

Maximize Computer Performance By Organizing and Cleaning out Your Hard Drive

Regardless if your home office is sparkling clean or you thrive among piles and chaos, there is one place that should consistently remain organized — your computer's hard drive. Your computer's hard drive is the engine of your computer and overloading it with documents or files you have created and/or saved can lead not only to frustration when trying to find them, but, like a car way overdue for a tune up, it also makes it difficult for your computer to run properly. In fact, continual maintenance of your computer's hard drive can help you avoid losing important files, computer freeze-ups or costly repair bills. The good news is that it is relatively easy to keep your computer cleaned and tuned.

Benefits to organizing your hard drive

- **Accelerate PC performance:** Locate inactive or rarely used files on your hard drive and delete or save them to removable media, like CD or DVD media. This will increase the amount of free space available on your hard drive and allow your computer to function more efficiently.
- **Increase security:** Distinguish which important personal files, such as financial documents, you want to backup and move them off of your computer. This will lower the risk of identity theft that can occur when personal information is saved on an Internet-connected hard drive. Also, teach your family some basics about file downloading to avoid risks of viruses.
- **Save money:** Identify large files such as digital photos and videos and save them on removable storage media. This can be less expensive than buying an additional hard drive for storage, plus you will have remove on your hard drive to begin new projects.
- **Organize your life:** Arrange your hard drive with organized files and folders to allow quicker and easier access to your digital information. This can save you time searching for important documents.

Organizational tips

- Create folders with specific titles and move all documents into the appropriate folders. Consider separating your files from your children's files.
- Develop a naming system and give each folder or document a specific name, steering clear of abbreviations you may not recognize later. Include the date the document was created or updated and explain the document's contents. You have 255 characters to name a file or folder, use them! Example: "Eng. 101 Catcher&Rye Book Review.04.13.04.doc."
- Avoid "default saving" of files to random places on your hard drive (e.g. last folder saved to). Take a few extra seconds to properly name the file and place it in the appropriate folder.
- Sort your files by file type, file size, alphabetically by name or numerically by date.
- Transfer large files, like photos and videos, or unused files to CD or DVD media. Or use a USB flash drive to easily transport very large files between computers.
- Consider using computer software to help organize your files, such as Norton PartitionMagic or Partition Commander. These programs help automate organization while protecting system files and optimizing your PC's performance.

Tips on cleaning out your hard drive

1. Disk Cleanup

Every day, your computer creates temporary files it does not need for the long term. These files can quickly accumulate and cause your computer to run less efficiently. To cleanup these files and create more room on your hard drive, use the Disk Cleanup tool for Windows or the Terminal function for Macs. Make sure the important files you need to keep are backed up to a CD or DVD first, or you could risk losing your files that were not saved correctly.

To begin disk cleanup:

- Windows users: Click Start – Programs – Accessories – System Tools – Disk Cleanup. Then check the box next to the drives you want cleaned (check Drive C to clean your hard drive).
- Mac users: Open Applications – Utilities – Terminal. Then type "sudo sh/etc/daily."

2. Defrag

What if, after a meal, instead of putting away pots, pans, utensils and plates in their usual places, you put each one in any cabinet that had space? It would take a lot longer to make the next meal! Your computer works something like this. To keep all connected files stored together, you need to "defrag" your computer. Defragging removes unnecessary files and moves the files you most frequently use to a more convenient storing space. Overall, it rearranges all files into a nice, orderly pattern on the spinning magnetic disk inside your computer.

3. Update Software

Your computer software is not error-free. Some “holes” appear after using it, making your computer vulnerable while you surf the Internet. Keeping your software up-to-date protects your computer and keeps it running smoothly. Microsoft provides a Windows Update tool found in the Help menu that makes it easier to check for operating system and Internet Explorer updates.

It is also important to update your anti-virus software. Most virus protection software products allow you to schedule automatic updates for your virus definitions, or visit your anti-virus software provider’s Web site where you can access a link to update your virus definitions.

4. Prevent Spyware and Adware

You may not know it, but you may have Spyware and/or Adware on your computer. These are forms of aggressive marketing packaged with no-cost software downloaded from the Internet. Spyware gathers information about the Web sites you visit, your browser, system information and your computer IP address (your computer’s identifying number), and transmits it to an “interested party” or third group who paid to have the downloaded software include the Spyware. Adware supports itself by displaying ads and tracking your movements while you are connected to the Internet. These downloaded files quickly take up significant hard drive space and reduce computer performance. If your computer has been attacked by either Spyware or Adware, consider your PC an open door to all of your personal information stored conveniently for anyone to access.

You may have Spyware or Adware on your computer if it:

- Frequently stops responding.
- Takes longer to open your desktop.
- Changes your Web browser home page by itself.
- Has an excessive amount of pop-ups.
- Automatically adds Web pages to your list of favorites.
- Automatically adds desktop icons to your desktop.

Spyware and Adware can be extremely difficult to remove from your computer. You can remove most by uninstalling the software it came with or you can purchase Spyware removal software such as SpySubtract to remove them from your computer.

To prevent Spyware and Adware:

- Purchase and use full versions of software that are not supported by advertising.
- Know the software before you install it! Carefully read license agreements and cancel installation if you do not understand or agree with it.
- Never click Yes on security warning windows. Close unwanted windows by clicking No or pressing “Alt” and “F4” together.