

Doctors Orders

Hello welcome to the February edition of Doctors Orders. I know you were hoping the new slimmed down January version of Doctors Orders would become the norm, but no such luck. We had so much to tell you this month we've had to stretch it to 12 pages.

Don't be disheartened, you'll get to the back page with the new competition eventually, but don't miss page 2's review of the new "Avast 5 Free". It's definitely worth upgrading and page 2 tells you how.

As I now have A+ certification, the boss let me go out to a customer this week, accompanied by a proper engineer, of course.

The customer had an office in quite a large out-house, where there was 5 workstations and a server. The fault was on one of the workstations. It had lost all connectivity to the server, the rest of the network and the internet.

It was an easy fix, the cable from the workstation to the patch panel was completely chewed in half, by what looked from the teeth marks, like a very large rodent!

As the trainee, I got the job of replacing the cable. I crept on all fours under the desks, expecting at any minute, a huge rat to leap out and grab me by the throat. Our engineer and the customer were gleefully shouting words of encouragement, like "What's that in the corner Craig"? And "Cor-blimey, he's a big-un".

I got the cable plugged in both ends and started to back out from under the desks, when the customer, who was wearing a comfy pair of size 10 plaid slippers, removed one and lobbed it over my shoulder into the gloom in front of me.

I screamed, hit my head on the underside of the desk, reversed out as fast as my arms and legs could carry me, whilst doing a pretty good imitation of a tourette patient.

Our engineer and the customer spent the next 10 minutes with tears running down their faces, holding their stomachs and silently pointing at me whilst gasping for breath.

Some people lead very sad lives!

Craig



<http://twitter.com/CraigtheTrainee>



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Avast 5 gets a new look and feel



Freeware antivirus Avast 5 was released on 19th January with several new features, but long-time fans are most likely to notice that the old interface has gone. Along with the new interface, Avast Free, Avast Professional, and the new Avast Internet Security introduce an overhauled feature set that keep the suite highly competitive. Arguably, the free version provides the most complete free antivirus on the market.

Before detailing the new features, the importance of this interface change can't be understated. Gone is the music player default look, which was configurable but confusing. In its place is a sleek user interface that new users should find far more manageable. The grey and orange colour scheme stands out well on the screen, and the tab-based navigation on the left makes it much easier than before to navigate between features. Highlighted with the familiar security colours of green for safe and red for dangerous, the Summary tab gives up-to-date info on shield status, auto-

updates, virus definitions, the program version, and whether the new silent/gaming mode is on. There's also an unobtrusive ad to Avast Internet Security.

The Summary tab contains a second sub-menu, Statistics. If you're curious to see how Avast's shields have been performing against threats, here's where you can get your maths geek on. For each shield, it tells you how many files were scanned and when, and presents the data in a concise graph.

The scans live in the second tab, where you can choose and adjust six default scan types plus a custom scan option. What useful about Avast's layout here is that you can adjust all Avast-related scans from this tab. This includes the expected Quick and Full scans, but also encompasses the Removable media scan, Folder scan, Scans initiated from Windows Explorer, and the Screen Saver scan. Once you initiate a scan, you're not locked into that pane. Exploring the program interface while a scan runs doesn't kill the scan.

You can also schedule a boot-time scan and access scan logs from the scan tab. While running a scan, Avast will tell you not only how long the scan has taken and how many files have been examined, but also how much data has been tested and how fast it's being tested. As with the summary graphs, there's a lot of data that Avast exposes.

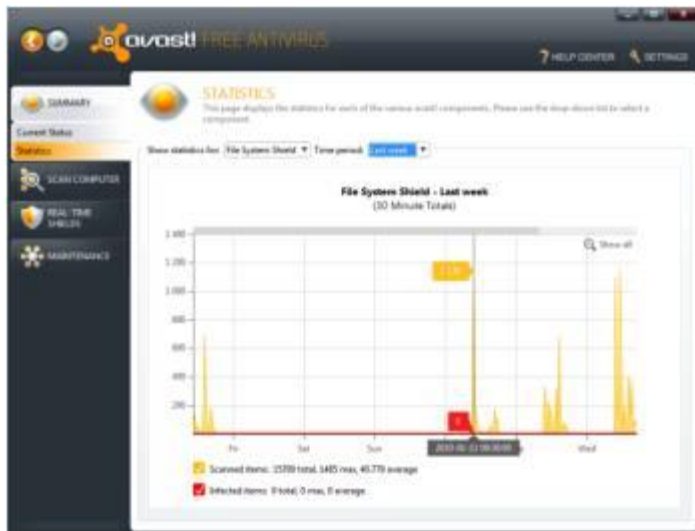
The Real-Time Shields live in the third tab, and again the clean interface comes into play here as navigating what could be a mess of options and tweaks is instead dead simple. Click on a shield to reveal a real-time chart of what it's been defending you against, with a Stop button and settings options at the top of the window. Another button at the top takes you to the advanced settings for that shield, while links at the bottom expose the shield's history as a graph and export a log file.

