

Dangers of using Dropbox, OneDrive etc. with PhotoComp software

If you use a synchronisation service such as Dropbox or OneDrive as the storage medium for PhotoComp or PhotEx competition data, you should be aware of the potential for a loss of entrant information, including entries, scores and awards.

These services upload a copy of the files in their folders to the web. Windows applies a timestamp to the files when you save them. If the services detect that your local version of a file is older than that on the web, they download the web version automatically, and **overwrite** the file on your machine.

PhotoComp and PhotEx programs read the Entrants.xml file when the program starts and write it again when you click “Finish” – whether or not you have made any changes. This means that if the Entrants.xml file is opened on two computers, the contents of the last of these to be closed will be overwrite any changes made in the first to be closed.

Take this example... you are judging in a hall with no wifi. You close the program and the scores etc. are written to your computer, but as you have no internet connection, they are not uploaded to the web service. You then look at the entries on another computer that *is* connected to the internet, and the service stores your Entrants.xml file with this later timestamp. Finally you open the judging computer when you have internet connection, and the service overwrites your scores etc with the version from the other computer.

Similar problems can occur when downloading entries if you download while another computer has the Entrants.xml file open. (Note that PhotoComp and PhotEx prevent you from running another program in the suite on the same machine at the same time, but have no knowledge of what is happening on the internet.)

You should only use Dropbox, OneDrive etc. with PhotoComp software if:

- a) you are absolutely sure no other computer can access the shared folders
- or b) you have the competition files on the hard drives of two or more machines located *outside* their service’s folders. You can then copy the files to and from the service folder when you specifically need to use them to another machine.

You should not put your Download/Backup folder in a Dropbox or OneDrive folder.

You set the location of the Download/Backup folder with the “Web settings” tab in Settings. This folder stores entries and images as they are downloaded, as well as changes made using PhotExPackage. It also stores a backup of the Entrants.xml file when entries are finalised. This can be used to recover data in the event of a problem with the computer or a software crash. You should place this folder on the hard drive of your machine – if you have more than one hard drive, it should be on a separate one from your Entrants.xml file.

During the judging process, scores are written to a file in the computer's Appdata folder. This is a "hidden" Windows folder on the C: drive. The purpose of the file is to recover from software or hardware crashes while judging. The timestamp of the file is compared with the timestamp of the Entrants.xml file and if this was saved after the backup file the backup file is deleted. (If not, you are given the opportunity to recover the scores.)