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Preventive Maintenance Tips for Your PC

Today your computer is working fine. Will it be as healthy tomorrow? The average PC user doesn't think much about the problems that can arise with a computer until one is experienced. Then, recovery can be both costly and time-consuming. This article introduces some proactive measures that you can take to decrease the likelihood and lessen the impact of future problems.

Why Computers Fail

Computer failures occur for a variety of reasons. Physical factors include excessive dust, heat, static, magnetism, power surges, and abuse such as spilling liquids into a computer or dropping it. Software based failures include malware (virus and such) infection, improper configuration and damaged or obsolete software.

The following tips are a basic guideline that you can use to keep your PC maintained to run efficiently, increase component lifespan and help lessen the overall likelihood of PC failure.

Preserve System Information

When you get a new computer save all disks and documentation that comes with it and any components. Store this material where you will be able to find it, but don't keep it in a laptop bag as it could become damaged or lost. If you did not receive system recovery disks with the computer make your own now- before you need them. Be sure to add documentation with your stored disks when you add components to your computer.

You should also keep a record of the changes you make in a system such as CMOS setup, new drivers you install, and any maintenance you perform on the system. You can use this record to backtrack when you are troubleshooting a problem or to restore lost settings.

Operating Environment

Heat is the enemy of computers. Keep the PC's air vents unobstructed and free of dust. If you never turn off your computer dust will accumulate inside over time. Every year or two the case should be opened and the dust blown out with compressed air. Do not place a PC near a heat source, such as heating vents or in direct sunlight. Strive for ambient humidity of 20% to 80% but do not operate the computer if moisture is condensing on the case.

Do not place a PC in the path of wayward liquids. Avoid areas near open windows, houseplants, and serving areas.

Be extremely careful when moving a computer. Power off the system and disconnect all cables before moving it — even if it's only going from one side of your desk to another. Laptops in particular have exposed connectors which are quite fragile.

Operating System

Turn on automatic updates or manually download and install the latest patches and service updates for your operating system on a frequent basis. If using automatic updates, leave the computer on overnight at least occasionally so that it will have the opportunity to update itself. These updates will fix bugs and remove security exposures.

Hard Drive

From time to time it's advisable to check your hard drive for errors. In windows, open My Computer, then Right click on the drive and then select Properties, Tools, Check for Errors.

There is no need to back up the entire hard drive as you should already have program installation disks in a safe place. However, you should backup your data files often. Keep backup copies of any important

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data in multiple places. Computers can fail or be lost. For most of us our data is actually much more valuable than our hardware. Keep back up data at a location remote from the computer so it will still be recoverable if the computer is lost or destroyed.

Do not destroy old backups. Keep them for a long time. It's possible that you will not be aware of a problem until several back up cycles have passed. If your recent back up reflects the problem status, you can use an older backup to restore data to a prior state.

Defragment your hard drives as needed. This organizes your hard drive so that access to files and programs is more efficient. The defragment program is in the same place as the error checking program discussed above.

Keep Clean

Vacuum the computer from time to time to remove lint. Invert the keyboard and tap lightly to dislodge debris. Clean the bottom of the mouse using a cloth dampened with isopropyl alcohol. This can be used to clean most monitors as well. If you are using a trackball mouse be sure to clean the rollers inside to keep the mouse moving smoothly.

Software Considerations

Be wary of installing file sharing and other peer-to-peer software as this is a security risk to your PC. While the software itself may be harmless, downloading other users' files can bring hidden dangers

Likewise, avoid using shareware (or freeware) wallpaper, screensavers, and similar audio and visual apps. These will usually require extra system resources to run, and may contain malware.

Purge old software. Getting rid of unused software frees up additional system resources and hard disk space. To uninstall software on a Windows PC, use the "Add/Remove Programs" function from the Control Panel.

Malware Protection

Malware is short for malicious software. These programs are intended to infiltrate a computer system without the owner's informed consent. Malware is a general term that covers a variety of hostile, intrusive, or annoying programs. The common example is the computer virus, but worms, Trojan horses, most root kits, spyware, dishonest adware, and crime ware are all malware.

Typically, malware is installed by unwitting users of the computer who think they are installing something useful. Your best defense against such programs is to practice good computer hygiene. Don't run files from external sources, such as the Internet, email, or portable devices.

Install an antivirus security system to scan and assess all files before you open them. Insure that it updates virus definitions daily.

If you need help with Peachtree, Quickbooks, MAS 90, MAS 200 or ACT in a network environment contact www.jcscomputer.com 800/475-1047

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