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Introduction

How long have you owned a PC? 3 Years? 5 Years? 10 or 15 Years? Ever since Windows was introduced in the early 90s and people started bringing home computers patched together with random parts, they've been having trouble getting those computers to run as fast and as effectively as possible. The problem is simple – there are too many pieces of hardware and too many programs vying for attention at once and when you don't optimize them regularly, they tend to get in each other's ways.

The current brand of Windows is one of the worst yet. It has so many options to make your computing experience easier that it tends to forget that most people just want it to be faster. The worst part is that your computer doesn't need to be like that. There are dozens of options out there that are aimed at helping you make your computer faster and more efficient. However, they all tend to cost an arm and a leg.

That's where this guide is going to come in. For the measly few dollars you spent on this guide, you're going to boost the speed of your computer by up to 150% and you won't spend another dime doing it. Using all completely free software and simple actions in Windows, we're going to turn down some unnecessary resource hogging, boost your computer's response time and make it all happen on a regular basis without having to worry about anything coming loose in the future. Imagine how much you'd spend for the same service if you took it into a professional? Those guys cost as much as \$200 an hour, just to look at your computer, let alone actually fix anything. And you thought car mechanics were bad.

If you've never done anything other than surf the Internet and write down recipes in Word on your computer, don't worry either. I've been helping men and women with less knowledge than that get their computers up and running for more than 10 years now – and I'm going to make sure that you have the same service and attendance that you would get if you paid some guy a big hourly fee to stand over you shoulder and help.

It's time to turn your increasingly sluggish hunk of metal and plastic into a blazing fast technological wonder. You ready? Let's make your PC a whole lot faster!

Computer Terms to Know

Before we get started, it's probably a good idea to review a few key terms that can help you when sorting through menus, buying new parts or taking panels off of your machine. Don't hesitate to do a little extra research either. The website at http://www.computerplug.com/glossary_of_terms.php has a great listing of common computer terms with easy to understand descriptions of each. Here is a rundown of all the terms we will use in this book as well.

- **Windows Vista** – The sixth full version of Windows released as a full PC operating system.

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Released in 2006, Windows Vista will soon be replaced by Windows 7.

- **Windows XP** – One of the most stable and popular versions of Windows. Windows XP was released in 2002 and lasted until being supplanted by Vista in 2006/07. The system has fewer features but is much faster.
- **USB Flash Drive** – A form of portable storage that allows for small, pinkie finger sized drives that can hold up to 32 GB of storage space. Perfect for backing up important files for school, work or family.
- **Portable Hard Drive** – A small, notebook sized hard drive that can be carried in a pocket but that can hold as much data as a standard computer's hard drive. Perfect for performing full backups of an entire computer.
- **GB** – Gigabyte. Equal to 1000 Megabytes of data. Most hard drives are measured in these.
- **TB** – Terabyte. Equal to 1000 Gigabytes of data. The higher end hard drives can have more than one TB at times.
- **Virus** – A malicious piece of software that can interact with your computer in ways that will harm or take files from you.
- **Malware** – Any form of unwanted third party software that causes damage to your computer or was not permitted by yourself for installation.
- **Adware** – Malware that will display pop up ads or steal your personal information for the purposes of sending you spam or additional ads.
- **Spyware** – Hidden software that downloads to your computer and relays any number of pieces of data back to its creator including personal data, email addresses, or how you use your computer.
- **Disk Space** – The amount of GBs that your hard drive can hold.
- **Computer Memory** – The measurement of physical memory that your computer can use to open and store software programs as you are using them.
- **RAM** – Random Access Memory. The hardware that is used to provide Computer Memory for using various software programs.
- **CPU** – Central Processing Unit. The core processor that actually performs tasks in your computer. A CPU will run through all of the 0s and 1s your computer software and processes are written in and execute the actions requested.
- **C:** - The C: hard drive is the main drive your computer works with. Windows starts with C: because originally, A: and B: were used for floppy drives, no longer utilized in home computers.
- **Taskbar** – The bottom right bar on a Windows Desktop where software can run in the background when necessary. Most software in the taskbar is unnecessary.
- **System Recovery** – A process first made available in Windows XP that allows you to revert your computer to its state a few days or weeks prior. A useful tool for turning back your PC to before

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a problem occurred.

- **Web Browser** – A software program used in conjunction with your PC to allow you access to the Internet.
- **Driver** – The software file that allows your PC to operate and utilized the hardware installed on it.
- **Firewall** – The software guard between your computer and outside sources. A firewall will act as a gateway to your personal files and hard drives from online sources, blocking unwanted downloads as well as unwanted access from outside users.
- **Registry** – The central database of information about the programs installed on your computer.
- **TCP/IP** – A protocol used to convert the packets sent over the Internet to your computer into the data you are viewing.
- **Page File** – A software tool that allows your computer to more quickly index and use a hard drive. Multiple page files are useful in that they allow you to run more than one hard drive or multiple partitions on the same hard drive without them slowing your computing speed.
- **Defragmenting** – Defragmenting your hard drive gathers up loose bits of data that have been scattered after deletion and puts them back together or removes them completely. Over time, a computer that becomes too fragmented can lead to long periods of time in trying to access a file or install a new program.
- **BoD (blue screen of death)** – A blue screen with white lettering outlining a fatal error that caused a computer to crash. The blue screen of death usually proceeds larger, systematic computer failure and needs to be taken seriously. Always back up your files after you see a BoD before trying to fix it.

Part 1 - Getting Started

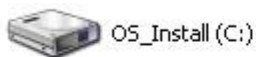
When you start working on your computer, you're going to see a whole lot of new phrases, terms and other information that may be just a little over your head at first. I'll do my best to help you keep up. But remember as well that every step in this guide has been written to help keep you on step behind me as we put your PC into the stratosphere. By following these steps, you don't *need* to understand every term, though I do recommend trying to learn as much as you can so that you can do these things again on your own and share them with other people.

The first thing you're going to want to do before you even start to get your computer running too much faster is to do some basic cleaning and maintenance. There are some tweaks and tricks that you can perform on any computer to help boost the speed as well as to prep it to be run through with a fine tooth comb. These steps are going to be the simplest and I promise you that they each cost nothing as you get your computer started:

Backing Up Your Computer

Before we do anything that could potentially harm or cause problems for your computer, you need to step back and do a little work to make sure your files are safe. Anything important that you may have needs to be stored on an external hard drive, a USB flash drive or DVDs. Depending on how much content you have on your PC, I recommend you go out and buy a small personal hard drive for doing this. They come in sizes between 100 GB and 1 TB (1000 GB) and usually cost between \$50 and \$250 depending on how big of a hard drive you want. Alternately, if you don't want to pay that much money, you can buy DVDs and burn your data to them then load it back up.

Hard Disk Drives



Devices with Removable Storage



Other

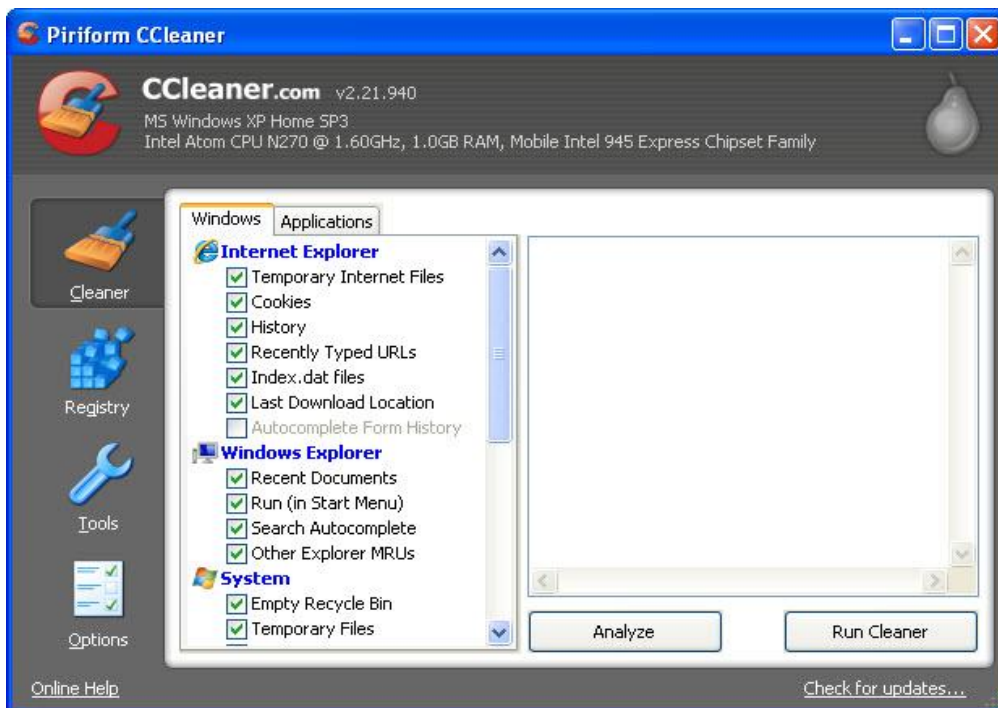
Just keep in mind that you cannot go back and get your files if something goes wrong. Don't think that anything we're going to go over will innately cause your files problems, but consider what can happen if those files are infected with a virus or some form or malware that you remove. When you remove

that software, you will cause your computer to freeze up or even for your files to disappear from your view. This is not something you want to have to deal with. Often times those files can be recovered, but you'll need to contact someone at a computer repair shop to help you do so.

