



Preventive Computing

Bits & Bytes

Bits & Bytes is a monthly newsletter for small business/home users who want to stay up to date on the newest technology, tips, tricks and trends.

Routine Computer Maintenance Is Key

In this issue of *Bits & Bytes*, we take a look at how to identify and prevent problems with your PC.

It may seem a little strange for a computer support company to tell you how to prevent problems with your computer, but at Realm 249 we care about making your computing experience as pain-free and smooth as it can be.

The thought that Realm 249 tries to teach is to treat your computer

like your car. People take their cars in to get the oil changed, get their brakes done, and such. They notice when their car starts making noises, begins sputtering, and smells odd.

When it comes to PCs, the PC can have error messages popup, programs open spontaneously, or noises come from the computer case. But unlike with their cars, people tend to ignore such occurrences.

But your computer is just like your car. Nowadays some computers seem like they cost the same as a car. When you pay so much money for something, it makes sense to take care of it.

Lets review some preventive steps that can be taken to decrease the chance of your computer having errors or breaking down.

Signs, Signs Everywhere Signs.....

There are almost always warnings before something goes wrong with your computer, whether it's hardware or software.

Signs of Hardware Failing

- * Popping/clicking noises coming from the computer
- * Strange smells coming from the computer
- * The computer turns off without you telling it to

Signs of Software Failing

- * Error messages when using installed programs
- * Program closes without you telling it to
- * When starting a program or performing a certain action in a program the computer turns off

Signs of Spyware or Viruses

- * Browser comes up while the computer is idle
- * When you type an address into your browser several other windows open also
- * Home/Search page has changed without asking
- * New tool bars on your browser that you did not install
- * Constant hard drive activity when the computer is idle
- * Antivirus client cannot start or cannot update
- * Typing or mouse movement not caused by you
- * Gambling- or pornographic-related icons on the desktop

Updates, Get Your Updates

Updates are very important. They give your programs/hardware the newest patches so that they can operate correctly, protect you adequately, and support new technologies.

Most updates/patches for programs and hardware are offered

for free. Fortunately, updating abilities are much more common in newer programs and only require a few clicks for the program to update itself. Some programs can even be set to automatically update.

Windows updates can be found by

going to windowsupdates.com and following the directions. You can also set Windows to automatically update itself by:

Win98/WinME/Win2000 - Go into the control panel, double-click on "Automatic Updates" and select the "Automatic" option.

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Updates, Get Your Updates (from page 1)

WinXP - Go to the control panel and double-click on the "Security Center" icon. If there is a green dot and it says "On" next to "Automatic Updates" then you are set. Windows will automatically download and install updates. If there is a yellowish-orange dot and it says "Check Settings" click on the "Turn on Automatic Updates" button to have your computer automatically manage your updates.

Antivirus solutions automatically check the web for updates to virus definitions as long as your subscription is current (if it is not, it will be asking you to pay for a new

one). The problem is that sometimes it does not automatically download program updates. It is a good idea to manually check once or twice a month. To do this:

Norton Antivirus - Open Norton and click on the "Live Update" button. Then just follow the prompts to check for updates.

McAfee Software - Right-click on the "M" in the bottom right-hand corner next to the clock in windows. Then left-click on "Updates." Follow the screens to check for any updates.

Office software (Word, Excel, etc.) also needs to be updated. To update any Microsoft Office application go

to officeupdate.com and then click on "Check for Updates."

Spyware scanners can be updated through the programs themselves. Just look for a "Check for Updates" or an "Updates" button.

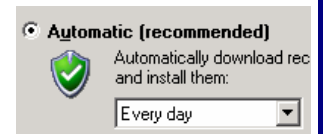
It's a good idea to check for updates on any program or hardware that you use. Start by going to the website for the company that makes the product (www.company.com) and look for "Updates," "Support," or "Downloads." That should point you in the right direction to see if there are any updates for the programs that you are using.



Automatic Updates



Security Center



Scan

Sometimes having protection is just not enough. You can have all of the protection and take all the precautions, but eventually trouble will find its way through the minefield and over the barb-wire fence. This is where scanning comes in.

There are many different types of scans that you can perform. Some of the most important and most common are scanning for viruses, spyware, hard drive errors, and fragmentation.

Viruses

Scanning for viruses should be done once or twice a month, depending on how often you use the computer and deal with downloading or receiving files. If your antivirus program offers automatic scheduling of scans, we recommend that you choose to set it up to scan automatically.

Spyware

Scanning for spyware is something that should be done 2-4 times a month, depending on how active on the Internet you are. When you do a

scan you should scan with at least two different spyware scanners. If you need more information about spyware and scanners that Realm 249 recommends, go to realm249.com and click on the "Bits & Bytes Online PDF's" link and then click on the "March 2005" link. This will bring up the March issue of Bits & Bytes and will provide the information that you need.

Hard Drive Scanning

Scanning the hard drive is something that a lot of people do not think about doing too often. Although the hard drive can crash without any warning, this is rarely the case. Normally there are signs that the hard drive is going bad. The way to find this out is to fully scan the hard drive and look for any errors. Repeatedly getting errors on scans is an indication that the hard drive is having problems. A hard drive should be scanned every 3-6 months, depending on how often the computer is used. To scan the hard drive (be aware this may take up to an hour on older machines):

Win98/WinME: Go to Start-Programs-

Accessories-System Tools-ScanDisk. When the program starts up, pick the "Thorough" option, and click the "Start" button.

Win2000/WinXP: Go into "My Computer," right-click on the "C" drive and click on properties. Go to the "Tools" tab and click on "Check Now." In the window that pops up, put a checkmark in both boxes and then click on the "Start" button. Normally it will tell you that the computer will have to be restarted to complete the scan.

Defragment

When you defrag a hard drive it takes all of the information and pushes it together in a place on the hard drive that is the quickest to access. Therefore, you can access files quicker. Most of the time this does not make a noticeable difference on the speed of your computer. This should be done once every 6-9 months, depending on how often you use the computer. To perform a scan, go to Start-Programs-Accessories-System Tools-Disk Defragmenter. Then follow the choices to perform a scan.

Next Month

We will look at the importance of backup and some good ways to keep track of all of the usernames and passwords with which we are plagued.

Some Miscellaneous Tips:

* Don't know the difference between a monitor cable and a keyboard cable? Try labeling the cables. You can use a piece of tape wrapped around the cord and a permanent marker to label what is what.

* Make sure all cables are securely plugged and screwed into the back of the computer.

* Use a surge protector to protect your PC and any device plugged into the PC.

* Place all of your manuals, disks, notes, and installation keys in one place. Find a folder, box, or large Ziploc bag and place all of your computer-related media into it. This makes it easier to find what you need if something does happen to your computer.