

Mother Board

Volume 26, Issue 5

May 7, 2008

This Month Protecting Home & Office Computers by Mr. Jeffrey Wagner

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The Computer Corner – Spring Clean Your Computer

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While you're cleaning everything else around your home and office at this time of year, don't forget to clean your computer. There is truth to the saying, "A clean computer is a happy computer."

With the time we spend creating and working on our systems, we should do all we can to keep them running smoothly and give them long, healthy lives. So here are some things we can all do to prolong the lives of our systems. As a cautionary note: **backup** all your important items before doing any maintenance on your system. If you don't feel comfortable opening your system or editing the Registry, then don't do it! But what I intend to discuss here is not rocket science. These items are the same ones I perform when I clean my clients' systems.

Blow the Dust Out!

Dust is your computer's enemy! So get rid of it. The electronic components in a system generate heat. Heat is bad for a system. The more dust in a machine, the hotter it will run. When motherboard components get overheated, they "take a powder" and just shut themselves off until they can cool down. By keeping the insides clean your system will run cooler, thus letting it run longer.

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This Month at the NOPCC Back to the "old" Location

For our May meeting, we will have Mr. Jeffrey Wagner, MCSE, Security-2003, CISSP, who will make those in attendance aware of the choices they can make to protect their home and office computers—a good starting point for the understanding current computer security issues.

We will be meeting on May 7, 2008 at our old location. Our meeting will start at 6:30PM at the J.D. Meisler Middle School, 3700 Cleary Ave., Metairie, LA . Use the entrance through the breezeway on Pharr Street.

See you there.....

"CISSP(tm) is a registered mark of the International Information Systems Security Certification Consortium in the United States and other countries"

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Most generic systems have 4 to 6 screws that hold the case cover on. If you have a Dell, HP, Compaq, Gateway or other major brand system, look in the owner's manual or online to find out how to open your case. By removing the sides of the computer you'll gain access to its guts which is where the cleaning can be done. I use a small hand-held vacuum to suck up the dust balls. I use the crevice tool, that's not the one with the brush. You can also use canned air or air from a compressor to blow the dirt out. Be careful not to bump or touch any components on the motherboard while cleaning. Keeping one hand on the metal case while you clean should discharge any static electricity that might have built up.

With the vacuum, don't forget to suck out the dust that has accumulated in the power supply. There are usually vents on the side opposite the circular fan. I vacuum out from both the fan-side and the vent side. Note: if you are blowing rather than vacuuming, don't blow air into the floppy drive or cdrom/dvd units. Unless they are filthy and already don't work, you don't want to risk getting dust on the optics inside. And remember, blowing air into a computer really just moves the dust from the computer to somewhere else! I suggest you do it outside, if possible.

If you have a mouse that has a ball, think about getting a mouse that uses laser light instead. But if you want to clean the mouse, open it up, wash the ball with warm, soapy water, and gently scrape the gunk off the three rollers inside. Your mouse will act like new after a good cleaning.

You can also vacuum your keyboard. You'd be amazed at how much junk you'll find if you just turn it over and shake it up a bit. I have even gone so far as to wash the keyboard to get rid of spilled soda. An hour or two in the Phoenix sun and the keyboard is ready to go!

Cleaning the Software

Before running software cleaners such as Ad-aware, Spybot Search & Destroy and a good anti-virus program (I like the free AVG), it makes sense to delete unneeded files and programs. Might as well not clean any more than you have to! This might be the time to use System Restore to create a Restore Point before you eliminate something you shouldn't. Better safe than sorry.

In the Documents and Settings area, look for the Local Settings folder for each user. If you can't find it, you may need to turn on the "Show Hidden Files and Folders" option on your system. To do this, open up Explorer, from the menu bar at the top go to **Tools-Folder Options-View-Show Hidden Files and Folders**.

Under Local Settings, I delete everything in the Temp folder. I also delete everything in the Temporary Internet Files folder also. Once that's done, I go to the Windows folder, and delete everything in the TEMP folder. Caution: some of you create your own Temp folders into which you may put things you might not want to delete. Check that out before doing a mass deletion.