Clean Your Computer's Hard Drive

Step one is to go through and clean your computer of all the unwanted little bits and pieces. My software choice for this task is CCleaner. It's faster, more efficient and best of all cheaper (it's free) than any other software tool out there. It works to optimize your system and promote privacy on your computer by removing all unused files from your system, freeing up disk space and helping Windows run a bit faster. It also removes any unwanted traces of your Internet History and dumps the cache (files stored on your computer when you visit a website or open a program) for you. It runs in about 5 seconds so it doesn't take forever to go through and it's going to be relatively easy to get started.

1. Download CCleaner from the official website at <http://www.ccleaner.com>
2. Choose the SLIM version of the software as it is free and does plenty for a home computer.
3. Download and install the software and then run it when it is installed. You shouldn't need to choose any of the options or do anything additional. CCleaner will do its thing and cleanse your computer nicely, then you can move on to the next step.



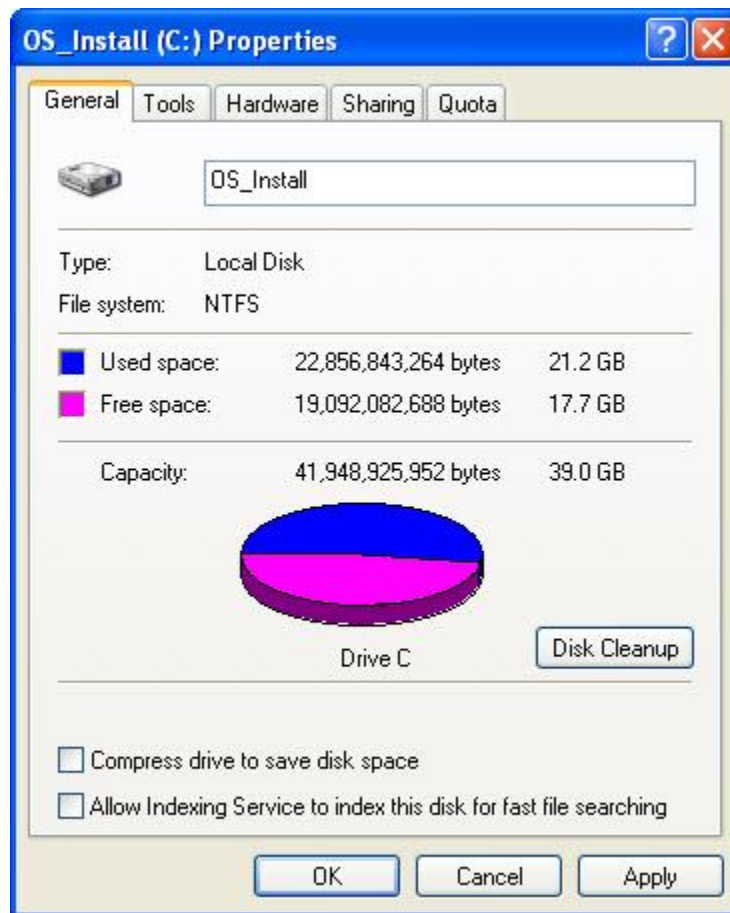
The CCleaner software is relatively easy to use and while there are other options out there, I don't recommend you try to sort through all their options without first giving this one a shot. If you have need of some advanced features, such as for RAID hard drives or for multiple partitions CCleaner should still handle the cleanup process nicely.

Turning Off Unneeded Windows Effects

One of the things that Windows Vista touted the most when it was released was the inclusion of two resource hogging tools that you really don't need.

The first is the indexing service that allows you to search through your files quickly. What happens is that Windows will constantly be indexing your files, including any new files you create for the life of your computer. This indexing takes a huge chunk of system memory and resources to complete and that means that anywhere from 10% to 20% of your computer's memory (what allows it to do multiple processes quickly) is being used by something you don't really need. Most people don't have enough files to even need to search through them, let alone have them indexed. The same service is present in Windows XP as well, though it doesn't drain nearly as much resources as the newer versions. To turn indexing off, do the following:

1. Click the Start Menu
2. Click the Computer or My Computer Tab
3. You will see a listing of your hard drives. Right click on your main hard drive (Almost always the C: drive)
4. Click on Properties when the menu pops up for your hard drive.
5. Located at the bottom of the screen that pops up is an option to have the hard drive indexed for fast searching (the wording varies in different versions of Windows, but mentions fast searching).
6. Uncheck this box to turn off indexing.
7. Click Apply and when the pop up menu appears asking to apply it to the [C:\Subfolder](#) and files, click okay.
8. If any further pop up menus appear, press ignore on them. You may need to restart your computer after making this change before continuing.



There are good reasons to leave indexing on for some individuals and don't feel like your computer is going to slug along if you don't turn it off. Writers, programmers, and accountants of all sorts will use the search feature often to keep their files in line and having the indexing service on can be quite helpful. But if you're not going to be using the indexing service for heavy lifting, keep it off.

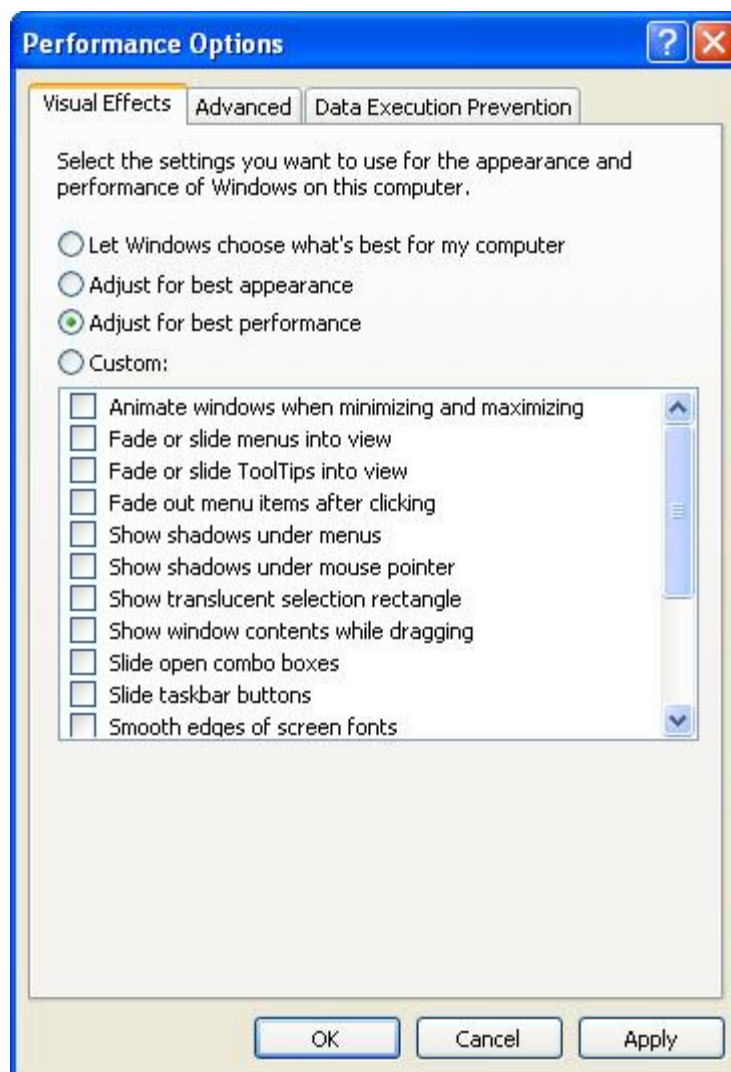
The second service you want to turn off is the bevy of visual effects that Windows comes with these days. No one needs these additional effects. They look cool, they remind you of why you paid an additional \$150 for the newest Windows and they slow your computer down massively. There's a reason that new computers need to have tremendously higher resources to run the newest versions of Windows – the operating system tries to look fancier than it needs to and as a result slows everything down. Here is how to turn off those slick pop ups, see through windows, and unnecessary sliding effects that Windows now comes with.

1. Click on the Start menu
2. Right click on the Tab for “My Computer” or “Computer”
3. Select Properties from the Drop Down Menu

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4. Click on Advanced in the tabs located with this menu. For XP this will be a tab at the top of the screen. For Vista, it is a link located on the left side of the menu.
5. Click the Performance button located at the top of this screen.
6. Click on Settings within this section and switch the option there to "Adjust for Best Performance"
7. Click Apply to complete the process and then restart your computer to set it all up.
8. If you find that some of the features you actually liked or used are now gone, you can go into the menu and manually turn on select visual effects. I don't recommend it because even the smallest effect can take away from your computer's ability to run properly, but it's still better than turning them all on.



Windows XP is not known for having the same issues with visual effects as the newer two versions of Windows, in particular Windows Vista. The problem with Vista is that that software was built on

hardware that was ahead of what most people own yet. If your computer is more than four or five years old, good luck getting it to run properly. However, if you turn the effects off as listed above, you'll have a much easier time using what your computer comes with. For those interested in the newer Windows 7 machines starting to appear, this is not as big of a deal. Not only is Windows 7 much more versatile at managing memory use, the hardware it is built on is much more in line with what people currently own.

