

A Little Spring Cleaning Can Re-energize Your PC

By Bruce A. Love

*W*e all slow down a bit as we get older, but sometimes we can do things to delay the inevitable. If you abuse your body by consuming harmful substances, by not giving it the nourishment it needs, or by denying it the rest that it requires, your body will age much faster than if you take care of it. The same is true with personal computers.

Over time, our computers accumulate stuff that may be unnecessary, and even harmful, to your PC. If you visit disreputable web sites, or you download e-mail without using protection, you may become infected with programs that will drain the life from your PC. Even if you are a responsible Internet user, your computer can become clogged with useless files that bring performance to a crawl. Fortunately, there are ways to put a little spring back in the step of your PC. *Although the following remedies may seem a little technical, most are relatively easy to implement, and will greatly enhance your PC's performance.*

The first thing you want to do is purge your computer of harmful toxins by running an updated anti-virus program. If your program is out of date, you can download the Free Edition of AVG Anti-Virus (see free.grisoft.com/freeweb.php). Next, get rid of other forms of malware (malicious software). I highly recommend the newest Ad-Aware SE Personal edition – It works great, and it's free! You can find links for this at lavasoft.com. Spybot Search and Destroy, and Spy Sweeper also are very good products for removing most spyware. I use several products to make sure I get everything off my PCs.

After removing dangerous programs designed to cripple your computer, you can delete temporary files that were created while you surfed the Web. You can free up many megabytes of disk space by doing so. Open Internet Explorer, and click on "Tools," then "Internet Options," and select the "General" tab. Under "Temporary Internet Files", click "Delete Files..." Next, right click the Recycling Bin icon on your desktop, and click "Empty Recycling Bin" from the dropdown list. Now, wait until dark.

Before going to bed is the best time to launch the next two tasks – each could take several hours to run.

Check Disk is a utility included in Windows XP and 2000. ScanDisk is the equivalent program used on Windows 98 and ME. These programs find and fix problems on your hard drive. To run Check Disk, click "Start," "My Computer," and then right click the hard drive (usually C:). Next click "Properties," and select the "Tools" tab. Click "Check Now" and select both boxes. Click "Start." You will have to reboot the computer to make it run. To run ScanDisk on Windows 98 or ME, click "Start," then "Programs," then "Accessories," then "System Tools," and choose "ScanDisk." Select "Thorough" and "Automatically Fix Errors," and click "Start."

Before you go to bed the following night, you can begin the defragmentation of your hard drive(s). Defrag rearranges data in your PC to make it more efficient. Click "Start," "All Programs," "Accessories," "System Tools," and select "Disk Defragmenter." In Windows XP, click the drive you want to defragment, and then click "Defragment." In Windows 98 and ME, click "OK." In Windows 2000, click "Defragment."

One of the biggest improvements you can make to PC's performance is to add more memory. Assuming you have an open slot in your computer for additional RAM (Random Access Memory), this procedure is relatively easy. Refer to your computer documentation to determine appropriate module types for your PC. Chances are you may be able to triple the size of your PC's memory by installing one module!

As time goes by, you may find that your computer takes longer to start-up. To improve startup time, disable unnecessary programs from launching at startup. Click "Start," "Run," and type "msconfig" (without the quotes) and click "OK." Click the "Startup" tab and clear the boxes for the programs you don't need. Click "Apply" and "OK." You'll be prompted to restart your computer. To determine the necessary programs to keep, and see descriptions of all start-up programs, visit: sysinfo.org/startuplist.php.

There are other options, including several software programs, which can assist in cleaning your computer. The important thing is, you do it. After performing these routine procedures, your computer should feel re-energized and ready to tackle the challenges of the day!

Love Consulting
600 Oakmont Place
Roaring Spring, PA 16673
814-224-2651

articles@loveconsulting.com

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