Open the Registry

Again, if you're not comfortable editing the Registry, don't. You can back up the Registry (entirely or just specific keys) before proceeding. I mention this item in order to delete the "Compress Old Files" key before proceeding to the next step. You can either search for this key using the Find feature, or go to: **HKEY_Local_Machine\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\VolumeCaches**. The second key down should be the CompressOldFiles key, if it hasn't already been removed. If it's there, RIGHT click on it and delete it. You don't need it. Close the Registry and proceed.

Clean Up Drive

To clean up your drive further, go to My Computer. For each hard drive, RIGHT click on the drive, left click on Properties, and then click on Disk Cleanup. If you didn't remove the CompressOldFiles key earlier, it may take a long time before the system responds. If you did, shortly you'll see files which may be deleted from your system so you can recover space. After cleaning these up you may see an increase in available disk space.

Clean Up Internet Explorer and Firefox

One of the easiest things you can do to keep your computer clean is to get rid of Temporary Internet Files that are stored on your computer. Here's how to do this for immediate relief:

§ Internet Explorer - delete Temporary Internet Files:

1. Open Internet Explorer.
2. Select the Tools menu.

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3. Select Internet Options.
4. Select the General tab.
5. In the Temporary Internet Files section, click the Delete Files button.
6. Do not check the clear Offline Content box. Click Ok.
7. Click Ok to close the Tools window.

§ Firefox (Mozilla) - clear browser cache

1. Open FireFox (Mozilla).
2. Click the Tools menu.
3. Click Options.
4. Click Privacy.
5. Click the Clear button for Cache.

If you use Internet Explorer, go to **Tools-Internet Options-Advanced** and almost at the end, put a check mark in the box that says "Empty Temporary Internet Files folder when Browser is closed" and IE will automatically delete the files when you close the browser.

Add/Remove Programs

In the Control Panel, you can add and remove programs you no longer need or use. If you are not sure, Google the program in question and then decide. You might want to opt to leave in any program you are not sure about. But if you still have games or programs you have not used in years, toolbars you don't want or need, or other items of no significance to you, clear them out. As I've said before, Google first, then if you're still not sure, leave them in. Often programs will have their own Uninstall feature. If you decide to remove a program, first go to **Start-Programs** and find the menu item of the program you want to delete. If it is there, check to see if there is an Uninstall menu choice and if so, I'd start with that before using the Add/Remove programs feature.

Spybot Search & Destroy and Ad-Aware

These are two FREE programs that do a great job cleaning up malware, spies, and other things that slow your system down. You can find them on the Internet at www.download.com, or just Google them. After installing them, make sure you use the update feature before doing a scan. These programs are updated almost daily, so it pays to take advantage of the latest updates.

Get Rid of the Language Bar

Control Panel, Regional Settings, Languages, Details, Languages, Uncheck the "Show Language Bar" box to get rid of the Language Bar at the bottom of your screen. If you use the Language Bar, by all means don't get rid of it.

Keep Your Antivirus Updated!

Whichever AV program you use, if it is not updated you're not getting full protection! *Security suites slow systems down!* I don't use them. Google "AVG Free" to get a free antivirus that does a good job, and then configure it to have it updated and run it daily.

Task Manager

Quite often slow performance is directly related to the programs that are running. RIGHT click on the Taskbar to open and look at duplicate program entries under Processes – click on the title of the Processes tab to sort alphabetically. If you see multiple instances of the same program running, for example, outlook.exe, odds are you're having some kind of problem. If you're not sure about what a process is, Google it to find out or leave it alone. If you click on the CPU tab twice, you'll see which programs are using the most memory. Find the memory hogs, check them at Google, and then begin to end processes you don't need. If a process is critical, Windows won't let you close it.

MSCONFIG

Go to **Start – Run** and type in "msconfig" (don't type the quotes) and click on "OK" and look in the Startup and Services areas to check to see what programs might not need to start. If you know they are not needed, uncheck them. If you have a problem after restarting, then re-check them. If you're uncertain . . . Google the file names and learn about them.

Defrag Your System Regularly

Go to <http://www.auslogics.com/en/software> to find free software to defrag your hard drives. I recommend defragging at least monthly to keep your system running smoothly. This is a nice program, FREE, and it's pleasant to watch. Keeping your hard drives defragmented will add life to your system and speed up performance when saving and retrieving files.

The suggestions above are based upon a system running Windows XP Pro. With Vista things may be in different places. The operation should be very

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similar, however, so doing a search in the Help & Support area may provide the answers you're looking for.

