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Encrypt Your USB Stick With Truecrypt 6.0

Jul. 20th, 2008 | by [Mark O'Neill](#) |

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Last year [I wrote an article](#) on the benefits of encrypting your PC folders with Truecrypt and I also briefly touched on being able to encrypt your USB stick with Truecrypt. Well, the other day I received a nice new 2GB USB stick as a freebie and so I decided to install John Haller's [Portable Apps](#) on it. But first I headed on over to the [Truecrypt website](#) to install the newly updated 6.0 encryption program.

Encryption is absolutely essential, especially if you're the kind of person that carries their USB stick around as if it's your car keys or your lipstick. USB sticks are so small that they are easily lost and they are also easily stolen. Just think of all the information that gets stored on one of these things. The British Ministry of Defence [has lost 131 of them since 2004!](#) A friend of mine constantly drops his in the street when he walks his dog and his dog keeps walking back to pick it up! So it definitely pays to take the time and have encryption.

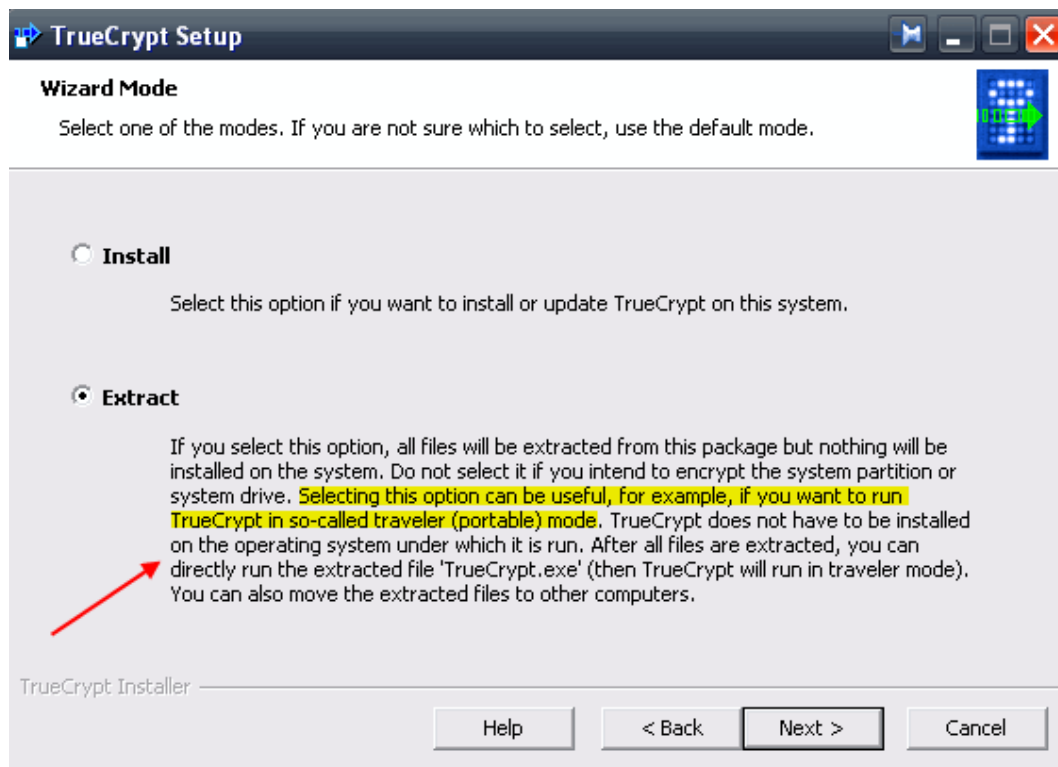
Also, look at it this way. If someone found your USB stick and it was unencrypted, they would have access to your Firefox browser (with access to your private bookmarks, including online banking), your private files, your portable FTP program (with the settings to your website), passwords, emails, IM contacts and much more. If the person was honest, it might not be so bad, but if the person *wasn't* honest....well then it could be catastrophic for you. Identity theft would only be the start of your problems.

The only problem with using Truecrypt for your encryption though is that you need to have administrator privileges on the computer in which you're plugging your encrypted USB stick into. So this would be no good for internet cafes for example. This would only be good if you were travelling between multiple trusted personal and work computers and you wanted insurance against theft or loss while travelling around.

