

Computer Group Notes

XP System Maintenance

Talk notes 4/1/08 by Robin Preston-Whyte

Hardware:

Clean out dust: If using compressed air canister to blast dust out of corners take care not to use on hot components. Also if blowing onto fan blades be sure to use a cotton bud to stop fan from spinning.

Check connections:

Clean screens: as appropriate. Avoid cleaners with Ammonia. 50/50 rubbing alcohol and water is good.

Note: CD pens must be used as ordinary marker pens use solvents which can destroy your data.

Reasons for doing maintenance

Lack of maintenance guarantees Impaired Performance, Clutter: Error messages: Infections: Chaos or Catastrophic failure.

Questions & Response

You should ask yourself “what will I do if I find I need to do a complete software re-installation or suffer a catastrophic disc failure at some point?”

Well

Prepare by identifying & organising your vital data.

Plan an appropriate backup strategy.

KEEP A NOTEBOOK. Record how and when you made any changes.

Things Can Get Worse

When changing things on the computer it is best to prepare for things going wrong by establishing a system restore point. These points are also saved automatically every few days so that if something goes wrong you can return to the earlier working configuration.

To save a current configuration click “Start”, “Help & Support” then “Undo changes to your Computer with System Restore”

Click “Create a restore point” and “next”. Enter a description and click “Create”.

Use the same procedure to restore the configuration to an earlier one.

Google, Site Advisor

The internet is a great source of information and help. Simply “Cut & Paste” mysterious error messages into Google to learn what others have done about it.

Unfortunately some sites can be malicious so it is helpful to download the free SiteAdvisor from McAfee.

This will flag google search results as OK (green) or

Suspect (red) or unsure (grey or yellow)

www.siteadvisor.com

Outlook Express

Email messages tend to accumulate and need to be culled occasionally.

With Inbox showing, click on the From in the from column heading. This will organise all the messages by sender. Delete all messages no longer required.

Where you have several emails on one topic, select (highlight) them, then click on the “Messages” Menu item and then click “Combine& Decode”. This will open all the selected messages as one message. This can then be cut & pasted into a word document or saved as a standalone “.eml” message that can be archived.

To make a new folder for U3A messages say, Select the “Local Folders” in the folders tree and then click the “File” menu item and then “New”, then New Folder”.

Name the new folder U3A. Messages can then be dragged from the “Inbox” to the new folder.

If all U3A messages come from a particular source you can create a “Rule” to automatically direct these messages to this folder. Select a U3A message in the Inbox, Click the “Message” menu item and then “Create Rule from Message” Use the suggestions to complete the rule.

Email Courtesies

Only use HTML for messages that require pictures and colour. Plain text is fine for most messages and is shorter and less likely to carry viruses.

When passing on warnings first check to see if it is a hoax at a website such as www.truthorfiction.com/ or www.snopes.com/

Also if passing on jokes or warnings to several people, first delete all the previous email recipients addresses and put all recipient addresses in the blind (BCC) To section. It is not fair to distribute other persons email addresses to all and sundry, probably including spammers address harvesters.

Old Programs

Clear out old programs that are no longer needed. Do this by Start > Control Panel > Add or Remove programs.

The “Change or remove programs” option will be displayed. Select the program for removal and click “Remove”

Click “Add/Remove Windows components” if you feel able to modify the windows configuration

System Administrative Tools

To make these tools more accessible do the following

RightClick Start > Properties > Start Menu tab > Select Start Menu tab > Customise > Advanced tab > Scroll down to “System Administrative Tools” and select the “Display on the all programs menu and the start menu” option.

The Admin tools can now be accessed by clicking Start and “Administration Tools” under the “Control Panel” link. These include:

1 Component Services:

Clicking the “Services (local)” will display the programs that are running in the background. If the “advanced” tab is selected a description of the service is displayed when an individual service is selected. Only practice will help you to identify suspect services.

2 Computer Management;

(i) Under “System Management” Click “Device Manager”. This will display the computer hardware configuration. If there a hardware problem has been detected this will be indicated by a Yellow ! RightClick on a device and select properties for more details and possibly reinstalling the driver software.

(ii) Under “Storage” click “Disk Manager” to view the current disc partition arrangements and sizes. Ideally you should have at least 2 partitions but depending on your computer use 1 can be fine.

(iii) Also under “Storage” click “Disk Defragmenter” This will bring up a relevant panel. Click “Analyse” to see the extent of file fragmentation on the disk. The colours are explained. Click “Defragment” to defrag the disc. This tidies up the files on the disc and should be done monthly for modest users. This exercise can take some time (hours?).

3 Performance;

This option will bring up a live chart of the computer activity.

Disk Cleanup

After time your disk will be full of abandoned temporary files, downloaded web pages, cookies and so on.

The disk cleanup utility will help to get rid of a lot of it.

Go to Start.> AllPrograms>Accessories>SystemTools>DiskCleanup

Choose disk C: to cleanup and you will see the various categories of file that can be eliminated and the disk space that would be recovered. Look at all the options. Only delete those you feel comfortable about letting go initially.

CCleaner

A popular alternative to the Microsoft tools is CCleaner. This can be downloaded from CCleaner.com (free but if you like it they depend on voluntary donations).

Install the program and tick the option to allow you to open it from a right click on the recycle bin. Once installed, open the program and do a disk cleanup as before.

Click the "Registry" button and check for inconsistencies in the registry.

Click the "Tools" button. This will allow you uninstall programs you no longer require and also stop programs that are automatically started from the registry.

Click the "Options" button to edit the program settings and also to exercise control over which cookies you want to eliminate or keep.

Startup Programs

Click "Start" then "Run". Type msconfig into the box and click OK.

Click the "Startup" tab to see a list all the programs and services that are automatically set running at startup. I was able to identify one that operated my scanner which I only use occasionally and so disabled it.

It is not easy to interpret this information but it helps to be aware of what is involved.

Recycle Bin

Finally remember to empty the recycle bin periodically. It can get very full.

Recovery Strategy

My backup strategy is divide my hard disc into 2 partitions so that it looks like 2 disks C: and D: All my data, ie. Documents, pictures, etc are stored here and periodically copied to an external backup disc.

C: contains all the programs and some settings but it can always be reconstructed from the original disks.

That is inconvenient so I used Acronis True Image to take a backup image of C: when it only had the new and activated XP and Office software. I then took a 2nd image with printer driver and other favourite software installed.

Now when I think I think I need a proper cleanup I reload C: from the image and effectively get a new computer.

Free Software

MWSnap

Easy to use program for taking screen clips suitable for using in powerpoint

www.mirekw.com/winfreeware/mwsnap.html

SiteAdvisor

Addin for Internet Explorer, etc for vetting web sites

www.siteadvisor.com

PCInspector

File recovery

www.pcinspector.de

Free Commander

Old style file manager which opens two folders at a time making it to drag and drop from one to the other
www.freecommander.com

Infrarecorder

Easy to use CD/DVD burner

<http://infrarecorder.sourceforge.net>

CCleaner

See above

www.ccleaner.com

Media Player Classic

Simple alternative to Windows Media player that caters for more formats

http://www.download.com/Media-Player-Classic/3000-2139_4-10518777.html

Picasa

Picture editor and organiser.

<http://picasa.google.com>