The last tab, Maintenance, contains the virus chest and manual update buttons. On the top right of the interface live the Help Centre and the Settings, from which you can get much more control of Avast. This includes everything from toggling the system tray icon, to managing updates, to password-protecting Avast access. This is also where you can un-involve your anonymously-submitted data from Community IQ, the Avast crowd-sourced behavioural detection engine. The new Avast interface is also Aero-friendly, with Explorer-style backward and forward navigation buttons in case you can't remember where you tweaked a particular setting. If the interface turned you off before, Avast 5 is worth a look just to see how much it's improved.

The basic free version, formerly known as the Home Edition, includes an attractive and obviously affordable set of features. The antivirus, antispymware, and heuristics engines form a security core that also includes multiple real-time shields. Mail and file system shields join the pre-existing behaviour, network, instant messaging, peer-to-peer, and Web shields. Other new features include a silent-gaming mode and an 'intelligent scanner' that only looks at changed files after establishing a baseline.

The behavioural shield is a common-sense feature, as security software publishers leverage their large user bases to detect threats early and warn others. Avast's user base is interesting in that they're heavily involved in the support of the software, and the company claims that their mostly volunteer-run support forums see 100,000 daily visitors. This isn't surprising, though, given that Avast passed the 100 million user mark at the end of 2009.

There are several features that are only available in both the Professional and Internet Security versions. The Pro version, which comes with a single-computer license for £29.95, offers a script shield and a sandbox for isolating and testing suspected threats, without having to worry about infection. The Internet Security version gives users three PC licenses for £49.96, and includes a firewall and anti-spam measures along with the sandbox and script shield.



Efficacy testing of antivirus programs is becoming trickier as threats mutate beyond what the tests have been designed to check, but some testing is better than none. In the Whole Product Dynamic Test by independent efficacy tester AV-Comparatives in December 2009, which tested a beta version of Avast 5, the program earned an Advanced rating. Although it shared that score with six others, including Eset and the free programs from Microsoft and Avira, only two programs scored higher: Norton and Kaspersky.

In November 2009, the old Avast 4.8 and Microsoft Security Essentials were the only freeware to score Advanced+ in the Retrospective/Proactive Test done by AV Comparatives. It's also the only program that tested faster than Norton AntiVirus 2010, and was tied with Micro-

soft for second place in fewest false positives detected. The detection score was also high, at 98 percent. That's just below Avira, but Avast noted far fewer false positives. Avast 5 Free lacks features that are included in the paid upgrade including anti-spam measures, a testing sandbox, a Script shield, and a firewall. Even without those, Avast Free 5 is in our opinion, the strongest, free antivirus currently available.

A test on one of our office PC's showed the Quick scan took 13 minutes, 40 seconds, while a full scan ran about 90 minutes.

Users should also note that along with offering an opt-in to Google Chrome (an alternative browser to Internet Explorer) when installing Avast, the free version was also chosen last week to be part of the Google Pack in Europe. (just untick the box during installation if you don't want Chrome)

While it's clear that the paid versions of Avast represent a good value, feature set, and ease-of-use of Avast Free make it a must-have security suite.

At the moment there is no automatic update from version 4.8 to version 5, although this may change. So if you want to take advantage of the new interface and features you will need to download and install it from our download page.

<http://www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/links.htm> you'll see Avast under the heading of "Antivirus Software".

We anticipate a heavy demand for this download and there are mirror sites available to download from but some of these can be a bit disorganized so make sure you are actually downloading the correct program.

