggestion
though –
you never
know with
these
things –
anything is
possible!

So What
Now?

Well, that's
where I'm
at. Perhaps
the event
logs on the
laptop
itself
will
shed some
light.
Perhaps not.

As I
mentioned
in my first
post, the
one thing at
the "back of
my
mind"
that

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I have doubts about, is the fact that "Mary" at one point had access to his User share on the server. This access has since been removed and permissions replaced back to normal, and also all the machines have been re-imaged. However, knowing how finicky Windows Permissions can be sometimes, I'm wondering if *something* is holding over somehow? I really don't think so though...everything looks exactly as it should.

I'm now grasping at straws, and wondering if it's a particular

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file?
Something
corrupted
somewhere?
I'm really at
my wits
end.

The one
thing I
pretty much
know will
fix it, will
be a total
reinstall of
the server
from
scratch
(along with
all the
workstations).
That is a
monumental
task, and a
pretty
brute-force
"fix" even
for a small
office
such
as this. I
may be left
with no
choice
though...

"Macker"
wrote:

I
never
believed
the
Offline
Files
horror
stories
I
would

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read
on
forums
from
other
system
admins
–
until
now.
(Apologies
for
not
taking
"you"
seriously).
I
may
have
lost
a
client
today...

(Please
excuse
the
length
of
this
post,
but
I
want
to
try
and
give
as
much
information
as
possible)

Here
is
the
infrastructure/scenario:

–
SBS

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2003

–

My
Documents
Redirection
enabled

–

My
Documents
made
"Available
Offline"

–

Size
Limit
on
server
set
to
5GB
(rather
than
default
1GB
limit)

–

Client
laptop:
Dell
Latitude,
XP
Pro
SP2

Here
is
a
basic
overview
of
what
is
happening:

–

STARTING
POINT
(before
any
problems):

–

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The
client's
My
Documents
are
fully
synched
and
available
offline

–
no
problems.

–
The
client
has
no
problems
for
two
years

–
his
My
Documents
are
always
available
offline.

–
Everyone
is
happy.

–
The
size
of
his
"My
Documents"
before
the
problems
started,
is
about
4.2GB

–
PROBLEMS:

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–
One
evening
(6
months
ago)
I
get
a
call:
The
client
is
offline,
and
the
most
of
the
contents
of
his
My
Documents
are
GONE.

–
I
say
"most",
because
about
ten
files
(out
of
2,000+)
are
available.
They
are
the
files
he
most
recently
worked
on.
They
are
available

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at
the
end
of
the
tree,
eg:

My
Documents\School
Files\School
2005\Science
Class\ScienceProject1.doc

AND

My
Documents\School
Files\School
2006\Civics
Class\CivicsProject1.doc

However,
in
the
"Science
Class"
or
"Civics
Class"
folders,
there
should
be
hundreds
of
files,
not
just
the
ScienceProject1.doc
and
CivicsProject1.doc
files.
Additionally,
there
should
be
(lots
of)
files

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in
the
folders
above
these.
eg:
the
"School
2006"
folder
should
also
have
hundreds
of
files
in
it,
as
well
as
other
folders.
They
are
all
missing.

ATTEMPTED
FIXES:

FIRST
TIME:

The
first
time
this
happened
(at
11PM
at
night,
when
he
had
a
flight
at
6AM):

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–

I
drove
to
his
house,
picked
up
his
laptop,
and
drove
to
his
office
where
the
server
lives.

–

I
first
of
all
looked
on
the
server,
and
sure
enough
his
"missing"
files
were
all
there
under
his
appropriate
user
folder
on
the
server.

–

Next,
I
hooked
up
the

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laptop,
and
logged
onto
the
network
as
the
user.

–
I
DID
NOT
SYNCHRONIZE
(YET)

–
I
opened
up
his
My
Documents,
and
sure
enough,
there
were
his
files

–
all
WITHOUT
the
blue
synchronization
arrows
next
to
them.
The
only
ones
that
DID
have
the
arrows,
were
the
ones
mentioned

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above
(ScienceProject1.doc,
CivicsProject1.doc,
etc.)

–
I
then
performed
a
full
synchronization.

This
took
about
three
hours,
over
a
100mbps
network.

It
appeared
to
have
to
rebuild
the
offline
cache
from
scratch.

–
Once
the
synchronization
was
complete,

I
did
another
synchronization
"just
to
be
sure."

This
time
it
ran
like
a

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normal
sync,
and
took
about
a
minute.

–
I
then
powered
down
the
laptop,
disconnected
the
network
cable,
and
rebooted
in
offline
mode.

All
the
files
were
now
there

–
everything
seemed
fine.

–
I
returned
the
laptop
to
the
client
(at
about
4AM).

SECOND
TIME:

My
client
worked

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away
merrily
for
about
a
week,
then
disaster
struck
again:
Exact
same
symptoms
—
only
about
the
most
recent
7
to
10
files
he
had
been
working
on,
were
available.
Again,
the
tree
structure
above
the
7
to
10
files
was
intact,
but
there
was
nothing
else
in
the
folders.

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This
time
(about
1PM
in
the
afternoon),
he
was
again
about
to
leave
for
the
weekend
at
8PM.

–
I
rendevouzed
with
him
at
his
office.

–
I
synched
up
the
laptop
as
before.

–
THEN
–
–
I
COPIED
the
contents
of
his
My
Documents
onto
his
Desktop.

–

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I
DELETED
the
contents
of
his
My
Documents

–
I
did
another
sync
(of
his
now
empty
My
Documents)

–
I
deleted
his
Offline
Cache
(Folder
Options,
on
the
Offline
Files
tab,