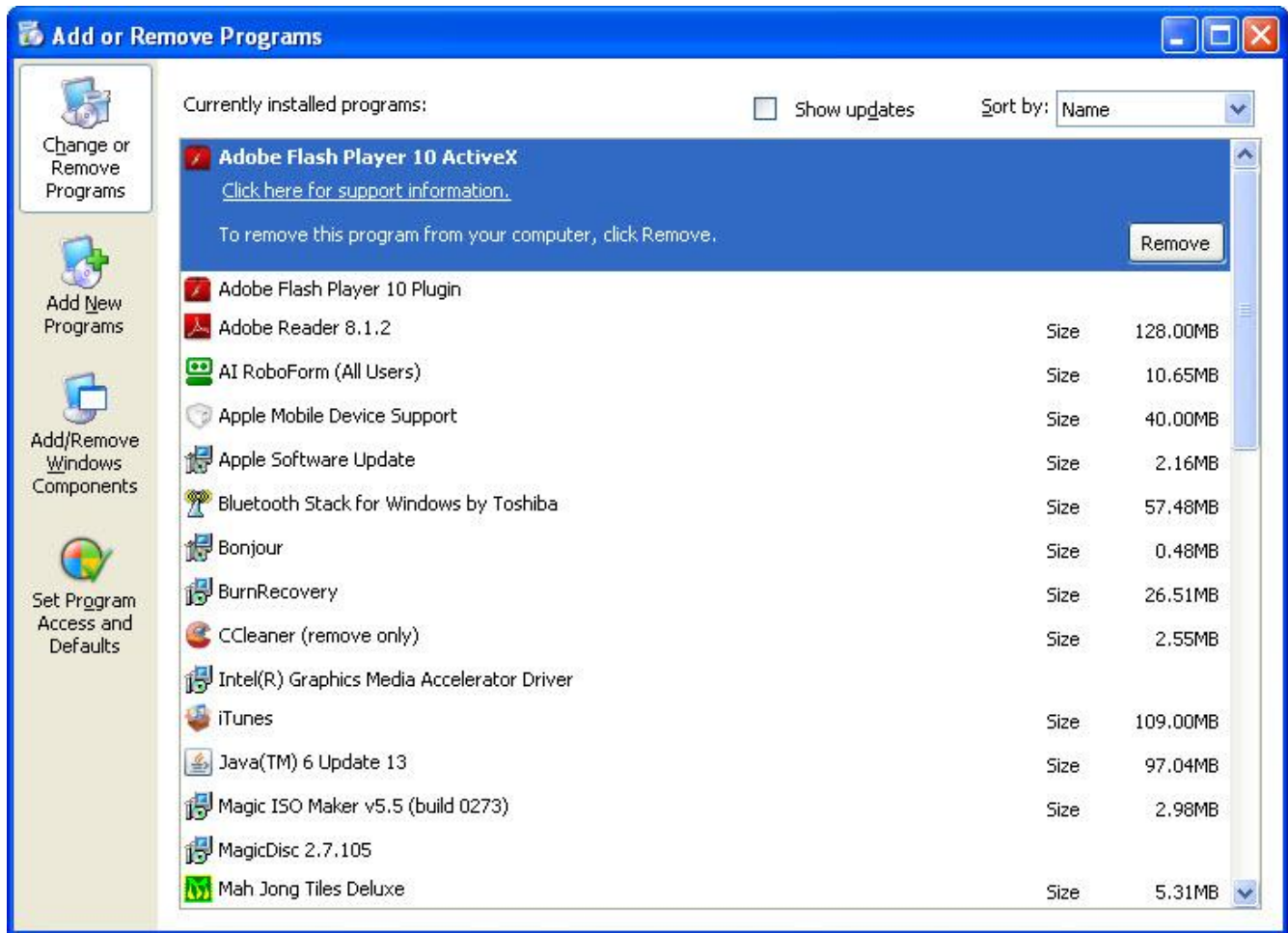
Removing the Unwanted Software

You know all those programs that pop up when you turn your computer on. Maybe it takes 10 minutes to boot up your PC, all the while you're cursing it, you see program after program pop up and go to the taskbar in the bottom right corner. Those are all pieces of software that were installed for you before you bought your computer or that you have installed since then. They boot up when your computer turns on and they probably just sit there and waste resources. Even though you cannot see any of them, they all use resources to operate in the background, including CPU (the processing power or ability to perform tasks on your computer) and RAM (the memory your computer has that allows it to load up and keep software open). To effectively speed up your computer, you need to go in and remove every piece of software that you don't use – trust me, there will be a lot of them.

1. Click on the Start menu
2. Click on the Control Panel button
3. Click on the Add or Remove Programs button located there.
4. It might take a few moments for the entire list of programs on your computer to populate – wait for them all to appear before you select anything.
5. Once they are loaded, look through the list and find anything that you never use, you don't remember installing, or that you would rather not have. They waste disk space and they are slowing your computer down (especially the stuff in your task bar). Check that task bar too and make sure you don't miss anything down there.
6. Highlight a program and click on “Uninstall” in the options bar there. If you are ever unsure of what a piece of software is, where it came from or what it does, look it up on Google. There should be nothing in here that will break your computer if you remove it. That being said, you still don't want to remove anything you use or that you paid good money for.
7. Your computer will often need to restart between uninstallations of certain pieces of software. Additionally, some programs can take a few minutes to uninstall. Just wait for them to complete and don't get impatient.

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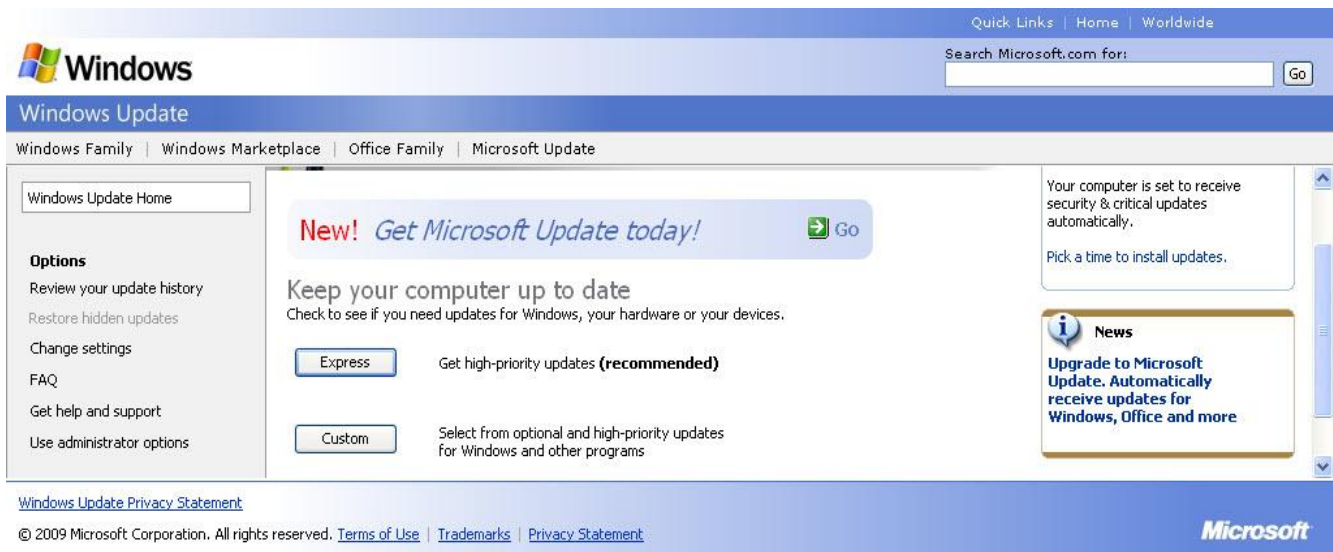
If you are unsure about a piece of software, look it up on Google to see what it is used for. Also make sure to check with the other members of your family if anyone else uses your computer. The last thing you want to do is to delete software that others need.

Updating Windows

Windows a very volatile system. It has less to do with the fact that Microsoft makes buggy software than it does with the fact that it is the main system on 90% of the world's PCs, which means there are millions of hackers and virus writers out there finding ways to bog your computer down. That said, not everything in Windows that doesn't work right is due to bad software or a hacker. It could just be a software issue that hasn't been updated yet. In any of the three cases, a Windows update can severely increase the efficiency of your computer. Ideally, you have automatic updates turned on and your computer is already up to date. However, if you do not, you need to turn those updates on.

1. Click on your Start menu.

2. Go to the Programs Menu located there.
3. At the very top of the Programs menu you will find “Windows Update”
4. Click on Windows Update and you will be taken to Microsoft's Update website. You may need to authenticate your machine if you have never updated Windows before. If you do, just follow Microsoft's instructions.
5. When the option between “Express” and “Custom” appears, select Custom from the menu.
6. Now, you should see a listing of the most recent updates available from Windows. Choose all of them, and install them now.
7. It is possible that a new update for Windows can actually cause you more problems when it is installed. If this happens, you should use the System Recovery to turn back your computer to before the update. This is as very rare problem though and most likely if there is an issue after an update, it is another piece of software and not Windows.



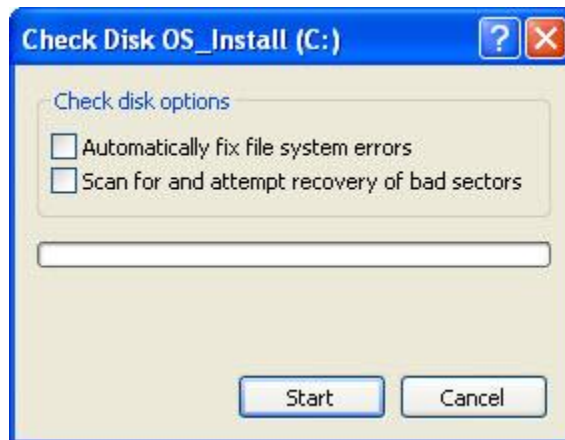
While having Windows Automatic Updates on is a good practice, you may also want to occasionally check the update lists manually. There are a number of updates that are not considered mandatory that can help your computer run faster. For this reason, you should have a steady stream of Windows checks each week.