For a PowerPoint slide presentation with screen shots of locations referred to in this article, please visit <http://www.phoenixpcug.org/articles> and look for the link.

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Hasta la Vista - Customize Your Data Locations

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I'm told the literal meaning of "hasta la vista" in Spanish is "until the seeing." Or maybe a more adequate translation is "see you later". But in this column, I'm using that phrase to invite you to take a look at Microsoft's latest version of Windows: Vista.

If you take a look at the new Vista Start Menu, one change from Windows XP you will see is that there is a link at the top of it which is your account name. If you click on that, you will open up a Windows Explorer window, which shows all your user folders, such as:

- Documents
- Music
- Pictures
- Desktop
- Favorites
- Etc..

In Details view, this is handy since one column shows the Folder path for each of these. Most of the folders will be on your boot drive (normally, C:) in this path:

C:\Users\<<AccountName>,
where <AccountName>, of course, is your account name.

There are several entries in this list which have the little "shortcut" arrow in their icons, for example:

- Application Data
- Cookies
- Local Settings
- My Documents
- Recent
- Send To
- Start Menu
- Templates

If you click on any of these shortcuts, except Recent, you will immediately be presented with an error message: "<folder path> is not accessible Access is denied", then you have to click the OK button to dismiss the message.

All of those shortcuts are there for compatibility reasons, in order for the system to be able to access certain locations that were used in Windows XP. The actual path of each of those locations has changed in Windows Vista. For example, the folder that was accessed in this way in Windows XP C:\Documents and Settings\<<AccountName>\My Documents is now here in Vista:
C:\Users\<<AccountName>\Documents.

Backup and Partitioning

I like to backup my entire system periodically with a drive image program from Acronis called True Image.

However, I also like to try and keep most of my data separate from the program files and windows system files making up the boot drive.

I took advantage of the built-in drive partitioning software of Vista (more about this in another article), in order to create several other partitions on my C: drive, and one of these is reserved for storing the contents of such folders as Documents, Favorites, Music, and Pictures. (I did something similar for an old computer using Windows XP.)

This not only reduces the size of the backup image of my boot drive, it also makes it much easier to backup my rapidly changing data to CD-RWs or DVD-RWs.

In Windows XP, in order to move the data locations to another partition, I was forced, in some cases, to edit the registry. In Windows Vista, this is no longer necessary.

There is a Windows user interface to change folder locations of your user account profile. Just right

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click on your Documents folder, for example: Select Properties from the context menu, and then you will see a new tab in the folder properties windows called Location.

Click on that tab, and you will now see this message: You can change where files in this folder are stored to another place on this hard drive, another drive, or even another computer on your network.

All you have to do is type in the new location, and click OK. You will then be presented with a message, asking if you want to move all of the files from the old location

to the new location, and recommending that you do so, or else you will see two of the designated folders in your profile.

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How to Forward Email

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Let's examine a typical email scenario. After opening your email, you find a message that you simply must share with all your friends. You press the "Forward" button and one way or another get all their email addresses in the "To:" box. Feeling quite satisfied after pressing the "Send" button, you sit back and take satisfaction in the joy you are sending to others.

You should be ashamed of yourself. You have just exposed everyone on your mailing list plus any people who received the email ahead of you to unending streams of spam, spyware, viruses, and other assorted electronic junk and mischief that hackers are prone to these days. What you have done is prove conclusively that you don't have a clue about the proper way to forward email. Your license to compute should be revoked immediately.

As messages get forwarded in this way they move along the internet, and the list of email addresses embedded in the note gets longer and longer. All it takes is for just one of these folks to get a virus or some other kind of malware, and everyone who has their email address in that list can be infected.

Anyone can take those email addresses, sell them or send out their own junk mail. Assuming you are a mature responsible adult, you most likely would not want to harm anyone, even inadvertently. What does a conscientious person do to stop or better yet, prevent damage?

When you click the "Forward" button you enter the edit mode of your email client. Before you do anything else DELETE all the other email addresses appearing at the top of the message. Let me repeat. DELETE them by highlighting them and THEN pressing the Delete button on your keyboard. It doesn't take long. When you've finished, delete any other junk that isn't actually part of the message, such as information about the original sender. Delete anything that is not part of what you want to send.

