



Save Yourself from Data Accidents

An incredible new product from a Montreal company makes saving yourself from a data accident so easy, you have to have it. It's called **TimeTraveler™** and every Vista owner should visit their web site and spend the \$20 to buy it right now. You install it in Windows Explorer as a tool bar and when you need it, it adds a timeline to the bottom of your Explorer window. Now you can look back at your files as they were in the past *before* your accident happened. You've seen time travel in the movies for years, but on Vista it works!

The **TimeTraveler™** toolbar uses the built in Volume Shadow technology shipped in every copy of Vista. If you have Vista Business or Vista Ultimate (or Vista Enterprise) the interface to these shadow copies of your data is accessible through the Previous Versions tab, if you can find it. On Vista Home and Vista Premium, **TimeTraveler™** allows access to your shadow copies even though Microsoft does not. For the money, **TimeTraveler™** is a steal.

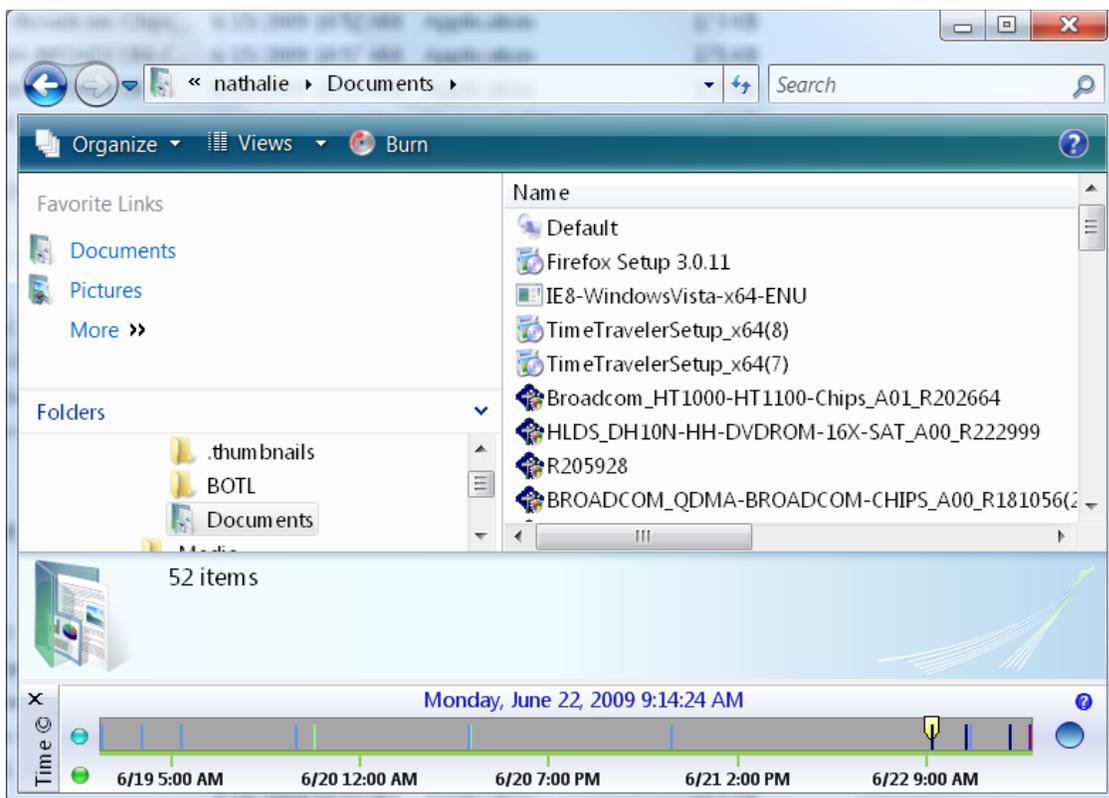


Figure 1 - TimeTraveler toolbar for Windows Explorer



If you look at the screen shot above, at the bottom of the Explorer window you will see a timeline with a date and time at its top. This is the date and time of the Explorer view. You can change it by dragging the yellow pointer across the timeline to one of the blue markers. Those markers are often very helpful. The dark ones show the shadow copies where the file or folder you are viewing has changed since the last shadow copy. You can access any of them, but the dark blue ones are usually more interesting. To look at the contents of one of your files at a previous time, just select the time on the timeline and click on the file's icon in the Explorer window. Nearly all applications work as always. Occasionally, an application will tell you it is opening the file read only. (Movie Time Travelers can go back and change the past, but we only get to look back.) If you accidentally mangled your data somehow, just go back before the accident and get it!