Checking Your Hard Drive

Your hard drive is a very volatile place. When you think you are deleting a file, you don't actually do anything other than tell the hard drive that it is allowed to write over the space that that file was using. What this means is that all of your deleted files may be fragmented and scattered across different parts of your hard drive at any given time. When these fragments start to build up, errors can occur that will cause your hard drive to run slower, files to become bogged down, or in the worst case a major error on your hard drive to occur. To keep these things from happening, you should periodically check your hard drive for errors – something that is possible with the Check Disk tool in

Windows.

1. Click on your Start menu.
2. Click on the Computer or My Computer tab.
3. Choose your hard drive (the C: drive is likely your main drive) and right click it.
4. Choose the Properties option from the drop down menu that appears.
5. Click on the Tools Tab located in the properties menu for your hard drive.
6. Choose 'Check Now' from the box titled "Error Checking"
7. Choose both options that appear in the "Check Disk Options" pop up box.
8. Click the start button.
9. Click the Schedule Disk Check box that pops up.
10. Restart your computer and it will run a Check Disk
11. This will take longer than normal to complete a start up. Expect between 10 and 20 minutes to go through your entire hard drive and check it for errors. If an error is present, your computer may attempt to fix it, which will take even longer to complete. Don't interrupt or turn off your computer. Go grab a snack and watch TV for a few minutes, then come back. It's hard to tell how long this will take, but you need to let it run its course.



The Check Disk feature in the modern versions of Windows (XP and Vista) is very simple and runs in a few minutes. If that check disk feature slows down at all though, make sure to be patient. Some times, when a particularly messy part of the hard drive cannot be fixed, the check disk feature can take a great deal more time to complete its process. By restarting or hitting buttons, you can cause additional errors. However, if it goes for too long, there may be errors that cannot be fixed. If this is the case, abort the check disk and restart your computer. You may need to back up your files and reformat your hard drive (covered later in this guide).

Speeding Up Your Browsers

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There are some features in browsers that, while they are supposed to make your Internet browsing speed faster, only slow down your overall computing experience. The first of these features is the use of Temporary Internet Files. By default, browsers store certain files in their caches that can be used when you logon next time to save time, remembering who you are, what images were there and what your passwords are. However, these files can take up huge chunks of space and slow your computer down significantly. The process for turning Temporary Internet Files off varies from browser to browser. I recommend you use Firefox so I'll show you how to do it in Firefox's settings menus:

1. Open Firefox
2. Click on Tools
3. Click on Options
4. Turn off all Temporary Files and Saving options

In addition, by visiting the Privacy Tab in the options menu, you can have Firefox delete all of your files and personal information whenever you turn off your browser. I recommend you do this so that you don't have to manually delete these files every week or so. They will not build up that fast in a single session and will never exceed how much they're allowed to store.

Remove Extra Icons from Your Desktop

Most people don't realize, but the more icons that are on your desktop, the slower that desktop will load. This can severely slow down how long it takes for your computer to start up each day and can cause a great deal of problems when you go back and forth between multiple programs quickly. To keep this from becoming a problem, make sure to delete any unused icons and to move all of your Word documents and Spreadsheets into your Documents folder. The more organized your Desktop is, the faster your computer will be able to process Desktop actions (which is pretty much everything you do).

Update Your Drivers

Most people assume that when they install the disk that comes with their new hardware or as soon as they get their computers home and set them up that they are going to come out of the box working as they are supposed to. However, much like Windows, the pieces that make up your computer will regularly need to be updated with new software that tells your computer how to use that piece of equipment. These are called drivers and while many drivers don't often need to be updated, others need to be changed and updated every few months to stay up to date. Here are the drivers you will most commonly need to update:

- Video Card
- Audio Card
- Network Adapters

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- Printers



You should also periodically check things like your monitor and motherboard drivers, though more often than not, these kinds of things don't need updating. To find information about what hardware is currently installed on your computer do the following:

1. Open the Start menu
2. Right Click on "Computer" or "My Computer"
3. Go to Properties
4. Click on Devices or Device Manager
5. Find the type of device you are looking for
6. Right click on the device when you find it and go to settings
7. Take the name of the hardware

Once you have the hardware name, you can visit the official company website and just search for the hardware in their search box. Nine times in ten, the search will yield a page where you can download and install the newest drivers.

Part 2 - Locking Down Your Computer

Once you have cleared up some of the simpler problems that can often cause your computer to slow down, you need to step back and look at the safety of your computer and its files. Imagine everything you do each day. You might check your bank account, pay bills, review your work files, check multiple email addresses. Your children might even be online, using their own personal information for things like social networking. These are all tasks that provide information to certain sources that you would rather keep safe. For that reason, and to keep your computer running quickly, you need a trio of software options that will stop viruses from getting on your computer, while also blocking and removing Spyware and Adware.

Cutting Back on Security Suites

I'm going to recommend to anyone that has a computer with any kind of need for virus protection that they get something simple, low on memory usage and most importantly free. Unfortunately, most new computers come with huge, bloated software suites that try to do everything and slow down your computer tremendously. Additionally, this software will often times get in the way of other software, causing games to crash, Internet applications to freeze and memory to overload too quickly.

The easiest way to handle this is to just delete the software completely and reinstall something simple such as the options I'm going to give you below. If you decide to go with something different, make sure that you research first and make sure that the software is not only free (paid antivirus and anti-spyware can be pricey) but that it doesn't eat all of your resources up whenever you boot your computer.

Virus Protection

Viruses tend not to cause that many problems any more, other than severely slowing your computer or getting into your files. However, there are many viruses that will also remove personal information, share your data with others, give them control over your PC, or simply mess with you. Virus protection is more important than ever. It will not only maintain your computer's speed by ensuring nothing gets into important files, it will keep your files safe.

The screenshot shows the AVG Anti-Virus Free Edition website. At the top, there is a logo for AVG Free Anti-Virus, stating it is trusted by 80 million users. A search bar and a language dropdown set to 'Worldwide (English)' are visible. Navigation tabs include 'Get Protection', 'Help', and 'About Us'. Below these are three main tabs: 'Homepage', 'Get basic protection', and 'Get complete Internet security'. The main content area features a heading: 'Download AVG Anti-Virus Free Edition - trusted by 80 million users'. Below this, it states: 'Antivirus and antispyware protection for Windows available to download for free'. A 'NEW!' announcement highlights 'LinkScanner® Active Surf-Shield checks web pages for threats at the only time that matters - when you're about to click that link.' A list of features includes: Award-winning antivirus and antispyware, Real-time safe internet surfing and searching, Quality proven by 80 million of users, Easy to download, install and use, Protection against viruses and spyware, and Compatibility with Windows 7, Windows Vista and Windows XP. A note specifies: 'AVG Anti-Virus Free Edition download and installation is only available for single computer use for home and non commercial use.' At the bottom, there is a section titled 'Choose your protection level' with tabs for 'Extra protection' and 'System requirements'. Below this is a table comparing three products:

| | AVG Anti-Virus Free | AVG Anti-Virus Pro | AVG Internet Security |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Antivirus & Antispyware | | NEW VERSION | NEW VERSION |

For those seeking a good, free Antivirus software option, I recommend you go with AVG Antivirus Free Edition. Unlike many free Antivirus software, this one is written to provide full features for home computers. The paid edition is for those with work computers or enterprise needs. Another good free Antivirus program that I have seen a lot of computers running is avast! Home Edition. This software runs quietly in the background, updates once a day and never causes any problems with your other software. It also runs quite well on Windows 7 and 64-Bit machines.

AVG Antivirus – <http://free.avg.com>

Avast Antivirus - <http://www.avast.com/eng/download-avast-home.html>

Spyware/Adware

The second thing you need to protect against is Spyware and Adware. These two things are the most simple forms of viruses out there. They will come from infected websites, install on your computer and then start sharing your information with third parties. Most often they are used to spam you, but sometimes they can be much more malicious. Additionally, you may find that when you are infected, your computer runs infinitely slower. With enough Spyware or Adware on your system, your computer will bog down to extremely low speeds, reducing your computing power to nil.

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The screenshot shows the Lavasoft website homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Lavasoft logo on the left and a language selector set to "English" on the right. Below the navigation bar are several menu items: Home, Products, Support, Security Center, Company, and Special Offers. The main content area features a large banner for "Ad-Aware Anniversary Edition" with the tagline "The World's Most Popular Anti-Malware". The banner includes an image of the software box and a group of people working on a laptop. To the right of the banner are three buttons: "Get it now!", "QUICK BUY Ad-Aware Plus", "QUICK BUY Ad-Aware Pro", and "DOWNLOAD Ad-Aware Free". Below the banner are three columns of content: "Home" (Privacy protection for sensitive data), "Business" (Securing your company data), and "Non-Profit" (Strict budgets should not mean reduced security). To the right of these columns is a "Want to renew your license?" section with a "Log-in to the Support Center" link. Below the "Home" column is an "Industry News" section with two articles: "Jul 24 : Information Week: Rising Internet Fraud, Darknets On Agenda At Black Hat" and "Jul 24 : Business Week: HSBC Fined Over Faulty Data Protection". To the right of the "Industry News" section is a "The Ballot Box" section with the text "While playing online games (like MMORPGs):" and a radio button option "I have come across fraud or malware". To the right of the "Ballot Box" section is a "Top Threats" section listing five threats: W32/Sality.Y, Worm/KillAV.GR, Worm/Netsky.AB, Worm/Mytob.CD, and Worm/Bagle.FJ. Below the "Top Threats" section is a "Threat Check" section with two links: "Product Updates" and "Malware Labs Blog".

