

# Tech talk: A slow PC?

By Chris Howard

Computer slowing down? Error messages taking over your life? Before you invest in expensive software, hardware upgrades or even a new PC, try these simple suggestions for cleaning up your system.

Remember, these suggestions should be harmless, but don't do anything you find uncomfortable. Also, as always, be sure to back up any information that is important to you before you start.

## Initial preparation

To find out how much space is used on your hard drive, double click on the My Computer icon on your desktop. Then right click on the icon for each hard drive and the pie chart will tell you how much disk space you have used and how much free space remains. Write down this information so that you can compare numbers later.

## STEP ONE: Review your Startup Programs

Something that can dramatically affect performance is the number of programs that load when you turn on your PC. (Lots of new software automatically inserts itself into your Startup tray when you install it.)

The more programs in the Startup group, the slower the start-up. Any open program will use the Random Access Memory (RAM) to some extent. The more programs using RAM, the slower your computer will run. However, just closing the program does not immediately release all the RAM, so you should keep as few programs open as possible.

To find out which programs are running in your start-up tray, click on the Start button at the lower left of your screen. Then choose Run and enter msconfig and then hit OK. A screen will appear with various tabs. Click on the Startup tab to see what is in your startup tray and remove the check in front of items you do not want to load when you start your PC. (Remember - when in doubt, don't! It is better to leave items you are unsure about than to remove them and find that they are needed.)

## STEP TWO: Clean out your Windows/temp directory

It is safe to delete all files from the Windows/temp directory that are more than a week old. Use Windows Explorer to go to the Windows folder, then the Temp folder. Click on View - Details, then click on View -- Arrange Icons -- By Date. Using your mouse, draw a box around any file that is more than a week old and then hit Delete.

## STEP THREE: Uninstall old applications (software programs)

If you have applications (software programs) on your computer that you no longer use, you can uninstall them using the uninstall program that came with the program. (Typically, you can find the Uninstall program by clicking on the Start button at the lower left of your screen, then click on Programs. Highlight the name of the application/program that you want to remove and look for an Uninstall listing in the program folder and follow directions.)

If there is no Uninstall program provided, double click on My Computer and use the Control Panel's Add/Remove Programs utility to uninstall it.

## STEP FOUR: Folders, documents & files

Over time, you can begin to accumulate folders, documents, and files that do nothing more than clog your hard drive. Open Windows Explorer and use the delete function under the File option at the top of the screen to remove items you no longer need.

## STEP FIVE: Empty your browser's cache

All Internet browsers toss files onto your hard drive as you move from Web site to Web site. The trouble is they leave them there in a folder or a series of folders called the Cache. The means you can literally have thousands of files on your disk that serve little or no purpose.

To deal with this problem, with your browser running, use these instructions to clear the Internet Explorer cache: Select Tools/Internet Options. In the dialog box that appears, click the Delete Files button under Temporary Internet Files on the General tab.

## STEP SIX: Empty the Recycle Bin

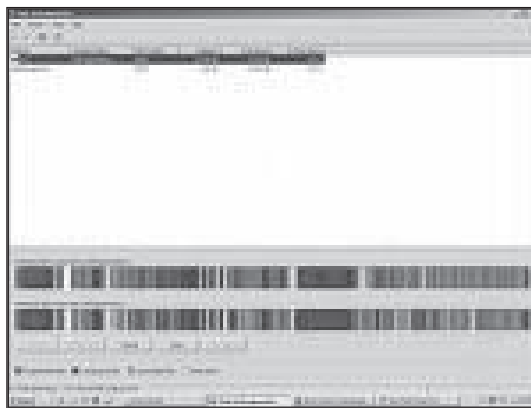
Open the bin before you empty it and check its contents. Is there something in the bin that you do not want to delete? Highlight it and click Restore. Remember that once you empty the Recycle Bin, you cannot easily retrieve those files.

## STEP SEVEN: ScanDisk

ScanDisk cleans your hard drive of the miscellaneous errors caused by software conflicts. Before running ScanDisk, be sure to close all applications, and turn off your screensaver. Click Start and then Run and type in: scandisk You will have an option of choosing Standard or a Thorough. If you have never done a scandisk before, choose the Thorough option.

## STEP Eight: Defrag

Your computer will function best if all the information it needs to access is in the same place. Unfortunately, programs do not always place items in the optimal places on your hard drive, and when you delete files and programs, your hard drive gets fragmented. To get all the information together again, run a Defrag after running a ScanDisk. Click Start -> Run and type in: defrag. Defrag will take awhile, so do it just before you go to lunch or overnight. Restart your machine after defragging and check your system performance - by now, you should see a noticeable difference.



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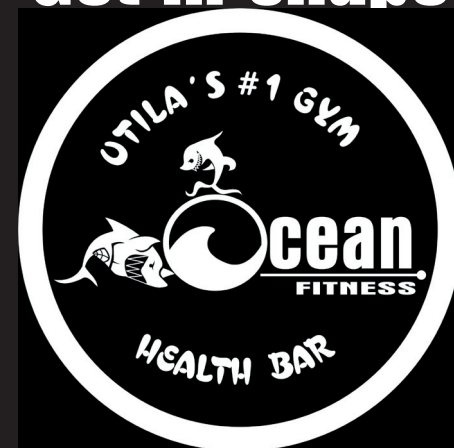
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