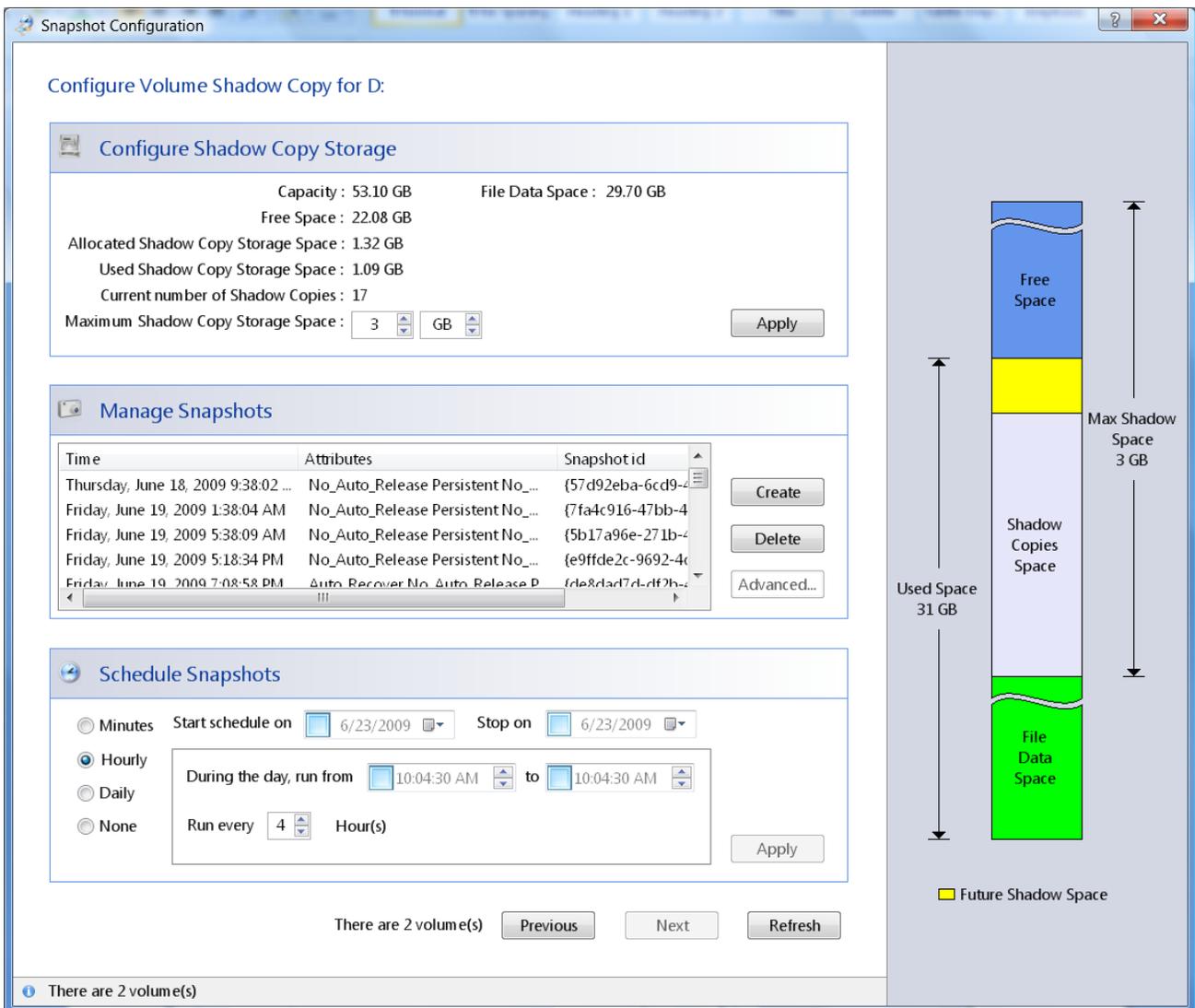


Figure 2 - TimeTraveler configuration form



Moreover, in my opinion, the best part of **TimeTraveler™** is the round button to the right of the timeline. In Windows Vista Business and Windows Vista Ultimate, you can configure and access the Volume Shadow Copies using VSSadmin on the command line, or take copies with the Data Management Console, but in Vista Home or Vista Premium, these interfaces are conspicuously absent. With **TimeTraveler™** you can click on the icon and a configuration screen appears. Now you can set up the shadow copy feature the way you want. Again, it is really easy, just adjust the maximum shadow copy space until the picture on the right looks like what you want. Anybody trying to use shadow copies needs this interface. A quick look will show you how much storage is (or might be) used by your shadow copies.

Windows makes shadow copies of your disk every time you install new software. By default, these copies are limited to 15% of the disk capacity. Microsoft calls them restore points and Vista uses them to recover to the time just before an install. When you install **TimeTraveler™** you will probably find a few of these restore points already on your disk. If an accident happened before you installed **TimeTraveler™**, one of these may save your bacon. (The first time I used it, I was lucky like this.)

As you can see in the top panel, I have my laptop configured to use 3GB of my 53GB disk for shadow copies. Most of the time, the shadow copies actually occupy a little less space, but they will never occupy more. If they would exceed the limit, Vista deletes older shadow copies until it has enough space to make a new shadow copy. If you ever need to make a shadow copy right now, go to the middle panel on this screen and click the create button. You can also delete old shadow copies from there, but I never do. I just let them fall off the end. That's because I have used the bottom panel to schedule automatic copies every four hours. In most cases, I have about 17 copies in my 3GB. When I do something that changes a large number of bytes, like downloading a new release of one of my applications, then I have 6 or 7 shadow copies. That's three or four days worth, and for me it's fine. Since disk space is cheap, you might decide to keep more copies.

TimeTraveler™ is not a substitute for backup. If my disk goes south, I will lose everything on it, including the shadow copies. I have a USB disk I use for backups. What **TimeTraveler™** does do, is something I never want to give up, now that I've used it. First, it makes the Shadow Copy Service easy to configure, and once I've done that, it lets me quickly look back at previous versions of my files, even while I'm sitting on the plane, or working in the Hotel coffee shop. The best of internet backup is not like this. Be warned, once you try it, you will never go back to living without it.