



## PC Computer Maintenance

By Edward Zeidan



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**E**very computer needs periodic maintenance in order to perform at its best, and to keep running without problems. The vast majority of people—well over 90% in my experience—do not perform routine maintenance on their computers. Consequently, they

experience many avoidable problems with their computers. This article describes what steps you need to take to maintain your computer, and provides some practical computer usage tips.



### Update your antivirus/antispayware software

This is critical! Your computers' security suite updates daily, sometimes more frequently. Don't allow it to get out of date, or let your subscription expire. Since there are something like 16 viruses released every day, not having

up-to-date protection can be as bad as having no protection. Most of the time, you can just right-click on the icon in the lower-right part of your screen, and click "update" or "check for updates". Our favorites are AVG, Bit-Defender, and TrendMicro.



### Make sure your firewall is working

A firewall is designed to protect your computer from certain Internet threats. You need a firewall in addition to antivirus/antispayware software. If you have a home

network, your router is probably acting as a firewall. If not, make sure Windows or your security software is providing a firewall.



### Backup your data!

I know I sound like a broken record on this issue, but we're constantly seeing clients who lose irreplaceable pictures, documents, etc. and are in a panic. This would not be an issue if they had current backups.

You can use a thumbdrive, external hard drive or online backup service. For online backup services, we like idrive or carbonite.

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## Change passwords frequently

Many people store highly sensitive information on their computer, such as online banking and investment passwords, income tax returns, business

information, etc. With identity theft increasing rapidly, it's important to change your computer and online passwords periodically. We recommend at least once per year.

## Keep all your program CDs & passwords handy

You need ready access to your program CDs in case there's a problem with your computer, or an upgrade is required. A large Ziplock bag or a small box makes a handy storage container for your CDs. Keep your software license codes with the CDs. Passwords for your

email, router, wireless network, etc. are frequently needed when troubleshooting computer problems or making changes to your system. We have created a password list document that is available for download on our website at [www.Nerd4Rent.com](http://www.Nerd4Rent.com) under the freestuff link.



## Stay away from file-sharing and other questionable websites

Websites that offer free music and video downloads often install programs on your computer that will make

it run worse, or could give you a virus. Many websites that offer some sort of free product or service make money by selling your personal information, or by installing rogue programs on your computer. Approach with caution.



## Watch what files/programs you download or open

When you receive an email with either a link to a website, or an attached file, use extra caution. Clicking a link or opening an attachment can install malicious software or a virus. Just because an email comes from a friend or

family member, do not automatically trust it. There are many viruses that will send themselves to everyone in your address book. A frequent ruse is to have people click a link in an email to see a joke. Once you click that link, you could get an infection.



## Defragment your hard drive

Your computer's hard drive is like a great big filing cabinet. As you create or edit files, your computer may store the file in several pieces. This causes your computer to slow down over time, as the pieces must be reassembled every time you want

to open the file. When you de-fragment your hard drive, the computer finds the pieces and reassembles them into one file. As a bonus, it even moves all files to the front of the hard drive, where they can be accessed more quickly. Disk defragmenter can be found under **All Programs | Accessories | System Tools.**



## Run Disk Cleanup

Disk Cleanup is a little utility that empties your recycle bin, clears out temporary files, and a few other niceties.

Run this utility at least monthly to clear out unneeded files. Disk Cleanup can be found under **All Programs | Accessories | System Tools.**



## Blow out the dust

Your computer is a dust magnet. Dust gets pulled into your computer's case and into the ventilation holes by the cooling fans. When dust builds up on internal components and covers ventilation holes, cooling air cannot flow over the

components and they heat up. Heat is the enemy of your computer. It's a good idea to vacuum or blow the dust out of the ventilation holes and the inside of your computer periodically. A note of caution: be careful if you open your computer's case. You can get a nasty shock or you can damage sensitive electronics inside.

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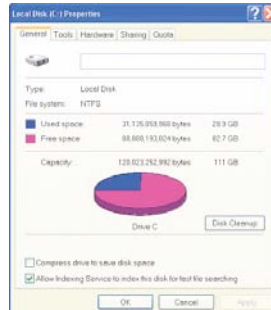


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## Run Microsoft Update/ Windows Update

Microsoft is constantly updating Windows and Office to enhance performance and fix bugs and security issues. Make sure your computer has Microsoft Update and that it's set to automatically download critical updates.



## Check your hard drive space

You always want to maintain at least 15-20% free hard drive space. Your hard drive needs the free space for temporary storage space, while it figures out where to put your 500 page autobiography. Move little-used files to an external hard drive, or archive to CDs/DVDs.



## My computer suddenly stopped working, what should I do?

Windows XP comes with a great utility called System Restore that periodically takes a snapshot of your computer's settings. If you experience a problem, you can always try System Restore to see if that fixes the problem. When you run System Restore, any new software or hardware that you've

added since the system restore date will be lost. You will not lose your data files, they are unaffected by System Restore. A note of caution-some manufacturers have similarly named programs, which may cause you to lose all your data and programs. Make sure you know which System Restore you are using. System Restore is found under **All Programs | Accessories | System Tools**.



## Repair vs. replace

When does it make sense to replace your computer, rather than repairing it? Since computer prices have dropped so much over the past few years, we recommend that if your computer is over 3 years old, consider replacing it rather than performing repairs that

cost more than \$200-300.

If the computer is more than 5 years old, then you should replace it when it needs service. You may be surprised to find you can purchase an excellent new computer for between \$400-700.



Windows Vista

## Windows XP vs. Windows Vista

Last year, Microsoft released Windows Vista, their latest operating system. Unfortunately, Vista has been plagued by hardware and software incompatibilities, slowness, and instability. We strongly recommend that you purchase Windows XP with your new computer. Please note that you can only

find Windows XP online.

Dell sells computers with XP on the business side of its website.

If you're thinking of buying a new computer soon, be aware that Windows XP is supposed to be unavailable after June 30 (this deadline has already been extended once, and may be extended again).