



What Every Computer Owner Should Know About Maintenance

Like cars, homes and everything else we purchase, computers require ongoing upkeep and maintenance. Computers are complex machines, and the more we use them, the more critical it is ensure efficient and smooth performance. Follow these ten tips to keep your computer running well as long as possible:

1. **Back-up Data.** Contrary to wishful thinking, your computer will not last forever. It has a terminal lifespan, and crashes are not only inevitable, but common. At any moment without notice, your hard drive could stop running, obliterating all of your important data and files. While the best back-ups are off-site to ensure restoration in the event of theft or natural disaster (think Katrina victims), you should minimally back-up your files to an external hard drive. How often do you require a back-up? Heavy users should conduct daily back-ups, while periodic users can get away with weekly or monthly back-ups. Similarly, heavy users should clone their entire drive, while recreational computer users can get away with saving a second or third copy of their documents, music, photos and other irreplaceable data.
2. **Use System Utilities.** Whenever you load software or delete files, you change things on your drive. Keep this clean and efficient by running a Disk Doctor, Disk Defrag or System Utility on a routine basis.
3. **Shut Down Properly.** Never click the power button to turn your computer off without properly shutting down the system first.
4. **Uninstall Programs.** Avoid dragging unused and unneeded programs into the trash. Instead, use the application's uninstall option to properly erase and clean up affiliated files.
5. **Block Viruses.** Invest in a reputable virus protection program and set it up to automatically scan your system on a routine basis.

6. Assess Downloads. If you don't know who the sender is or don't know what the file type is, don't download it. This is applicable to all file transfers, including email, instant messaging and web surfing. Keep in mind, viruses can initiate emails to everyone in the victim's address book. So even if you know the sender, don't assume its safe. A quick call to the sender can save thousands of dollars in computer damage.

While we're not all computer technicians, we should have a basic understanding of the system we're using. Once you get the hang of it, system maintenance is as easy as riding a bike.

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