OK, let's get insured.

Step One - [Download Truecrypt 6.0](#)

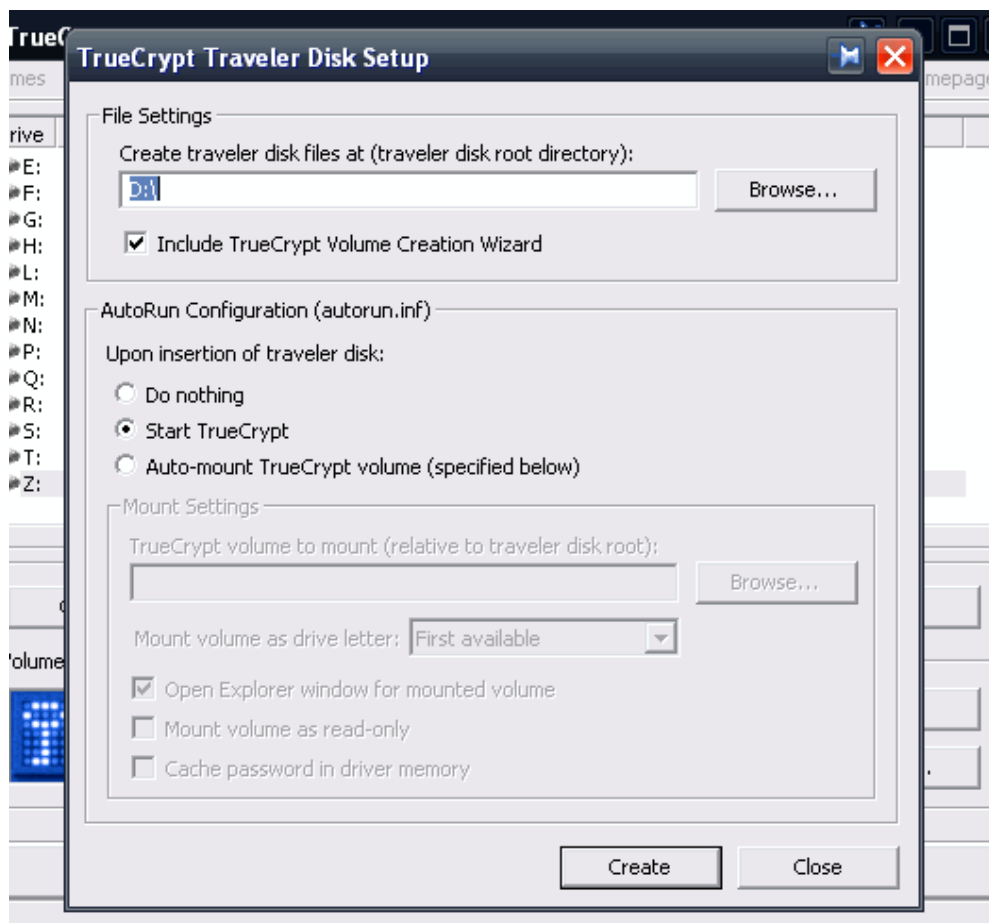
The obvious first step. Head on over and download the encryption program. BUT since you are putting this on your USB stick, you do NOT install this anywhere. When you double-click the "exe" file, you will see this. Choose the second option. This will just unpack the files onto your computer and not install anything.



When the files are unpacked, move the whole lot over to your USB stick. Once they are sitting on your USB stick, again don't install anything. Just leave them there.

Step Two - Turn Truecrypt Into “Traveller Mode”

In your USB stick folder, double-click the “Truecrypt.exe” file and this opens up the main screen. Go to “tools” then “traveler disk setup”. That brings up this :



