

By Brien M. Posey

1 Automated System Recovery can be a huge time saver

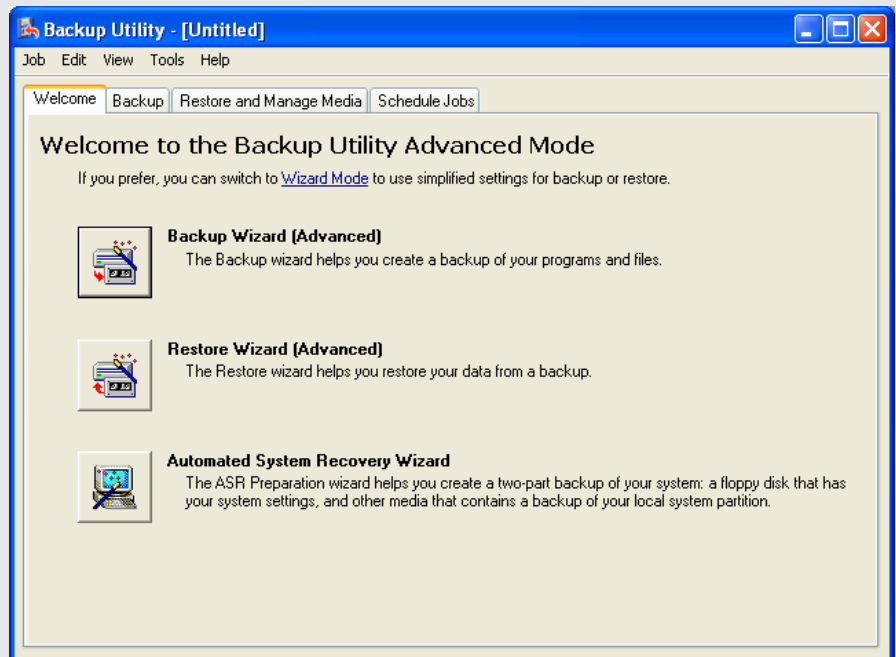
If the system drive on your server fails, you would normally have to replace the drive and then manually install Windows and your backup software (if you are using third-party software) before you could even think about performing a system restore. With Automated System Recovery (ASR), you can restore Windows from a special backup rather than install it manually.

2 Automated System Recovery is supported only in Windows XP and Windows Server 2003

ASR was first introduced in Windows XP. You can use it to restore a machine that's running Windows XP or Windows Server 2003, but not earlier versions of Windows.

3 You must perform a special Automated System Recovery backup

You can't perform an automated system recovery using a normal backup. If you want to take advantage of ASR, you'll have to create an Automated System Recovery Backup. This is a special two-part backup that consists of the backup itself and a supplemental floppy disk that contains information regarding how Windows should restore the backup. When you launch NTBACKUP, the Welcome screen contains an Automated System Recovery Wizard option, as shown in the figure. You'll use this option to create an Automated System Recovery Backup.



4 Applications will not be restored as a part of an Automated System Recovery

ASR does not perform a full, bare metal restore. Its job is just to return the Windows operating system to a functional state. An ASR backup is not a suitable replacement for your regular backup.

5 Automated System Recovery will format the system drive as a part of the restore operation

To perform an automated system recovery, you must boot your computer from the Windows installation CD and then choose the Automated System Recovery option when prompted. As with a clean Windows installation, ASR will format the system drive as a part of the recovery process. Normally, this shouldn't be a problem, since ASR is intended for use after a hard disk failure. However, if your system drive contains data you want to salvage, running ASR is a bad idea.

6 The Automated System Recovery floppy disk is needed for the restore procedure

When you perform an ASR backup, the process will create a supplemental floppy disk. The restore procedure requires you to have this floppy disk available. Since most computers today ship without floppy drives, you may also want to keep a spare floppy drive on hand in case you ever need to perform an automated system recovery.

7 If you have lost or damaged the Automated System Recovery floppy disk, you can create another one

Although the supplemental floppy disk is required for an automated system restore, you are not up the creek if you should happen to lose or damage it. You can make a replacement disk on another machine. The catch is that your ASR backup must be accessible from the machine you're using to create the replacement disk.

To create the replacement disk, take the server's backup tape to another machine and restore the ASR.SIF and ASRPNP.SIF files to a floppy disk. These files are located in the \Windows\repair folder.

8 When an Automated System Recovery completes, you must update Windows

When the ASR process completes, Windows will exist in the state it was in when you made the ASR backup (minus your applications and data). You will therefore have to restore a normal backup to get your applications and data back. However, depending on which applications you're running, simply restoring a backup at this point could cause some major problems that would result in you having to start the restore operation over from scratch. To avoid these potential problems, I recommend using Windows Update to bring the Windows operating system up to the same patch level that was in place when your most recent backup was made.

9 You may have to manually install some applications

You may find that you have to manually install some applications prior to restoring your applications and data. One example of this is your backup software. If you use third-party backup software, you'll usually have to install your backup application before you will be able to restore your backup.

Another example is Exchange Server. The NTBACKUP program does not support the backup and restore of Exchange Server databases by default. NTBACKUP is extended to support Exchange only after Exchange is installed. Therefore, if Exchange databases are part of the data you plan on restoring, you may have to manually install Exchange before restoring your backup. If you find yourself in this situation, remember to install the most recent Exchange Service Pack as well before attempting a restore.

10 Don't depend on USB floppy drives

As I mentioned earlier, a floppy drive is required for an Automated System Recovery. I've known some people who keep a USB-based floppy drive on hand in case of just such an emergency. However, ASR runs as a part of the Windows Setup process. During this process, Windows has a limited driver set and in most cases it won't recognize a USB floppy drive.

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Version history

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