The best option for someone seeking a solution for their Adware and Spyware is to go with Ad Aware SE Personal. Like the antivirus, the home version of this software is free and works as well, if not better than 90% of the options out there. You need to be sure that you have this software fully installed and that it loads up with your computer each time you start.

Ad Aware SE Personal – http://www.lavasoft.com/products/ad_aware_free.php

Firewall Protection

You have probably heard of a firewall because Windows comes with one by default. Unfortunately, the Windows firewall is not that great and is easy to compromise. You need a more powerful, more highly charged firewall solution and that comes in the form of ZoneAlarm Basic Free Edition. While the other two programs will remove and block the software and viruses from infecting your computer, Zonealarm keeps them from ever getting into your air space to start with.

ZONEALARM Free Firewall

Download Basic Firewall

START DOWNLOAD NOW

Provides basic two-way firewall protection

- Blocks inbound and outbound traffic threats
- Makes you invisible to hackers

OR Get ZoneAlarm® Internet Security Suite Full-Version Free!



- Advanced two-way firewall protection
- Blocks viruses and spyware
- Protects against identity theft
- Filters and stops email spam
- Credit monitoring services

Get It Free 

Reg: \$49.95

How does TrialPay work?

- 1** Start TrialPay checkout

- 2** Pick a TrialPay offer

- 3** Get ZoneAlarm® Internet Security Suite FREE!


A good firewall also needs to be able to make exceptions easily while not slowing down your other online computing needs. If you have a good firewall but it turns your internet connection into a crawl, what good is it? For that reason, Zonealarm is a good choice.

Zonealarm Free Firewall - <http://www.zonealarm.com/security/en-us/zonealarm-pc-security-free-firewall.htm>

Part 3 - Faster Boot Times

One of the things I hear complained about the most is boot up time, especially in Vista computers. The problem isn't necessarily Windows of course – it is often just that a new computer has been used too much and some things have built up. You can make the process as much as two times faster than its default time just by tweaking some things. You've probably already made it faster with the work we've done. Now it's time to make it actually fast.

Using Bootvis

This program will allow you to use Microsoft's Optimization tools when you want to rather than on the scheduled times that are often too far apart (or that your computer is off during). You will notice that your computer runs much faster after using this.

1. Open the program and find the main menu
2. Click on Trace
3. Click on Boot and Driver Delays
4. The Trace Repetitions screen will now pop up
5. Choose Okay from the menu
6. Your computer will restart now and the Bootvis scanner will start up to analyze your computer.
7. When done, click on Trace and “optimize system”
8. Restart you computer again.

This should be done about once a week to keep your boot times up. You should already have a weekly backup schedule to keep your computer backed up onto an outside hard drive, so just do it then with other weekly maintenance.

Bootvis - <http://www.softpedia.com/get/Tweak/System-Tweak/BootVis.shtml>

Registry Repair

Your registry is a very important part of your computer, acting as the central storage location for all information about programs, hardware, and the operating system that runs your PC. However, because it is constantly being edited and revised, it can quickly become messy and distorted. Too many changes, a stray program from uninstallation or a malicious virus can all cause major problems with your registry that will severely slow down how fast your computer can operate.

There are a number of registry repair programs out there that can help go in and remove all old, fractured information from the registry though while restoring your computer to its lustrous finish. The best one that I know of is Easy Cleaner. You will find that the website contains detailed instructions on using this software along with a huge list of possible problems you may have. There are other options out there, but keep in mind that many paid registry cleaners are just stripped down versions of higher end software and freeware. You can usually get everything you need out of a good free program.

Easy Cleaner - <http://personal.inet.fi/business/toniarts/ecleane.htm>

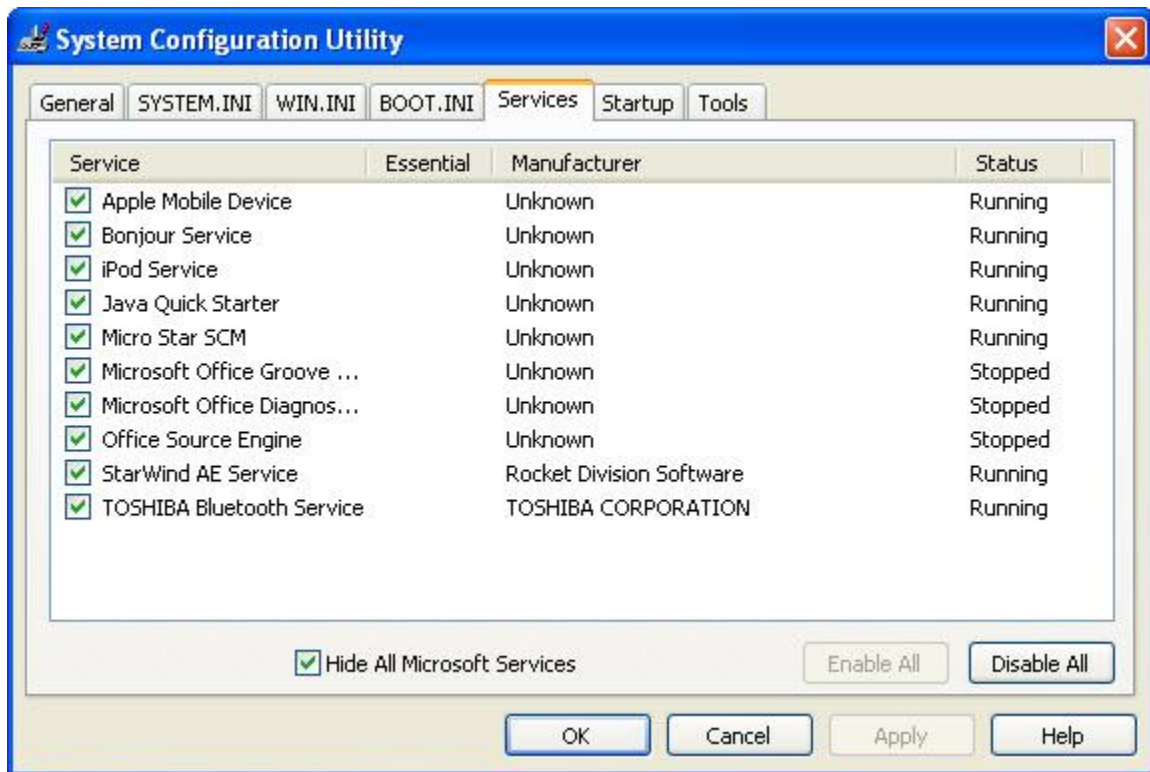
Clearing Out Startup Menus

The startup menu can severely slow down your computer over time, especially if you get a few dozen programs crowded in there. The more of these you can remove, the faster your computer will start and the more memory you'll have on hand more often. Here is how to make this work:

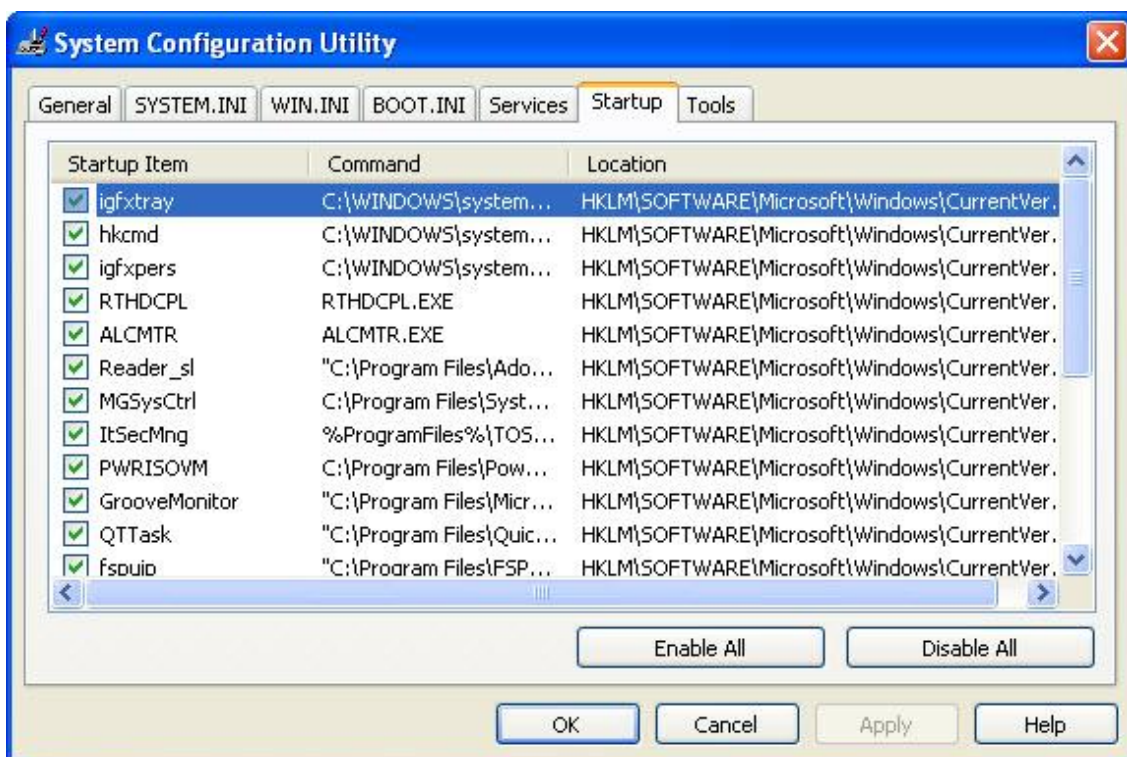
1. Click on the Start menu
2. Choose Run or use the Search box there
3. Type in MSCONFIG
4. In XP, the System Configuration Utility will automatically start. In Vista, a search option for "MSCONFIG" will appear. Click on it to start the utility.
5. Choose Services from the tabs in the utility
6. Choose the "Hide All Microsoft Services" button. You don't want to accidentally turn off any system services from here or your computer may not start properly.
7. If you have anything that you know is necessary, hide it so that you don't accidentally turn it off.
8. Uncheck anything else that you don't think you need. You can always come back and undo this if you find that your performance suffers.
9. Click on the Startup tab in the utility.
10. Repeat the process for the programs listed in this tab.
11. Click Apply on the utility and then restart your computer.

