

Ten Computer Housekeeping Tips

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Here are ten ways you can get peak performance out of your Windows or Macintosh computer.

1. When In Doubt, Reboot

Windows in particular likes a good reboot now and then. A "cold boot" is best, when you use your system's Shut Down command to turn off the power. If your machine seems momentarily sluggish, try the "warm boot," or Restart command.

2. Maximize Your Memory

Keep your desktop neat and tidy. Close applications when you're done with them, and delete the ones you don't use. If you can't keep all the programs you need open at the same time, you might want to consider an upgrade (see #10). You can also delete data, like old email and documents.

3. Keep Protection Programs Current

A sure sign of virus infection is a slow computer. Be sure to keep your antivirus and antispyware software up to date. They usually come as one-year licenses, so you'll need to renew annually. Remember, even though it looks like your new computer came with antivirus software, it may be only a limited-time trial version. And Mac users, don't get complacent! Your machine could still be compromised through instant messaging, malicious websites or email attachments.

4. Slay Spam

Some email programs have a "junk mail" feature that tries to detect spam and dump it in one mailbox. You'll want to sort through this mailbox periodically to look for real messages that might have been misidentified. Never respond to a spam message, you'll only get more spam. And you certainly don't want to buy anything through a spam message.

5. Flush Your Cache

You can clear out temporary files to improve performance. In Windows, go to Start, Control Panel, Internet Options, and click on the Delete Cookies and Delete Files buttons. On the Macintosh side, use the Safari menu to select Empty Cache. And in Firefox on either system, go to Tools, Options, select the Cache tab, then the Clear Cache Now button.

6. Check Your Drive

Windows users, go to Start, My Computer, select your hard drive and choose Properties under the File menu. Click Check Now, make sure both disk options are checked and click Start. You may be asked to restart your computer so the scan can take place. Mac folks, restart your computer, insert your Mac OS X Install disk and hold down the C key to boot from CD. Then, select the Disk Utility program from the Installer menu. Click the First Aid tab, select your hard drive, and click Repair.

7. Do A Defrag

In Windows you will find Defrag in the same place as the hard drive scan: Start, My Computer, select hard drive and choose File->Properties. Click the Defragment Now button, select your hard drive, then click the Defragment button. The defragment process takes a while, so choose a time when you aren't going to be using the machine for a while. Macs don't usually need a defrag, and when they do it is done through a third-party utility.

8. Separate Work And Play

If possible, keep separate computers for business and for home, especially if your kids need a machine. Websites designed for kids are more likely to be infected with spyware, posing as games. And file-sharing programs like KaZaa and LimeWire might be sharing a whole lot more than music--they are often a conduit for viruses and spyware.

9. Clean Your Machine

A physical cleaning can do a world of good. Grab a can of compressed air, crack open that case, and chase away those dust bunnies. If you're wary of doing it yourself, I'd be glad to do it for you on your next service visit.

10. Know When To Upgrade

Include your computer needs when considering your budget. You may be able to upgrade your existing machine, or it may be more cost-effective to get a new one. Be sure to dispose of your old one responsibly, through donation or recycling.

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