

COMPUTER CLEANING TIPS AND TRICKS

Note: Although the following information may be ‘common knowledge’ to some, as the saying goes...”a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing”. Changing startup or registry events or computer files without a thorough knowledge of the consequences CAN have disastrous results for the running of the Operating System. Even the ‘basic’ tips listed can cause problems if done without thought to the consequences. A good backup of your data is ALWAYS a must before doing any ‘tuning’ of an operating system. Even the most careful technician has caused major issues with a computer in trying to make a ‘safe’ change on a computer. The following ‘tips’ CAN be done, but are not guaranteed to cause bad results if such care is not given. I ALWAYS recommend the following be done by a professional...if bad happens, it is then on their shoulders to remedy.

First, get a good backup of all of your important files. Then....

Know what is Running At Startup

Look at the area around the time clock in the lower right side of the screen. This is called the ‘system tray’ area of the task bar. These are the programs that you can see that are running at startup. Perhaps some are unnecessary and you can free up resources by not having them start when the computer starts. Really, the only mandatory starting programs would be AntiVirus, Video, network (wireless and/or wired) and sound. Beyond that, others can be started only as needed.

To stop programs, go to start/programs/startup and see what is listed there. Right click and delete any that you do not want starting up. You can also go to start/run and type in msconfig. This will start up the Microsoft configuration utility. The startup tab will list ALL programs that start at startup. Any that you uncheck will not start at the next restart. This will also show you the location of where the startup file is located (usually the registry).

What can I do to free up hard drive space?

Disk Cleanup (Start/programs/accessories/system tools/disk cleanup) or start/run and type cleanmgr. Select the drive you would like to clean...disk cleanup will check to see how much space you can get free by compressing little-used files and by clearing your temp and deleted items files. This can take a little time.

Things seem to run slow...could my Hard Drive be bad?

The hard drive is the physical component of the computer that holds all of your data. Basically, think of it as a pile of old LP records piled on top of each other with an arm flying back and forth across the ‘platters’ and able to read all at the same time. If there are ‘bad spots’ on a platter, the result can be slow data retrieval or program ‘hiccups’. You can run a manual scan of the hard drive by going to My Computer, right click on the C drive, go to Properties, then to the tools tab. There, you can select the ‘check now’ button under Error Checking. Check both boxes to check and fix errors and recover bad sectors. The results for this scan can be found by going to start/run and typing in compmgmt.msc. From there, select the event viewer and the application sub-menu. In Application look for winlogon under source. Select it and you will see the results of the scan.

OK...Hard Drive is good...now what?

Well, after a good Disk Scan I like to do a Disk Defrag for dessert...it is just the way I roll. (sorry, getting a little punchy typing all this up...and this is only page 2!). Go to start/run type in dfrg.msc. The Disk Defragmentation tool will come up. You can either simply check the disk to see if it is badly fragmented, or jump right into defragmenting it immediately. Why is this necessary? Well, the Operating System will store files and programs in 'bits' or parts of their whole, on the hard drive. They are NOT necessarily stored in sequence. So, to run a program or retrieve a file, the hard drive may need to jump all over the hard drive gathering necessary file or program 'bits'. Obviously, the more the hard drive has to do this, the less efficient and slower will be the response. Disk Defrag puts these 'bits' back together a bit better.

Any Other Thoughts?

Please! Don't encourage me!

Seriously, Spyware is another major culprit in causing a computer to run slow. You can have hidden programs running that can collect your keystrokes or personal information and forward to websites (keyloggers and other malware). The anti-spyware list below will help to remove such programs.

Finally, although they try to do a good job, most Anti-Virus "security suite" type software is extremely intrusive and harmful to the speed of the computer. The installation of such suites alone can cause remarkable slowing of the responsiveness of a computer. I run 'free' antivirus programs on my home computers and have had only one virus in 10 years...but I am also careful on the sites to which I will go...

And now, really finally...there is no 'free lunch' when it comes to file sharing. If you (or a child) has installed any free file sharing program, chances are you are already infected with some sort of malware. If you would like 'free' music...there is a wide variety at your local library. Do yourself a favor...get a library card and keep your computer running MUCH better as a result.

Programs that I use to help in cleaning:

Anti-spyware (in order of preference):

Super Antispyware: <http://www.superantispyware.com/>

Spybot Search and Destroy: <http://www.safer-networking.org/en/index.html>

LavaSoft AdAware: http://www.lavasoft.com/products/ad_aware_free.php

Disk Cleaning:

Crap Cleaner: <http://www.ccleaner.com/>

Bonus...

Free AntiVirus Programs:

Avira AntiVir: <http://www.free-av.com/>

AVG Free: <http://free.avg.com/download?prd=afe>

Avast! AntiVirus: http://www.avast.com/eng/avast_4_home.html