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The startup menu is often full of useless stuff. Even programs you use have no reason to be in the startup menu. However, there are many programs that, even if you remove them from the startup menu, will put themselves back there the next time you use them. Software like instant messengers, email checking software or antivirus programs do this often. To remove software permanently, make sure to also go into the options menus of those programs and turn their startup menu access to off.



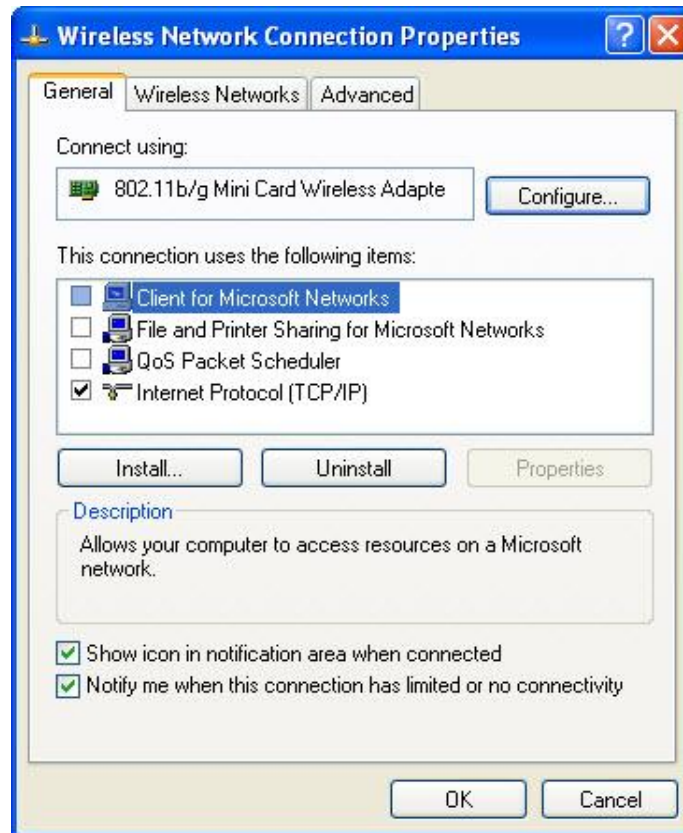
Part 4 - Speeding Up Internet Access

It might seem like your Internet access is organic – after all you just plug it in and it works. However, it will interact with Windows in ways that can slow both it and Windows down as well. Luckily, there are tweaks available that will not only boost the speed of your Cable and DSL but will add yet more speed to Windows.

Boosting DSL or Cable Speed

To do this, you'll need to have either a DSL or Cable high speed connection. Dial up connections don't use the same technology so they won't need to have this kind of tweaking done. Additionally, if you are on a network, don't do this either.

1. Click on the Start Menu
2. Click on the Control Panel
3. Find the Network Connections there. In Vista it will be Network and Internet
4. In XP, choose the Local Area Connection you are connected to. In Vista, find your connection by clicking on Network and Sharing Center and then clicking on your connection. Choose properties from the menu that appears to get to the same menu.
5. Uncheck "Client for Microsoft Networks", "File and Printer Sharing for Microsoft Networks", and "QoS Packet Scheduler"



This is not guaranteed to work on all computers. Many times, with wireless connections, it will not work very well because of security concerns. Additionally, some broadband connections have their own stopgaps put in place to maintain the lower speeds. You should see a marginal improvement at the least though and sometimes, if you are lucky, super speed boosts.

Boosting Connections in XP

This tweak is only going to work in Windows XP due to the software involved, but it will work wonders for your Internet speed if you are interested in getting the most out of your Cable connection. To do this, you need to install LVLORD's TCP patch.

1. Download the patch and install it.
2. The patch will find the Windows directory and ask if you'd like to increase or decrease it.
3. Enter C: here and choose 100 as the value it requests.
4. Confirm the changes and a new TCPIP.sys will be installed.
5. Restart your computer.

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Next, download the SG TCP Optimizer from <http://www.speedguide.net/downloads.php> and run the application. Slid the connection speed to what your computer has and you should have a much faster Internet connection that you did before.

The Best Browser

The default Browser that comes with Windows is frankly awful. It is slow, full of bugs and doesn't do things the way I like them done. For that reason, I'm going to recommend three browsers that are faster and generally work better than the other guys.

Firefox 3 – <http://www.getfirefox.com> – Firefox is the fastest browser on the Internet, especially if you download Firetune to go with it. You'll find that with the right tweaks, this browser operates ten times faster than anything you're going to get out of Microsoft. Additionally, you can add many more functions to it through add-ons and it is generally more secure.

Opera – <http://www.opera.com> – This is another open source browser that is faster and secure. It doesn't match Firefox in speed but it is very close and if you prefer the style, go for it instead.

Google Chrome – <http://www.google.com/chrome> – Google Chrome is new and still in beta but it's whole purpose is to be fast. Also, it uses much less memory than other browsers, which keeps the rest of your computer running fast too. The features are minimal right now, but if you just need a fast, simple browser, this is a way to go.

Choosing between the three may seem hard, but I would generally recommend that you always have Firefox installed. It will work with all websites as it has grown to have a decent market share despite being open source software. Additionally, you'll find that it has a ton of applications and add-ons that can be installed to expand functionality of the software, something that Chrome and Opera don't necessarily have yet. All three are good, but for the optimum experience a tuned up Firefox is best.

Part 5 - Machine Based Tweaks

Everything you've done up until now has served to clean off and streamline your computer, making it work better than it did before. This is the stuff needed to get your computer to a good place before you can actively start boosting its speed. So, now that you've done that, it's time to start finding ways to actually make your computer run faster.

RAM

Your RAM, short for random access memory, is the hardware that allows you to load up computer programs to your system memory. The more RAM you have, the more programs and processes you can operate at once. If you don't have enough RAM, your computer will crawl along trying to make multiple things happen at once with limited resources. Luckily, it is also the easiest part of your computer to upgrade. You can usually find RAM for \$50 per 1 GB, a major upgrade for anyone that is running low. The best rule of thumb is to get RAM if you have less than 1GB to start with. To check how much RAM you have, do the following:

1. Click on the Start menu.
2. Right click on My Computer or Computer
3. Click on Properties
4. On the pop up menu that appears, you should see system information. It will tell you how much CPU power you have and how much system memory you have (RAM). If it is less than 1GB, talk to a computer shop about getting an upgrade.

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The image shows a screenshot of the Windows XP system information window. On the left, there is a monitor icon displaying the Windows logo. To the right of the icon, the text reads: "System: Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition Version 2002 Service Pack 3". Below this, it says "Registered to:". In the lower-left section, it says "Manufactured and supported by:" followed by the MSI logo (Micro-Star International) and the text "Micro-Star Int'l Co., Ltd. Intel(R) Atom(TM) CPU N270 @ 1.60GHz 1.60 GHz, 0.99 GB of RAM Physical Address Extension". At the bottom right, there is a button labeled "Support Information".

When installing RAM, you need to be very careful. The slots to put the RAM in are incredibly easy to access, but putting it in backwards, allowing static to hit the RAM or having any other small problems during installation can permanently damage your new hardware or cause problems for your computer as a whole. I recommend that instead of risking your computer if you are unsure of yourself, that you hire someone to put it in. It takes five minutes to do and you'll pay the minimum fee at most shops.

Cleaning Your Hardware

A computer is on a lot and during that time, the parts inside are doing a lot of work, churning for endless hours. When this happens, dust and other particles can get clogged up in fans, heat sinks, or in between pieces of hardware. When this happens, your computer cannot cool itself properly, and when the computer gets too hot, it slows down. If it gets bad enough, the PC can even fail completely, overheating and shutting down. The solution is relatively simple and for many machines doesn't require much surgery. Just grab a can of compressed air – most electronics stores will have them specially made for computers, just ask for it – and spray out the fans and heatsink that sits on top of your CPU. Never touch any of these pieces of hardware and always remove the power cord and turn everything off before you do any work on your computer inside the case.