If you're sending the message to more than one person, do not use the To: or Cc: fields for adding email addresses. Always, always use the BCC: (blind carbon copy) field for listing the email addresses. The people receiving the message will see only their own address.

Some email clients don't automatically show the blind carbon copy option. If that's the case, click on where it says To: and your address list will appear. Highlight the email address and choose the BCC: option. It's not much effort, and it eliminates the possibility of someone using the email addresses inappropriately. When you send using the blind carbon copy, everyone receiving the message will see "Undisclosed Recipients" in the heading information.

If your email client requires that something be in the To: field, send the message to yourself and use the BCC: field for everyone else.

Remove any FW in the subject line. Better yet, clean up the subject line completely by fixing any spelling or grammatical mistakes. Why let someone else's errors appear as your own?

Sometimes you will receive an email that is a petition. It states a position and directs you to add your name, address, and sometimes other information. Then you're supposed to send it to as many people as possible. If enough people do this, an email can contain hundreds if not thousands of names and

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addresses.

The longer the list gets the more valuable it becomes to a spammer or hacker because the names and email addresses are valid. If you really want to support the idea behind the petition, a personal letter to the eventual recipient carries a lot more weight than a piece of paper with a long list of names. When you think about it, lists like these can be generated from telephone books. Do you really think that a member of congress is going to pay attention to something that could be so easily faked?

Sometimes these petitions come with statements or warnings that the emails are being traced. Don't believe it. While technology is constantly improving, there is still no way to trace emails through the internet.

One kind of really annoying email is the one that promises that something wonderful is going to happen, but only if I forward the message to at least ten people in the next ten minutes. However, if I fail to do so, some unspeakable evil will surely befall me. I always fail to do so, and nothing bad has happened yet, but I wonder if this could be the reason I haven't won the lottery.

Before forwarding some version of an Amber Alert, take a little time to check out the story behind the message. Most of these messages have been circulating around the internet for years. Some of them have been around for a decade. Almost all of them are much less than they seem.

Some sites that will help:

www.hoaxbusters.com

http://urbanlegends.about.com/od/internet/a/current_netlore.htm

<http://ciac.llnl.gov/ciac/bulletins/h-05.shtml>

<http://www.snopes.com/snopes.asp>

<http://www.vmyths.com/>

You may not be able to stop this stuff on your own, but you can stop contributing to it.

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Shortcuts

By Mike Moore, Editor,

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Why do some icons on your desktop have a little white arrow embedded in the picture?

These are shortcuts (sometimes called links). They are small files that represent and "point to" the real thing. When you double-left-click on a shortcut icon, Windows reads the location of the file to open from within the shortcut file, then opens the target file. Shortcuts are, in the lingo of computer programmers, symbolic links to actual files. They don't contain any of the file's information—they just point to it. In real terms: if Peoria, Illinois was a file, then its shortcut would be the map telling you how to get there.

Why do we use shortcuts? Why not just put the real, actual file on your desktop? There are several reasons. First, since a shortcut does not contain any of the target file's information, it can be deleted without damaging the file it points to. Therefore, placing shortcuts on the desktop (or in any directory) is safer. Accidental deletion of these links will not affect anything other than you may lose track of where your file was!

The other reason is that you can have many shortcuts and place them anywhere you might need quick access to your file. For example, when we give away computers, we organize the software links in various folders on the desktop. There's a folder for Educational software and Game software links, and for the software that is both Educational and Fun, we put links to the same program in both the Educational and Game folders. You can rename shortcuts to anything you want, and it won't affect the real name of the file they point to.

Shortcuts are also portable! If I know for sure that a program will be in a certain place on nearly every PC, I can e-mail a link to someone and tell them to place it on their desktop. Double-clicking on it should open that file on my recipient's PC! E-mailing a link is much more of a sure bet than e-mailing an executable file—because most e-mail servers just won't allow executables (files ending in .EXE) to be sent!

How does one create a link? The best way is to find the file you want the link to refer to, then do a single right-click on it. This brings up a context menu where

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May 2008

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	5 1st Congressional District Runoff GO VOTE!
4	5	6	7 NOPC Gen Mtg J.D. Meisler School 6:30p-8:30p	8	9	10
11	12	13	14 NOPC BOD @ TBD 6:30p-8:30p	15 New & Inter- mediate User SIG Old Metairie Library 6:30p-8:30p	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

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