Click "Run" from the download box and follow the install. If you have Avast 4.8 already loaded it will remove that and use the same settings including your existing licence key which will be carried over.

The look and feel is much more like Kaspersky and if you want the best then this is still it, but the other free anti-virus programs such as AVG, as well as some of the minor paid for programs such as McAfee, should be quaking in their boots.

<http://www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/kaspersky.htm>

Speed up your DNS with Google Namebench

Ever wondered what that long delay was when you click your browser to connect to the Internet. Well, the first thing that happens is your browser connects to a DNS server (usually owned by your ISP) and converts the web address you are looking for into an IP address. i.e. google.com is translated into IP address 64.208.34.100. This code is then used to route across the Internet to the Google servers.

Some ISP's DNS servers are very slow and you can improve your Internet response by choosing a faster one. But which one? There are lots out there. Google namebench finds the fastest server from your location and shows you how to configure your router or PC to use it instead of your ISP's server.

<http://code.google.com/p/namebench/>

(if you are not confident about reconfiguring your router or PC, this may be a job for a technical friend).

Update Flash Player

Christmas saw, many people purchasing Netbooks that run Windows XP. If you're one of them, be sure to use Adobe's Flash Removal Tool to replace the machine's outdated Flash Player, as described below. Then install version 10 of the player, (making sure to uncheck the offer to install the Google Toolbar).

Microsoft security advisory 979267

<http://www.microsoft.com/technet/security/advisory/979267.mspx> warns that the Flash Player version shipped on XP-based Netbooks (version 6) is vulnerable to Web-based malware attacks. I suspect that many other PC 's are also using this early version.

How to uninstall the Adobe Flash Player plug-in and ActiveX control

Due to recent changes to the Adobe Flash Player installers, you can now only remove the player by using the Adobe Flash Player uninstaller. To do this, download and run the uninstaller using the steps below.

Download the Adobe Flash Player uninstaller for Windows:

http://download.macromedia.com/pub/flashplayer/current/uninstall_flash_player.exe

Save the file to your system, choosing a location where you can find it (for example, your desktop).

Exit ALL running applications, including all Internet Explorer or other browser windows, AOL Instant Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, MSN Messenger, or other Messengers.

Check the Windows system tray carefully to make certain no applications are still in memory which might possibly use Flash Player.

Run the uninstaller by double clicking it. This will remove Adobe Flash Player from all browsers on the system.

Note: The uninstaller cannot remove files currently in use.

If you have any instances of the player open in your web browsers, instant messaging clients, stand-alone SWFs, or projectors, then the uninstaller will complete but some files may not be deleted. If this occurs, then close all of your applications and run the uninstaller again to ensure that all files are removed.

Note: Internet Explorer users may have to reboot to clear all uninstalled Flash Player ActiveX control files. If you're not certain, select the "Show Details" button in the Flash Player uninstaller. If there are any log lines that begin with "Delete on Reboot..." then you'll need to reboot BEFORE running the Flash Player installer again at:

<http://get.adobe.com/flashplayer>

Increase laptop battery life

Modern graphic intensive operating systems and resource hungry applications are cutting down the life of your laptop's battery every day. The average battery life per continuous use still stands at a maximum of three to four hours. So, a fast depleting battery could very swiftly put the crutches on your 'mobile' road trip.

Falling just short of carrying an extra pack of batteries in the back-pack, are several ways to keep the juice flowing through the batteries.

1. Ship shape with a defrag

Regular defragmentation helps to arrange data more efficiently thus making the hard drive work less to access the data. The quicker the moving hard drive works lesser is the load placed on the battery. Thus, your batter can last longer. The effect is minimal, but this efficiency goes hand in glove with hard drive maintenance.

2. Kill the resource gobblers

End the background processes that are not vital. Monitor the resource usage through a 'Ctrl-Alt-Del' which brings up the Windows Task Manager (in Windows). If you're not on the internet, it is safe to shut down the immediate non-essential programs running in the taskbar like the anti-virus and the firewall. Weed out unnecessary programs running as start-ups by launching the System Configuration Utility from Run - Msconfig - Tab: Startup. Uncheck the programs which you don't want to launch and reboot the computer once.

3. Pause the scheduled tasks

It may be a defrag or a virus scan, but make sure it is scheduled for a time when you are near a power socket. If not then leave them for the moment.