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Windows XP Tweak

In Windows XP, the system automatically puts a sound on every action your PC does. It might be small, but those sounds can often cause your computer to slow down the smallest bit. If you have a limited resource machine to start with, this is a big one.

1. Click the Start menu
2. Choose Control Panel from the Start Menu
3. Click on Sounds and Audio Devices
4. Choose the Sound Tab and then find the "Sound Scheme" box
5. Change the option to "No Sounds"
6. Make sure to check that your audio still works afterward. If not, go back and turn the box back to on.



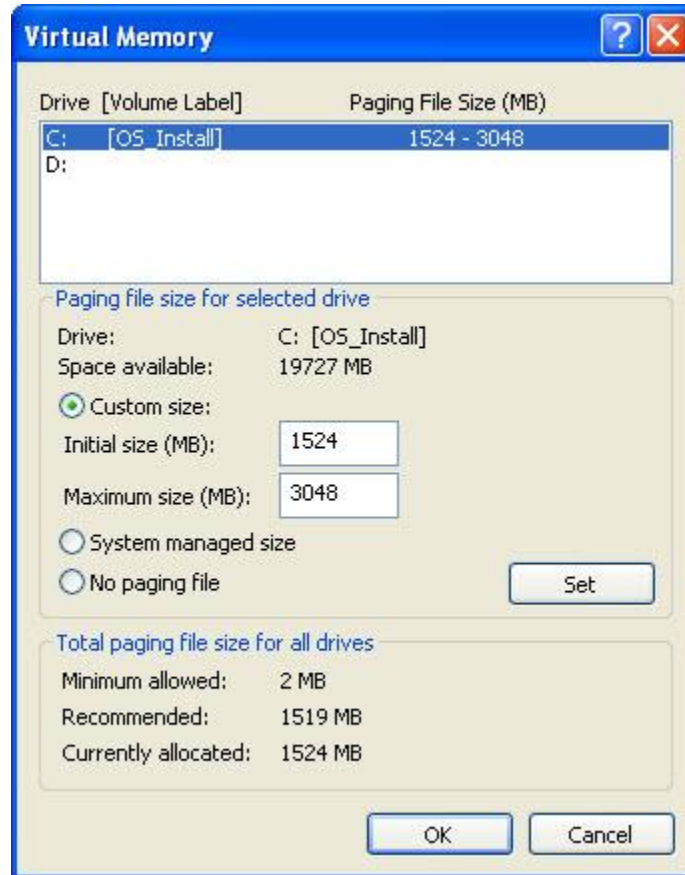
This might seem like a small change, but it has almost as large an impact on the speed of older XP machines as the visual effects have on the newer Vista machines. That can be quite substantial when

added up over time. Don't allow your computer to be bogged down like this when it is so easy to fix and no one needs those sounds.

Page File Allocation

This is a bit of a complex one because it involves multiple partitions on your hard drive or having multiple hard drives. Most people who just buy a computer from a store and don't do anything to it don't have any of this. However, if you do have a second hard drive or if your hard drive has been split into a second partition, this is a tip that can help boost your speed.

1. Click the Start menu
2. Click the Control Panel
3. Choose System and then Advanced on the tabs
4. Choose the Settings button in the Performance section
5. Choose the Advanced Tab here
6. Find the Virtual Memory box and choose "Change"
7. Find the Drive that you are interested in speeding up (this will not be your main hard drive. Look for the one that matches your second partition or second hard drive – usually D: or F:)
8. A Page File helps to keep the computer running smoothly in tandem with the hard drive. You only have one Page File by default – on your main hard drive. For this, you're going to add a new one to the other hard drive or partition.
9. To do this, click on the C: in this menu. Find the "Maximum Size (MB)". Set your Initial and Maximum size to whatever size your hard drive is.
10. Now click on the second hard drive, whatever partition it is, and choose "Custom Size:", then enter the same number as you did for "C:" and click "Set".
11. Restart your computer when done.



Remember that if you only have one hard drive on your computer that you work with, you don't need to worry about this. The purpose of a Pagefile is to make it faster when you actually work with that hard drive. If you never work with a second hard drive or if you have a hard drive that is solely used for backup, you don't need to worry about this as much since you only use that second drive or partition every month or two.

Managing Windows Services

The services in Windows are small files that are running in the background of your computer. The problem with them though is that it's nearly impossible to know which ones are vital to the operation of your computer and which ones are just hogging up system memory and making it harder for you to get anything done. For that reason, you need to sort through them and turn off anything that is unnecessary.

1. Click on the Start Menu
2. Either click on Run or use the Search box in Vista

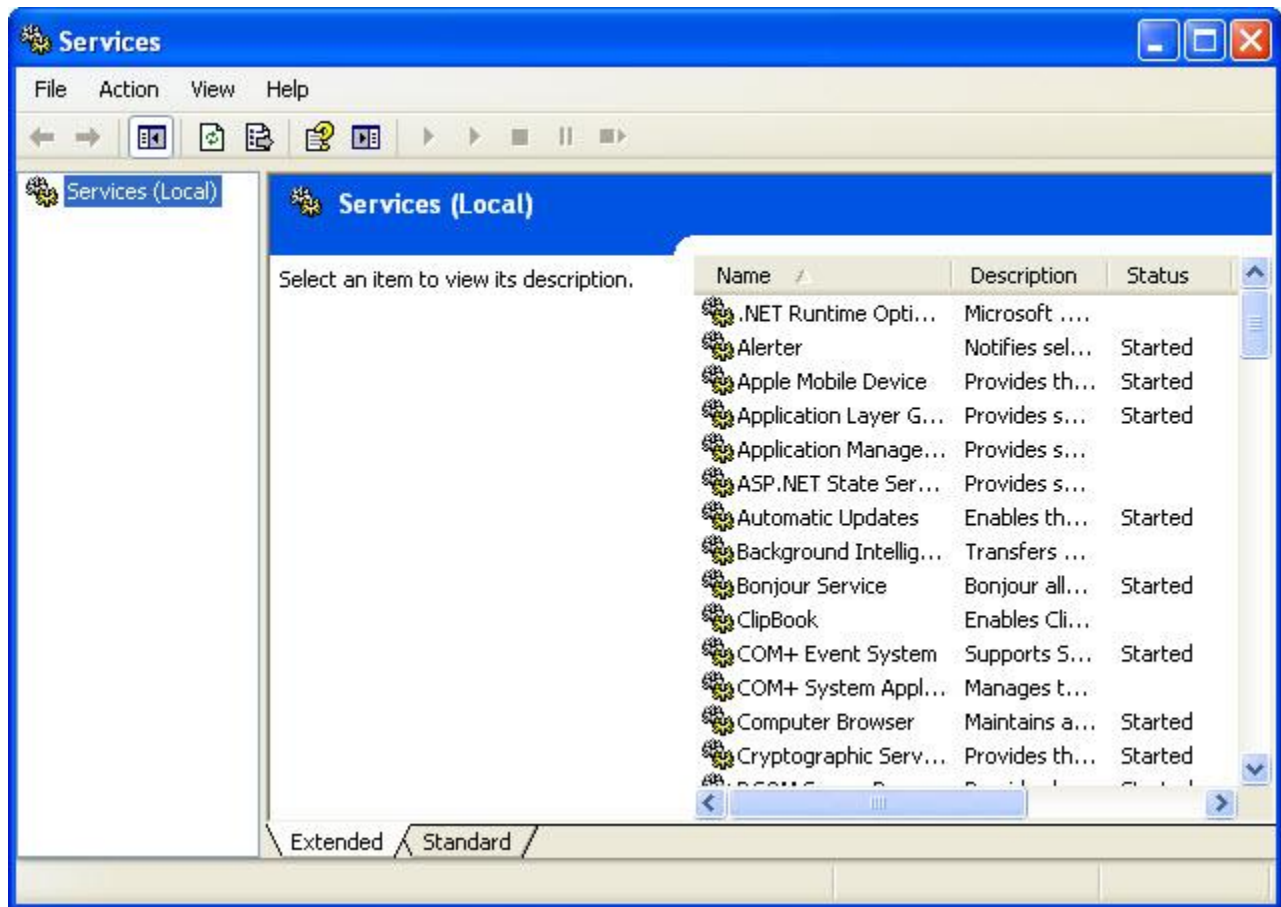
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3. Type "Services.msc"
4. In XP, the program will start up, in Vista an option will appear in the search box – click on it to open the same menu.
5. A list of services running on your computer will appear. To edit any of them, you will need to right click them, choose properties and edit the startup type.
6. Disable the following Services to boost your performance:
 1. Clipboard
 2. Error Reporting
 3. Application Management
 4. Telnet
 5. Upload Manager
 6. Support Indexing Service
 7. Portable Media Serial Number
 8. IPSEC Services
 9. SSDP Discovery Service Help
 10. Messenger
 11. Windows Time
 12. WMI Performance Adapter
 13. Registry Service Secondary Logon Alerter
 14. TCP/IP NetBIOS Helper Remote
 15. Distributed Link Tracking Client

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If your computer does anything strange or anything doesn't start properly after doing this, go back into the menu and change them back to on. You will need to restart your computer every time you make a change to your Services file.

