

Behind the Counter

Computer Systems

A question that is often asked is 'Now that I have started my own business, what sort of computer do I need'. My answer to that is if you require a computer to generate sales for your business, then it makes sense to go and purchase a top notch system. If you only require a computer to store data, or to keep track of your expenses, any used system will probably do, just as long as it isn't so slow that it will drive you absolutely crazy waiting for it to process data.

Sometimes a computer that seems to have problems just needs some tender loving care by doing a bit of computer maintenance. The first maintenance task that should be attempted is to defragment your hard drive. This program can be found at Start/Programs/Accessories/System Tools/Disk Defragmenter. This program will reorganize your hard drive and combine the various segments of files together. Over time as your computer stores data, it will store the data on the first unused part of your hard drive, then if it runs out of space because the file size has changed from the last time it was stored, it will store the rest of the data on the next part of your hard drive, etc., until the entire file is stored. Then when you to retrieve that file for the next data input, the computer finds all these pieces and puts them back together again in a format that is readable by you. If the file is one that is updated every month and grows with each update, then it may be stored at several locations on your hard drive. Your computer may take a lot of time to put all these segments back together again. The defragmentation of your hard drive will help to put all these pieces together in one spot so that your file does not take so long to load. The next maintenance step that will be beneficial to your computer is to download any updates available for any of the programs on your computer. These updates usually have security items, bug fixes and performance enhancements. If you typically run Microsoft office products you can download the Microsoft Update service (found at Start/Control Panel/Automatic Updates) or at www.microsoft.com to keep your system current. This program will allow you to set a schedule for automatically downloading and installing Microsoft updates.

Perhaps it is time to re-evaluate your virus protection software. Perhaps you have purchased a virus protection software that slows down your computer too much. All virus protection software does slow down your computer somewhat, but extensive checkers such as Norton can basically slow your computer down to a crawl. If your subscription is due to expire soon, perhaps it might be time to download an evaluation copy of some other virus protection software and see if that might speed up the performance of your computer without taking away any of the protection. If you are a shaw customer, you can download the F-secure software from shaw for free. Unfortunately, this virus protector only

seems to work well on the newer computer models. If you don't access the internet or use email, then you won't need virus protection software on your computer at all.

The operating system of your computer is controlled by a program called the Registry and over time small errors can also creep into this system. For example if you have many runtime errors when you are attempting to access a program or if you have many errors pertaining to 'Active X' Controls, you may have a problem with your computer registry. There is a free program that you can download called Registry Mechanic available at www.pctools.com that will help to fix these problems. Be warned that this is a more advanced type of maintenance and that you would need to back up your computer's registry before making any changes.

Sometimes the addition of computer memory chips (RAM) will help to speed up processing. You would need to know the maximum amount of memory that your computer can handle and also the amount of memory that you currently have installed. If you no longer have your original invoice with this information, there is an on-line tool that might be able to help you at www.crucial.com. Memory chips are relatively inexpensive and easy to install. Depending on where you purchase new memory chips, their technician will likely give you some instruction on how to install them.

Some software when it is installed becomes resident in memory and will boot itself up as soon as you start up your machine so that when you access the program, it is already running and doesn't need to install at the point of access. These memory resident programs will make the initial start up of your computer slow and if you don't have a lot of extra memory on your computer, your processing time will be slower because you don't have as much memory to access for other tasks. To disable any programs that automatically load and sit in memory you can remove them from your 'start' directory in your microsoft explorer. If you are running Windows XP or Vista, you can remove Microsoft products from the Microsoft Management Console.

Finally, the most time consuming maintenance task would be to totally gut and rebuild your computer. You would need to take a back up of all the data that you wish to keep, then format your hard drive, reinstall your operating software, all the updates and bug fixes as well as any application software that you use and copy back your data. Sometimes the problem is in your data, so this method doesn't always work and sometimes we forget to backup a crucial file and then we are hooped.

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