4. Unplug external devices

USB devices are the biggest drainers of battery power. Unplug all external devices like an external mouse, PC cards, Wi-Fi, external speakers, Bluetooth and even an attached iPod.

5. Empty the CD/DVD Drives

Even if you don't intend to use it, don't leave any CD/DVDs in the drives. A spinning drive sucks battery power like a sponge.

6. Go local

Desist using the DVD/external drives while running on batteries. Shift the content to the hard drive or run using (free) virtual drives like Pismo File Mount or even Microsoft's Virtual CD ROM Control Panel.

7. Lower the lights

The LCD screen of a laptop is another huge power sink. Calibrate the brightness to the lowest level you can tolerate using the Function key toggles or using the Display Settings applet in the Control Panel.

8. Kill the sounds

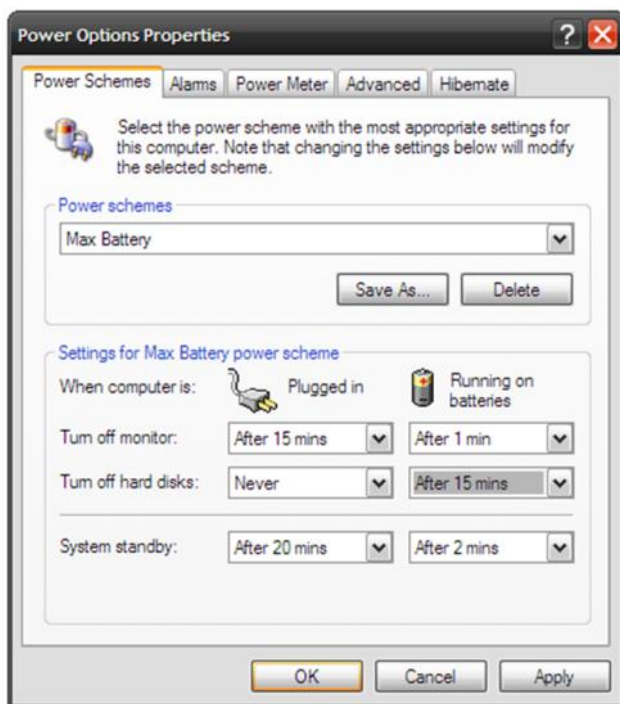
Mute the speakers and try avoiding the use of multimedia software to maximize the battery life. Installed sound schemes also drain a battery perceptibly.

9. Rid the screensaver

To maximize battery life by a little, switch off the screen-saver.

10. Visit Power Options

Get familiar with power management through the 'Power Options' applet in the Control Panel. XP, Vista and Windows 7 come with advanced power management features which shut off components like the monitor and/or the hard drive after specified intervals. This again depends on the chosen 'Power Schemes' (for XP) in the same applet. For instance in XP, 'Max Battery' under Power Schemes can be selected for maximum battery optimization.



Windows XP - Power Options

Similar settings can be found under 'Mobile PC' in the Control Panel of Vista and Windows 7

11. Turn off the looks

Windows Vista come with features like 'Aero Glass' which are resource guzzlers. One can turn it off and go for the 'Classic' appearance which consumes less power. In Vista, click on Desktop - Preferences - View Colour - Appearance - Classic Appearance and Windows Basic graphical interface. In XP it's - Display Properties - Theme - Windows Classic.

12. Hibernate is better than Sleep

In the Stand By mode (or sleep mode), the computer turns off the hard drive and the display but memory remains active while the CPU slows down. This draws on the battery. In contrast, hibernation mode is better because

the computer saves the current state and shuts itself down completely thus saving power.

13. Get the most...work on the least

Working on too many programs while on the battery is a sure fire power drainer. Keep use of graphic intensive applications to a minimum. Working on a spreadsheet consumes much less than playing your favourite game. To increase the life of the battery open just one or two programs concurrently.

14. Ram in more RAM

Adequate RAM reduces the load on Virtual memory which by default resides on the hard drive. Though every extra bit of RAM uses up more power, it increases overall savings by short cutting access to the power hungry hard drive.

15. Keep it clean

A laptop with blocked air vents will generate more heat thus reducing the life of the battery. Clean the air vents regularly to keep operating temperatures low. Allow for open space around the vents for air to circulate freely. Keep the area around the laptop clean to avoid entry of dust.

