

Home Computer Maintenance

A computer needs regular maintenance just like an automobile. Here is a list of recommended maintenance tasks and helpful tips to keep your PC running like new.

Microsoft's Windows Update web site

No matter which Operating System you use check Windows Update regularly and ensure all critical updates are installed. Windows Update site analyzes your computer to see what system you have and what you need. Be sure to download and install all critical Updates. The installation of Windows Critical Updates will also protect you from some common computer security risks and some viruses.

Software Updates

Keep important software applications updated by visiting the vendor's website and obtaining patches, bug fixes, and software enhancements. If you have any questions about which updates are right for your application, please contact us.

When you install a new operating system on your computer, upgrade to the newest available version of anti-virus software. Older AV programs tend to cause major problems in newer operating systems.

Don't update your computer's BIOS or your hardware drivers unless you have specific problems with the operation of the PC that you believe may be solved by applying these updates. Updating a BIOS or driver just because a newer one is available can sometimes cause other problems, so unless you have a problem to fix, it is better to leave well enough alone.

Firewall

If you have a high speed Internet connection you need a firewall. A firewall keeps those who want to hack into your computer from gaining access to your system. You really do not want someone else running your computer.

Anti Virus Software

Keep good anti-virus software installed, keep the virus pattern files or "definitions" updated, and scan your computer for viruses regularly. New virus definitions are updated at least weekly, and sometimes even daily. At the very minimum, perform weekly virus scans of the entire system. (We recommend Symantec Antivirus, Trend Micro's PC-cillin or for a no cost option we recommend AVG)

It is important to carry out a virus scan on "EVERYTHING" that you download from the Internet and intend to install, or intend to install from a CD or floppy disk, or open any attachments from an email. Even if you know where the file or groups of files have come from, check it first for viruses. This is easy enough to do. If you have a CD or floppy disk, before copying anything over to your hard disk or before installing anything from them, open up My Computer, highlight the CD or floppy disk drive, right click, and choose "scan with your AV". If your AV does not install a right click option, open up the AV program, select Scan, and navigate to the drive to be scanned. Similarly with files received from download or from email attachments. First of all save them to a temporary folder. The desktop is a good place, but only for temporary storage. Highlight the file, and right click to select scan with your AV.

Anti Spyware Software

Use a program that removes spy-ware applications from your computer. Keep it updated, as new spy-ware is discovered as often as viruses. Scan for spyware about once per week to keep your system running its best and to protect your privacy. The best spyware removal programs are free, but there are many imposters out there that are actually spyware themselves so be careful. Here at Dominion Technologies we recommend using both Ad-Aware, and Spybot Search & Destroy for complete protection.

Windows Disk Cleanup

Run the Windows disk clean-up utility two or three times per year. Check all of the options except "Compress Old Files" to remove unnecessary files from your hard drive that are wasting space.

Windows Disk Defragmenter

De-fragment your hard drive with the Windows disk defragmenter once every month or two. Prior to performing this action, be sure to run the disk clean-up utility, then disable any screen savers and close all running programs.

Software to Avoid

Avoid software packages that claim to be "registry cleaners", "duplicate file cleaners", or "installation managers". These applications can seriously damage your operating system and applications. Unless you are an advanced user capable of undoing any improper actions these programs might take, it is just best not to use them.

Avoid installing software that is "shareware" or "free" as much as possible. A lot of free software is crammed full of spyware applications that invade your privacy and use your PC to deliver advertisements to you. Read the license agreements on any free software you may install. If you must install a free software application, do so only when the website guarantees their downloads are spyware or adware free, like www.download.com.

Avoid installing software that isn't specifically designed for the version of Windows you are using on your computer. Look for Microsoft logos on the software box that specifically say "Made for" or "Designed for" or "Compatible" with your Windows version.

Power Protection

Your computer should always be plugged into a power-surge protector. Any cables used to connect your system to the Internet should also run through a surge protector. DSL and dial-up users should ensure their phone cord runs through a standard RJ-11 phone jack that is part of the surge protector, and cable users should purchase surge protectors that include coax connectors on them.

If you live in an area where power surges and low-voltages are frequent, consider using an UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supply) rather than just a surge protector. (We recommend APC)

Computer Placement

Make sure your computer can "breathe". The computer needs adequate air space, especially at the rear, to allow proper cooling of the internal components.

Computer Cleaning

Open your computer at least once per year (after unplugging it) and use an inexpensive can of compressed air to blow out the dust that has accumulated inside the PC. If your computer is standing on the floor, perform this task more often than once per year. Compressed air can be picked up in office supply stores, and major discount retailers.

The proper way to remove Programs and Files

Never attempt to free-up space on your computer's hard drive by just deleting files from "Windows Explorer" or "My Computer" unless you know exactly what you are deleting. Instead, use the disk cleanup utility mentioned in item #4 that was installed with your version of Microsoft Windows.

Never attempt to un-install a program by deleting its folder in "Windows Explorer" or "My Computer". Go into the Windows Control Panel, open Add/Remove Programs and locate the application you wish to remove from the computer and un-install it from there.

Keep track of the software disks you receive with your computer and new peripherals. These disks contain valuable software drivers and programs for Windows and are needed when Windows must be reloaded. Keep these disks and your Windows software disks in a safe, dry, place -- you never know when you will need them.

If children regularly use your computer, consider using an operating system like Windows Vista, Windows XP Professional, or Windows 2000 so you can limit the "user rights" of children. This will prevent any accidental file deletions that may occur when they are learning to use the computer.