

Computers Take Vacations Too!

10 simple tips to keep your computer systems running longer

Let's face it, in this day and age, someone telling you about 99.9% efficiency is a common thing. It also seems like an excellent reason to take on their services, just because they are so close to perfection, so how could you pass that up? The reality is 99.9% is not perfection. No one can promise you that. In fact, if 99.9% was the acceptable efficiency rating:

- 12 newborns would be given to the wrong parents every day.
- 3056 copies of tomorrow's Wall Street Journal would be missing one of the three sections.
- 103,260 income tax returns would be processed incorrectly during the year.
- A computer network will be down for 8 hours and 46 minutes per year (one full work day).

Based on this information, a company with annual revenue of \$20 million and 100 employees would lose \$42,000 for *one hour* of computer down time. If their computer does this 8 times in a year, the cost skyrockets to \$336,000 annually.

Now, don't lose hope yet. There are things that you can do to help ensure your computers run as smooth as if they were brand-new. These steps are what we call 'preventative maintenance', and they should be done on a regular basis

Preventive Maintenance should be done every 30 days for computers used in a business environment (40 hours a week, 4 weeks a month); computers in a home environment can perform these same functions every 90 days, since the average home computer isn't used as much as a business one. Let's look at some easy steps you should do to maintain your computers performance.

Scandisk – Windows systems come with a utility called Scandisk. This program checks the file structure of your hard drive to make sure data is being saved and deleted properly. Scandisk will also check the hard drive's "index". The "index" or "File Allocation Tables (FAT)" is where the computer looks to find the physical location of a file you requested. Scandisk is located under the Accessories -> System Tools in the start menu.

Defrag - Fragmentation occurs when files are deleted and new ones are put in their place. During the normal operation your computer may create temporary files then remove them, or cache files from web pages. The files are placed on the drive in a "first come first served" basis. In other words, when the hard drive is asked to save data it will start to look for the first available spot and begin saving. However, it may run into more data already saved to the drive, so the hard drive will place a marker to remind itself where the rest of the file is stored, and it will move to that empty spot to finish saving the file. Basically, the file you save is stored in small areas all over the hard drive. The Defrag program locates those files, and attempts to reassemble them back into one area on the drive. As a computer user you want to keep your drive as clean as possible, so load times can be reduced.

Disk Cleanup – Disk Cleanup, also located under System Tools in Accessories from the start menu, will remove temporary or unneeded files. This handy utility helps to keep your hard drive clean of useless files, and increases the amount of free space you have for your programs.

Systray – The System Tray contains all those icons in the lower right hand side of your windows desktop (next to the clock). Each icon represents a program loaded into memory to perform some kind of task. Some of them are small, like the little yellow horn to control your speakers' volume; others are just plain required, like antivirus software. But many don't follow either. Remove unneeded software from your computer; delete programs from the Startup menu under the Start Menu. You may want to bring in an engineer who can help you clean up and identify problematic software programs.

SpyWare- Spyware is a new term used to describe software that enters your system from websites or Trojans that track what you do online. They can cause your browser to open to certain websites, send info about you to outside systems, or cause conflicts with other software programs you have installed. Spyware applications are difficult to find and remove since they use stealth programming to keep them hidden from the user of the PC, but one company has created a program to help find and remove these malicious programs. You can find it at www.davenetworks.com/software.php.

Computer maintenance is very simple to do. The hardest thing involved with it is setting a schedule and maintaining the schedule. Keep track of the programs you install or uninstall, and make sure to follow up on the steps you take for your systems.

For more information, contact Nachman Networks at (240) 351-7510, (703) 599-5292 or info@davenetworks.com