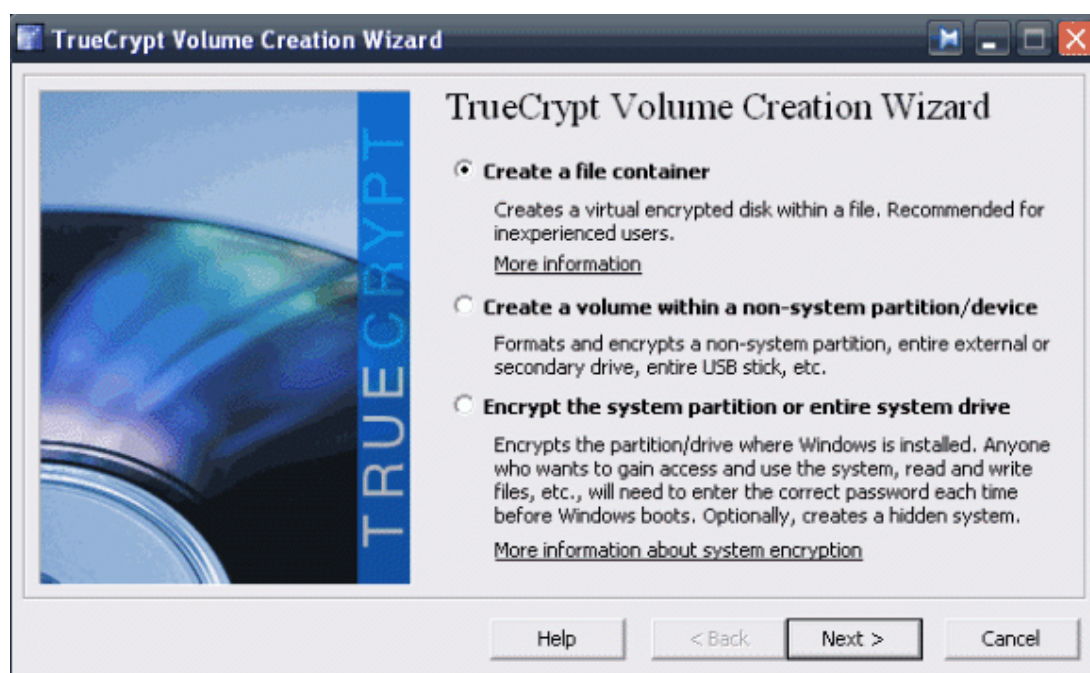
Change “create traveler disk files at” to whichever PC drive you have your USB stick in at the moment. Have the box underneath ticked. As to the Autorun configuration, well that’s down to personal preference so you decide. When you’ve done everything, press create. You’ll get a message a few moments later telling you that the traveler mode has been successfully created.

Step Three - Move Your Desired Programs Into Your USB stick

Now move your desired programs and files into your USB stick. As I said, I decided to put John Haller’s excellent [PortableApps](#) onto my USB stick. So I downloaded and moved all of them onto the USB stick **next to** the Truecrypt program as well as some documents. **Notice we haven’t encrypted anything yet.** That comes next.

Step Four - Create An Encrypted Area

OK, now we’re going to do the encryption. Go to the Truecrypt folder in your USB stick and double-click “Truecrypt Format.exe”. That brings up this screen.



Choose “create a file container” and [follow these instructions from step 3](#) to make an encrypted container. I’m not going to go through it all here as it’s a long process. **One important point** though - do NOT fill up the whole USB stick. I would only make a container that fills up **at most** 75% of your USB stick. Leave the rest free and unencrypted. It’s always good to have some free space.

Before anybody points out option 2 which encrypts the entire USB stick, everyone I have talked to about this recommends that this shouldn’t be done because undoing it later is tricky and it can potentially mess up your USB drive. Doing it my way is better because a) you have some free space left for unencrypted files and b) if you don’t want Truecrypt anymore, you can just delete the whole lot. Much easier.

Step Five - Move The Programs Into The Encrypted Area



Once the encrypted container has been made, you will then have three things sitting in your USB stick - the folder with your programs / files, the folder with the Truecrypt application and the encrypted container you have just made. Now what you are going to do is move your programs and files **INSIDE** the encrypted container.

You do this by double-clicking “Truecrypt.exe” and “mounting” (choosing) on another drive, the encrypted container you have just made. This opens it up and unencrypts it. When it opens up, just drag your files and programs inside with your mouse. When you’re done, just dismount the container which closes it back up again and heavily encrypts it. No-one can get inside now without knowing the password. So I hope you chose a very good password!