16. Temperature is a silent killer

Undue heat kills off a battery slowly but surely. Avoid leaving the laptop under direct sunlight or inside a closed car.

17. Avoid the memory effect

A problem more for the older Ni-MH batteries than for Li-Ion batteries on which most modern laptops run. Memory effect relates to the loss of battery charge when they are repeatedly recharged after being only partially discharged. It can be prevented by discharging the battery fully and then completely recharging it. Li-Ion batteries on the other hand have no problems with partial discharges and recharges and complete discharge is never recommended for this type.

18. Update software and drivers

This sounds a bit incongruous but then newer drivers and software are often designed to be more efficient (and hopefully less resource hungry).

19. Use the right adapter

Ensure that the adapter you use to charge the laptop battery is an original one or one with the correct specifications. A mismatch in the wattage could cause an overload thus damaging the laptop and the battery.

20. Pack it up

If you don't plan to use the laptop on batteries for quite some time, ensure that the charge is nearly 40 percent - remove the batteries and store it in a cool place.

A typical lithium-ion battery has an overall average life of 2-3 years. With some care and caution, its mortality can be delayed

"Samy Worm" author is now targeting your router

Fresh from criminal probation for his Samy worm exploits, Samy Kamkar is back with new software that can maliciously target your home network's router.

Kamkar's first worm brought MySpace to its knees in 2005. Now, his new proof-of-concept software puts vulnerable home routers in its crosshairs.

The first Samy worm's cross-scripting exploit

In October 2005, Samy Kamkar went looking for friends — specifically, friends on MySpace. Unfortunately, Kamkar chose to do so by writing and executing a cross-site scripting exploit dubbed the Samy worm, which became one of the first major worms to hit a Web 2.0 app

The Samy worm attempted to infect as many MySpace profiles as possible. The payload seemed relatively harmless: it merely tagged your profile with the phrase "but most of all, Samy is my hero" and added Kamkar as a friend. But the infection grew wildly. At one point, Kamkar had accrued over a million bogus friends and was getting more, at the rate of thousands every few seconds. The MySpace servers choked under the onslaught.

MySpace removed the infection and patched the code vulnerability that allowed Samy to execute. Kamkar has since published a detailed description of how he came to write the code.

The attack led to Kamkar's being charged; he was subsequently sentenced to three years' probation, ordered to perform 90 days of community service, and required to pay restitution to MySpace. During his probation, Kamkar was allowed to use a computer and the Internet only for work-related purposes.

Kamkar's not-so-triumphant return

Kamkar's probation is over and he's back. On his new website, Kamkar warns people to change the default settings of their routers. This is sound advice, but coming from Kamkar, the warning is also a bit sinister — especially when his site provides a number of different proof-of-concept programs that can be used to attack routers.

For example, if you use a Belkin router set with the default password, clicking a link on one page changes your router's basic service set identifier (BSSID) to "Samy was here."

A similar page for a Verizon FiOS router displays your current password but employs a cross-scripting vulnerability that Kamkar says "could be extended to do worse, such as changing your Wi-Fi password, setting an admin password, or even installing malicious firmware onto your router." Any Web page you visit that housed the malicious code could launch this kind of cross-site scripting attack.

All that's bad enough, but there's more: One of Kamkar's first tweets on his Twitter account was about a proof-of-concept worm that could pinpoint your router's physical location. Kamkar's code grabs the unique Media Access

Control (MAC) address of a router and — for now — sends the address back to him. But he says he could send the MAC address to Google Location Services (GLS) to obtain your router's longitude and latitude. Google says GLS can be accurate "to within a few metres."

It's a new take on an old attack stratagem

Determining your location via your router's MAC address is not new. A similar process was described by Terry Stenvold in an article called "Don't Locate Me" in 2600 Magazine. Stenvold showed how a MAC address could be used to find the longitude and latitude of a router.

In a related YouTube video, Stenvold demonstrates how he can find a random Linksys router's MAC address on Google and then use Google Location Services to find its location.

Stenvold's method is specific to the "Skyhook" collection of millions of wireless router and access-point MAC addresses. The Skyhook Wireless company sends vehicles around the U.S. to map and register all the MAC addresses it can find. Stenvold's method won't work unless the MAC address is already in the Skyhook database.