Defragmenting Your Disc

One of the easiest ways to get your computer running faster is to defragment your hard drive. However, it can be hard to go in and defrag your hard drive when it takes so much time to do so. Additionally, the built in tools for defragmenting in Windows only work on files you are not currently using – as a result, your Registry and Paging Files cannot be defraged. Additionally, any files to do with system memory you are using are left alone as well.

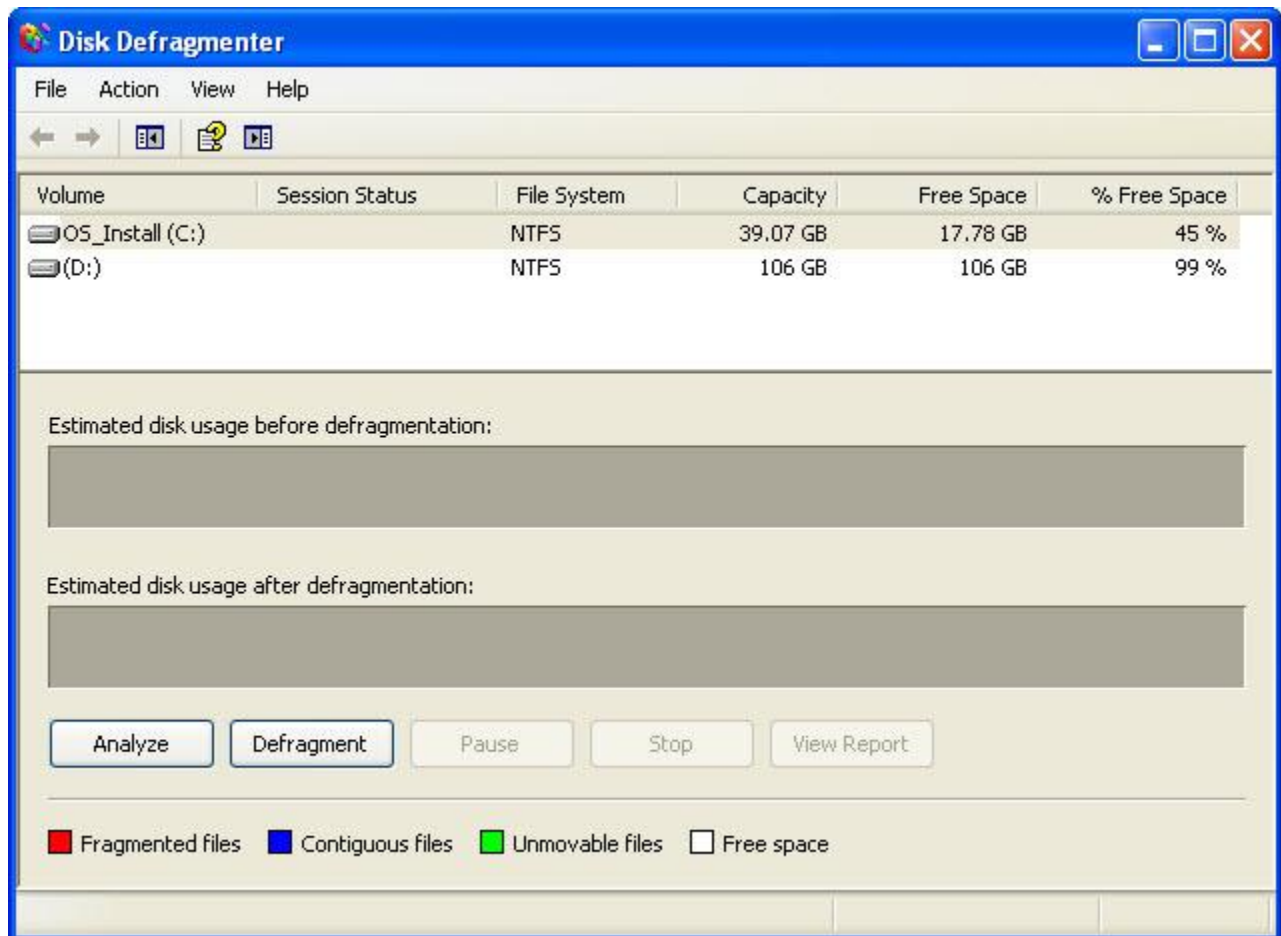
As a result, you need to use a third party program that will go in and clear out your registry in a way that will help your computer run faster without needing to do anything manually. Here are a couple of my favorite choices:

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PageDefrag - <http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/sysinternals/bb897426.aspx> – This program will allow you to see how defragmented your files are then to defragment them all, regardless of whether you are using them. Additionally, it will defrag log files and your hibernation files from when you close your laptop.

Diskeeper Lite - http://majorgeeks.com/Diskeeper_Lite_d1207.html – This program will allow you to analyze fragmentation on your hard drive and detect any problems automatically, saving you any protracted fixes. It is free, though you can upgrade to the full version if you need a few more options.



If you have trouble with the installation of the third party programs or just don't want to use them, don't turn away from doing this process completely. You will still need to use the Windows Defragmenter at least once a week to keep your hard drive from getting overrun by fragmented sectors.

Restoring Your Computer to New

I mentioned early in this guide that there is an easy way to just remove everything from your computer and start from scratch. This should be an absolute last resort that is only done when your computer doesn't respond to the changes we've made or starts having permanent errors such as the BoD (blue screen of death) error.

Most computers that are relatively new will have a Full System Recovery option built into the hard disk that came with it. Others in that age range will have recovery disks that come from the manufacturer and can be used to quickly and easily reinstall windows. Before doing any of this though, keep in mind that your computer will be completely reformatted – meaning all files and programs will be removed and replaced with new copies of factory software. You need to backup everything you want to save before starting anything with recovery.

To get started, you need to start the restoration process. I will assume most everyone has a computer new enough to have a recovery menu in it somewhere. For those individuals, there are a number of options at your disposal. To start with, you need to access that menu. If you have a recovery disc, simply put it into the disc drive and restart the computer. When it asks you if you'd like to boot from the CD/DVD, hit any button and the recovery process will start. Once you reach the menu that shows your hard drive, choose the "Format" option and reformat that drive (only after backing up). After reformatting, you can choose to reinstall windows and recover your computer to its factory settings.

For those with recovery menus only (usually laptops are shipped like this), you will need to enter the recovery menu on your computer manually. To do this, use the following commands for different manufacturers:

| Brand | Key Strokes | Notes |
|--------------|-------------|--------------------------------|
| Acer | Alt + F10 | During Boot Screen |
| Asus | F9 | During Boot Screen, After Logo |
| Dell | Ctrl + F11 | During Boot Screen, After Logo |
| Gateway | F11 or R | During Boot Screen |
| HP/Compaq | F10 | During Boot Screen, After Logo |
| IBM/Lenovo | F11 | During Boot Screen |
| Packard Bell | F11 | During Boot Screen, After Logo |
| Sony Vaio | F10 | During Boot Screen, After Logo |
| Toshiba | 0 | Hold Down Before Turning on PC |

Once you have entered the recovery menu, follow the same steps as for a recovery disc. The recovery process takes between 1 and 2 hours and remember, it will remove all software and files from your

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computer. You may also need to find and download new drivers if you have Windows XP as this version of Windows doesn't automatically install your drivers for you. Vista is much better at finding your drivers and getting them ready during installation.

Upgrading to a New Machine

While I did say that the recovery method was the last resort, this is technically your very last resort. I know you probably wouldn't be this far if you are reading this book, but keep in mind that at a certain point, computers just can't do any more. Most Laptops are built with 2-3 year lifespans in mind while most desktops are not expected to last past 4-5 years tops. If you take good care of your machine, don't let it get too hot, and don't use it too much you can make it last much longer, but eventually, a slow computer may just be due to old, dying hardware. When this happens, start looking around at new options. You'd be surprised at how cheap new computers are these days and when you've been using a 5+ year old machine, the least expensive new computers are plenty of power for what you've been doing.

Part 6 - Maintaining Your Speedy New Machine

The hardest part of getting a fast new machine is going to be keeping it that way. The reason your computer gets so slow to start with is that it gets bogged down over time with small errors and extra files that just add up too fast to fix. If you are serious about maintaining your PCs speed, you should have a solid weekly maintenance plan that will allow you to keep it moving along as quickly and speedily as possible. I recommend choosing one day a week and doing everything at once. However, if you do not have the time every night, you can also just break everything down into smaller bites:

- Update Windows
- Run CCleaner
- Run your Defragmenting Software
- Update Your Antivirus and Adware Software
- Run Bootvis
- Check your Hard Drive for errors

In addition, make sure to keep all of the extra, unneeded software clear of your machine. Don't visit sites on the Internet that can load you down with potential software problems either. You'll find that the newest versions of browsers as well as your Adware software will warn you when you are about to visit a dangerous site. Keep your computer clean, don't download extra stuff and you will have a nice, smoothly operating computer for months to come.

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Conclusion

Your computer may seem like just another tool or entertainment device, but in reality, it is the center of your life. You probably do just about everything there from paying bills to keeping in touch with friends to your work. You need that machine to operate properly and quickly and you need it to remain safe.

The tools I've provided in this book are going to help you do all of those things and then some, maintaining the quality and hopefully the speed with which your computer was meant to run. You will not only be able to enjoy more out of your machine, it will hopefully last longer because there is less strain on its many pieces.

Don't ever settle for a poorly running, bogged down machine again. Use these tips and share them with others to have a fast, one of a kind speed demon in your den. This is the kind of computer you deserve and the kind you now know how to maintain. Best of luck and I'll see you online.

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