

Computer Wizardry – Basic Windows PC Maintenance and Performance

In the old days, computers were simpler, with fewer options; but were hard to program and maintain. New computers are fast, have a million options and gizmos but take a geek to manage it. They can easily get out of hand, so here are a few tips for Windows PC users.

Slow Computers can be caused by: Computer Trash, Disk Fragmentation, Program Overload, Too Much security, Required Updates, Lack of Memory and more. Here are ways to identify and correct some of the problems.

Disk Cleanup and Defragmentation should be run weekly at an office and monthly at home. It depends upon your computer usage. These can be added to Scheduled Tasks, another System Tool Program. These basic utilities are not run often enough by most people but are essential to keep your computer performing well.

Disk Cleanup: Click on Start, Accessories, Programs, System Tools; then Disk Cleanup. Let it run, check most of the boxes and it will delete the trash. It deletes Temporary Internet Explorer files and empties the recycle bin amongst others.

Defragmentation: Click on Start, Accessories, Programs, System Tools; then Disk Defragmenter. Select Analyze; then Defragment if needed. Consider your hard drive is a parking lot of cars. The defragmenter puts the cars makes and colors together, making more room. Defragmentation makes the storage more efficient and the computer run faster.

Updates: The developers of Windows as well as other programs installed on your computer supply updates to the operating system and software. In the bottom right, near the time, there may be a Yellow Shield. Hover your mouse over the Shield and “Updates are ready for your Computer” may appear. These are usually important and should be installed. Another way to check is to Click, Start, Programs, Windows or Microsoft Updates. There are two versions: the Microsoft Update gets Office Updates as well. I select the Custom over Priority. Select all the Priority Updates and then others, like Hardware Driver Updates, that you feel important. The updates may take some time to download and install. Don’t do this on Dial-up.

Others Program Updates: Software that you have installed may have updates available, usually located within the software “Help” check for updates.

Program Overload: All those icons at the bottom right are programs taking up memory, possibly affecting the computer speed. Often you can right click on each; it may tell you what it is and allow you Exit (stop) the program. You may have old printers, scanners or camera software that appear there. If you are savvy, go to Control Panel, Add/Remove programs and remove programs that you are SURE THAT YOU don’t need anymore. When in doubt, KEEP the program.

More Trash: In addition there is a Temp Folder, hidden under Documents and Settings, User (you), Local Settings. You can delete the contents of the Folder, except folders for Cookies, History and Temporary Internet Files. Under Windows 98, the Temp Folder is inside the Windows Folder.

Don't buy a new computer without trying the above first. More memory, security and the registry will be addressed in the next article. Windows 98 and ME Computers are slower regardless as they can only use limited memory and due to their age have slower processors. If you only do home email and some internet surfing, a 98 or ME PC may suit you, but cleanup and defragmentation are a good idea for performance.

If you have any doubts or questions, there are many computer people in the area that would be glad to help you "tune up" your computer. The Isothermal College Polk and Spindale Campuses offer basic thru advanced computer classes.