

Clean Up Your Computer

By Ken Hicks



10 Tips for Maximizing Your Everyday Operations

To keep everything running in the best working order for your church or business, it can be very beneficial to follow these 10 simple steps to increase the efficiency of your computer and all the software applications you run on a daily basis. Windows has several built-in maintenance applications that can help optimize your computer and make sure it's in the best working order; also, there are other techniques that can help you make sure your computer is virus free and running smoothly. Hopefully these tips will help keep your system free of problems.

TIP 1: Delete Old Programs

Too many programs on your computer can slow everything down, from the time it takes to open programs you do use to the amount of storage space on your hard drive. Many programs load themselves into memory during the boot process. They are a constant drain on performance even if they are never used. By going through your system every so often and deleting programs that you never use, you will notice a change in your system speed—clean your “computer” house, so to speak.

Find it here: My Computer > Add or Remove Programs

TIP 2: Defrag Your Computer

Make use of the handy Disk Defragmenter application that comes standard with every version of Windows. The defragmenter will organize your files so that the computer can use the files you are accessing faster, since it won't have to search as long. It's best to run this program with very few applications running in the background. It's easiest to run it when you're not at your desk because it can sometimes take a while to complete, especially if you haven't defragged in quite some time. Defrag every few weeks and before you install a new program, or after you uninstall a program.

Find it here: Start > Accessories > System Tools > Disk Defragmenter

TIP 3: Run ScanDisk

This application is the one that runs when you boot up after your computer has been shut down improperly. This system utility checks for surface, folder and file errors and corrects them. If it seems like your system has been having a lot of error messages or if it seems to be functioning abnormally, run this program. By using ScanDisk once a week, it should help keep your system in better shape.

Find it here: Start > Accessories > System tools > Scandisk

TIP 4: Disk Clean Up

This is a great function in your drive properties that will help to clean up your hard drive. If you use Internet Explorer, using the Disk Clean Up function will get rid of pesky internet files, temporary files, and files in the recycle bin. If you use an alternate browser such as Netscape, you will need to locate the cache or temporary file folder within Windows Explorer to delete these unnecessary files. None of these files are necessary to store, and they take up space and slow down processing speed. Deleting them can help your system run much more efficiently.

Find it here: My Computer > Right Click on C Drive Icon > Disk Cleanup

TIP 5: Update Virus Definitions

Unless you've been living in a cave and have never personally encountered virus problems on your computer, you should already have a virus software program installed on your computer. If you don't, run (don't walk) to your nearest computer store and buy a copy of one of the many great virus protection programs out there. Once installed, most virus software programs include a year subscription to virus updates (because new viruses are created every day).

These updates should be set to notify you automatically and download to your computer at least once a

week. Also, most programs allow you to set a routine maintenance schedule to scan your entire hard drive for viruses. Set this auto-feature to scan your computer at least once a week.

TIP 6: Check Hard Drive Space

Unclutter your computer! Many of us have tons of data files, image files, and other files on our systems that are just getting in the way. This is important especially if you have a smaller hard drive. CD burners have made it easy to transfer information to CD and store it on the shelf instead of on your computer. Make use of this function to help speed up your computer and divert more power and energy to running software applications that you use every day, such as church management and financial software.

Find it Here: My Computer > Hard Drive Disks

TIP 7: Windows Update

If you're a Windows user (most of us are), operating system and Office program updates are available regularly for free. If you have Windows XP, an icon at the bottom right of your screen will notify you when there are new updates. If you have an older version of Windows, visit www.windowsupdate.microsoft.com and the site will automatically check to

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see what operating system you have and walk you through system updates. This is very easy to do and will help with system performance.

TIP 8: Shut Down Properly

Always shut your computer down properly to avoid causing errors and losing data. Sometimes this happens accidentally or because of power outages. Make sure to boot up your computer right away and run the ScanDisk (Windows does this automatically after a system crash). Fortunately, Windows usually reverts back to the last saved version of documents that were open. Make sure to set MS Word and any other programs you use to save automatically every few minutes so that you minimize lost data.

Find it Here: Tools > Options > Save Tab (change AutoSave to desired minutes)

Find it Here: Start > Shutdown > Shutdown



TIP 9: Evict the Dust Bunnies

Have you ever opened up your computer and discovered what looks like a hotel for dust bunnies? I have. Dust can actually cause heat buildup and this heat buildup will degrade performance as well as accelerate wear and tear on the parts inside your computer. So if you haven't cleaned out your computer before and it's been a few years, now's the time. Unplug your computer before opening the case and remember not to bump any of the internal parts with the vacuum to avoid damage. If you aren't comfortable opening the case, office supply and computer stores sell canned air that when sprayed, blows the dust out of the cracks and crevices of your computer.

TIP 10: Update Hardware

Having an old system can seriously impede your ability to perform routine functions and use newer software. Although most of us hate buying a new computer every two years, if your computer is more than five years old, you might be having trouble with newer software and Internet applications. It might be time to turn your old computer into a footstool and get a new system. You can still use your old monitor and keyboard and just purchase a new hard drive if you like.

If your system is only a few years old but you are still having problems with not enough storage space for applications and files, consider upgrading your system by adding RAM and/or hard drive memory. Check with your local computer retailer to find out what is possible with your system. Make sure to write down the model number and specifications of your system before talking with a computer professional so that they know what type of system you have.

Find it Here: My Computer > View System Information

Who would have thought that cleaning would apply to your computer system, too? By following these 10 tips, you can keep your system free of problems and help your computer run more efficiently. You might want to cut out this article and make copies for everyone in your office; have them tack these tips up next to their computers so that your colleagues remember to complete these tasks every few weeks. I promise you will all notice a big improvement in the day-to-day activities performed on your computers. Happy cleaning! ❖

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