Don’t forget to delete the programs and files which are sitting outside the encrypted container - the ones you just dragged inside the container are copies. If it reassures you, mount the container again, open it up and peek inside. You’ll see your files and apps inside all safe and sound.

Step Six - In Summary

So let’s recap what we’ve done here. We haven’t encrypted the whole USB stick. All we’ve done is put an encrypted container on the USB stick along with the Truecrypt encryption program to encrypt and unencrypt your files. If anyone was to steal the USB stick or find it (if you dropped it), all they would find on the drive would be an encrypted container which, without the password, is absolutely useless and unbreakable.

You also might want to put (on the unencrypted part of the drive) a text file with your name, email address and phone number so if a Good Samaritan were to come along, they would have a chance to do the right thing and return your property to you. A little incentive could also be mentioned depending on how desperate you are to get your property back.

Do you like to use any other encryption programs other than Truecrypt? What particular USB stick protection and detection methods have worked for you? Let’s hear about them in the comments!

(By) Mark O’Neill is a blogger, professional freelance writer and the editor of Make Use Of. Check out his personal blog at BetterThanTherapy.net



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Comment by [Rarst](#)

2008-07-20 13:56:04

Most of my flash drive is occupied with "software" folder that has bunch of portable (or simply needed often) stuff.

Trick is - it is only a mirror of folder I have on my HDD. Every time I launch sync process at my home PC everything on flash drive is brought to mirror local folder. So all stuff like possible logs and such gets wiped and I always have latest set of portables (drivers, setups, AV updates, etc) without much hassle.

So my best advice to prevent losing data via flash drive - only have data that you may lose there.

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Comment by [Clancolin](#)

2008-07-20 17:46:35

I like the idea of this, but this walk-through seems to miss out some steps.

I may be being thick here, by why install portable apps outside the encrypted file and then move it inside? Why not just install into the encrypted file (section) while that file is open and unencrypted?

Also what does this mean "You do this by double-clicking "Truecrypt.exe" and "mounting" (choosing) on another drive the encrypted container you have just made."? My usb stick is Drive J. When I get to this step, all I have are drive letters K to Z.

I'll look back later to see if there is any clarification.

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Comment by [Mark O'Neill](#)

2008-07-20 19:26:16

“why install portable apps outside the encrypted file and then move it inside? Why not just install into the encrypted file (section) while that file is open and unencrypted?”

That’s true - you could just download directly to the USB stick.

“You do this by double-clicking “Truecrypt.exe” and “mounting” (choosing) on another drive the encrypted container you have just made.”?

When you make an encrypted container, you have to open it to move your files inside. To open it, you have to attach it to another one of your drives on your PC. You’re right, that isn’t very clear. I’ll rephrase the article. Thanks.

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2008-07-20 18:48:09

[...] has an excellent instructional review by Mark O’Neill of TrueCrypt 6.0, which you can install on your USB stick to create an [...]

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Comment by Simon

2008-07-20 18:58:16

Nice USB-stick, Mark ^^

[Reply to this comment](#)

Comment by Christian Schmidt

2008-07-20 23:53:47

I have to say, first off I absolutely love TrueCrypt. I have gone a little bit more technical with my USB TrueCrypt setup but after the initial setup it works like a charm. I obtained a fixed drive driver and modified it to accept my USB Stick as a Fixed Drive as opposed to a Removeable drive. This then let me re-partition it via Windows. Essentially on my 2GB USB Drive I have a 50mb Partition and a 1.95gb partition. I then used TrueCrypt to encrypt the 1.95gb partition (Actual partition not a container) and in my 50mb partition I copied TrueCrypt and my USB Drivers. That way, if someone came off the street and picked it up they would find a 50mb USB Stick with a TrueCrypt Folder and a USB Driver folder and until they loaded the USB driver and unencrypted the other partition would not find any of my data. I haven’t personally found any issues with this method and would be happy to explain how to do it if needed.

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Comment by melaos

2008-07-21 02:52:50

hi Christian,
your method sounds interesting, can you share it?
thanks.

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Comment by BradB

2008-07-21 00:24:15

Hi I like your post. I'll go ahead and copy it on my blog but better.

