

IT Tips and Tricks

Does your computer seem to run slower than it did when you first purchased it? Chances are your answer is **YES**. Luckily, chances are very good that you can speed up your computer without spending a lot of money. Just start using these handy tips and useful Windows utilities. . .

RESTART YOUR COMPUTER DAILY

There is no right answer to leaving your computer on at night. But you should always restart your computer on a daily basis. Restarting your PC resets your computers memory and resources clearing out any residual programs that may have been left running after you closed them. If you are a heavy computer user consider doing this more than once a day.

CLOSE PROGRAMS NOT ACTIVELY IN USE

One of the biggest advantages of Windows XP is that it allows you to jump, with a click of the mouse, from open program to another open program. It's tempting to keep open every program you have used since booting up. Even if you are not actively processing data in a program, it grabs and holds onto portions of your systems memory and other resources. If you habitually leave two or three extra programs open, you slow down the performance of other programs – and invite glitches that cause lock-ups that require rebooting. For best performance close any non-essential programs when done working in them.

CLEAN UP YOUR DRIVE

As time goes by, programs tend to leave unneeded Junk Files on your computer. These files can slow your computers' performance just by being in the way of important files. To assist you in cleaning the unwanted files off of your computer, Microsoft provides you with a useful, easy-to-use Disk Cleanup utility. This utility will quickly search your hard drive for *Temporary Internet Files, Downloaded Program Files, Recycle Bin Files, Temporary Files, Temporary PC Health Files and Application Debugging Information*, etc. In other words, it quickly searches out all of the Junk Files, which are all safe to delete. It will not remove any files that are critical to your operating system.

To use this program simply go to **Start -> Programs -> Accessories -> Systems Tools -> Disk Cleanup**. It will scan your systems and present you with a list of files. Select which files you want to clean up and select the "OK" button. This utility can take several hours and all other programs should be closed.

DEFRAG YOUR DISKS

Opening, closing, creating and deleting files or programs on your computer can cause your files and programs to scatter them all over your disk drive. Then when you try to launch a program, your hard drive has to work much harder by searching many different areas of the drive in order to launch a program or open a file. Microsoft's Disk Defragmenter program addresses this issue by organizing all your programs and files on your hard disk in a sequential easy to access layout on the drive. To use this program simply to **Start -> Programs -> Accessories -> Systems Tools -> Disk Defragmenter**. This will launch the utility. Then select the "Defragment" button. This is a utility that you will want to run while your computer is doing no other work and can take a few minutes to several hours.

WINDOWS AND OFFICE UPDATES

Since the introduction of Windows '98, Microsoft has added functionality for user to update your operating system via Microsoft Update Website. This website will connect to Microsoft's update server and will then scan your computer for old drivers and systems files. If there are newer versions available, the Update Wizard will display a list of updates available for download. They can include critical updates to your system, multimedia enhancements, Internet Explorer patches and various updates, etc.

To run *Windows updates*, start Internet Explorer. Then select **Tools -> Windows Updates**. This will take you to the website. Follow the prompts from there, they will guide you the rest of the way.

To run *Office Updates*, Run Microsoft Word. Then select **Help -> Office on the Web**. This will take you to Microsoft Office Online Home Page. In the top right-hand side of the screen select "*Check for Updates.*" This will take you to the Office Downloads Home Page. Select "*Check for Updates.*" once more. The site will now analyze your software and then give you a list of required and optional updates and add-ons. Select "*Agree and Install.*" This will start the download and installation of these updates. Follow the prompts from there, they will guide you the rest of the way.

NOTE: *You will want to run both updates several times in order to be completely updated.*