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Comment by [Det](#)

2008-07-21 01:14:29

Hey Mark,

It's a very bad idea to first copy your files onto die usb-disc, then create the TC-container and at least copy/move those files into the container!

The File-System on your USB-Drive won't delete your personal files securely - in fact, they are really easy to recover.

So your way should be:

* Install TC in traveller-mode on the USB-drive

* create the TC-Container

* move your file DIRECTLY from your HDD into the container; no messing around with saving any sensitive data to the thumbdrive!!

Cant't be too paranoid 😊

//DET

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Comment by [Mark O'Neill](#)

2008-07-21 04:49:06

Actually you've got a point. Move the files directly from the hard drive into the encrypted container. Never thought of that. Good one.

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Comment by [oelewapperke](#)

2008-07-21 04:17:33

I do hope everybody realises this protects against exactly 1 thing : loosing your stick.

Any pc YOU insert the stick into in order to use it can access any and all information. So if you want to keep stuff secret from, say your employer, this advice is worthless, and the security zero.

Just a batch file, a registry entry, and the stick will be copied upon being made accessible through truecrypt. Nothing you can do about it either. Or one could even just save the password and the encrypted file.

And this is horribly bad advice since it will make people think data that is trivially simple to crack is secure.

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Comment by [Mark O'Neill](#)

2008-07-21 04:47:35

I'm sorry but you're wrong. Your information is secure inside the encrypted container and without the password, **no-one** can access it. I tested it on another computer before posting this article and I got someone else to try it. They were unable to crack the password.

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Comment by [Some More Ron](#)

2008-07-21 07:20:05

Instead of a text file saved to your usb stick, try this:

Open wordpad

Type this:

[autorun]

icon = \myicon.ico

label=your name here (Cell123.456.7890)

Save it as 'autorun' on your stick.

Where icon= pick an icon and save it to the same location as your autorun file.

Every time your stick gets plugged into a computer, it will be labeled with your name and contact number.

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Comment by [Gregory A. Blake](#)

2008-07-21 09:33:48

* You need administrator privileges in order to able to run TrueCrypt in 'traveler' mode.

That's a big problem if you ask me...I'm often at computers without admin rights...your encrypted data on your usb stick is then useless in that case...keep that in mind!

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Comment by [Mark O'Neill](#)

2008-07-21 09:38:40

That's why I said that this would only be helpful if you were travelling between personal and work computers (which you had admin rights on) and you wanted some insurance in case you lost your USB stick or you had it stolen.

A lot of people are self employed and have more than one computer in various locations.

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Comment by [800HighTech](#)

2008-07-21 09:35:18

Great Article, some really useful advice....well all have sensitive data that we need to carry around sometimes.

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2008-07-21 19:34:05

[...] [Encrypt Your USB Stick With Truecrypt 6.0 | MakeUseOf.com](#) (tags: security encryption usb truecrypt software portable thumbdrive howto) [...]

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Comment by jeffrel

2008-07-22 11:59:29

on Step Two - Turn Truecrypt Into “Traveller Mode”

In your USB stick folder, double-click the “Truecrypt.exe” file and this opens up the main screen. Go to “tools” then “traveler disk setup”.

- got an error on this, it says ->>

“The process cannot access the file because it is being used by another process”

i cannot create the file, using the exe on the usb stick, but when i choose to the exefile from the extracted folder — it works!!

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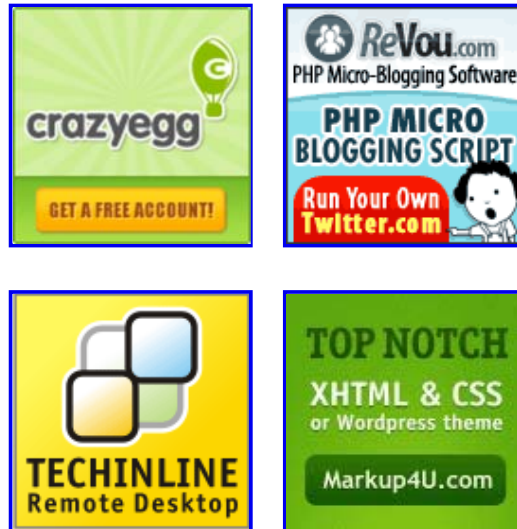
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


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