What's new in Kamkar's attack is that it can sniff out MAC addresses from scratch, whether or not they're already listed in the Skyhook database. Kamkar also says he can then learn a router's physical location via the Google geolocation service, but he doesn't say exactly how. Currently, the Firefox browser does have GLS built in — but the GLS privacy policy states, "The Firefox Geolocation Feature will make requests to Google only if you tell the feature to do so."

GLS is also used on iPhone and Android Google search pages. The service is able to determine the phone's location and provide search results — and ads — relevant to that specific area.

Unless we installed your router, you should enter your router's configuration settings and change the default name and password as soon as possible, if you haven't already. You'll find specific instructions for doing so on your router manufacturers website, but Bradley Mitchell provides a generic overview of the process in the About.com article, "How to Set Up a Network Router." <http://compnetworking.about.com/od/homenetworking/ht/routerconfigure.htm>

For obvious reasons we have not published the address of Kamkar's website. Not for his protection but for yours.

Many of the pages on his site contain "drive-by" viruses that will download and run on your PC as you click on the page.

It seems incredible that sites like this can legally exist, but there are literally thousands like it on the Internet and if you are unlucky enough to click on one, then it's a couple of hours running your anti-spyware or worse, a trip to your local PC repairer.

Solid State hard disks

Ask the Doctor



A customer is frustrated by the diminishing performance of his solid-state disk drive (SSD):

"I have a 64GB solid-state hard drive, but no way to restore it to factory-new condition. It has to do with getting the 'pages' to read as empty and not just overwritten. It's important to all SSD users, as the performance degradation is something [all SSDs] eventually suffer from.

"The few solutions I've found are very complex; so far, I haven't been able to get any of them to work. My SSD seek times degrading from .1 [millisecond] to .4 or .5 may sound silly, but it's not."

Performance degradation over time is a known issue with all SSDs. There are a number of contributing factors, but some of the worst culprits are standard disk operating commands that were originally designed for use on magnetic, spinning-platter hard drives. SSDs operate differently, and that leads to problems — especially when attempting to re-use previously accessed data blocks, such as the former location of deleted files.

To correct this problem, most current SSDs support a new command called "Trim". This SSD-specific command does just what you want — it automatically clears out old, overwritten data.

The "Trim" command specification is being made a computing standard by the International Committee for Information Technology Standards, so all operating systems will eventually support "Trim". But for now, only Windows 7 and Server 2008 fully support the "Trim" command. While Linux 2.6.28 is SSD-aware, its partial implementation of "Trim" falls short of Windows' full support.

That's worth repeating: Right now, Win7 and Server 2008 are the only OS's that offer full, native support for "Trim". They're the only OS's that let you get the most out of an SSD right out of the box!

If you don't have a trim-aware OS, you either have to rely on the workaround routines built into some SSD firmware or use add-on trim-ming tools. For example, G. Skill's Wiper software is designed specifically for its Falcon Series SSDs; you can download and read about the utility on the G. Skill site.

<http://www.gskill.us/forum/showthread.php?t=733>

"Hdparm," a Linux-based tool for modifying hard drive parameters, includes experimental "Trim" scripts in version 9.17 and higher. More information is available in an LWN.net article,

<http://lwn.net/Articles/345020/>

and "Hdparm" itself is downloadable from a SourceForge page.

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/hdparm/files/>

However, one look at the extensive cautions and warnings on those pages, and you'll see why having "Trim" built into your operating system is obviously the best way to go.

The bottom line is this: Upgrade to Windows 7!

"Scareware", another new word to worry about.

During 2009 we say an increasing number of scareware programs popping up on customers machines. The early ones bypassed the antivirus and anti-spyware programs because, basically they weren't either so did not get grabbed on entry to the PC. They were simply a web page telling you that you had 61 trojans on your PC and if you paid up with your credit card, you could download a program to fix it.

Many people paid up for a quiet life!



This program was called Personal anti-virus and the four people responsible for it were jailed in the US for 7 years each, before Christmas.

Unfortunately, before they went to prison, they sold their brainchild on the Internet and the variations that now total over 300 make the original Personal Antivirus look tame.

The new variations lock down your PC so that you cannot run any executables such as antivirus or anti-spyware programs. We have had some successes but it's like walking on shifting sand as each new variation closes the loopholes that engineers used last time to eradicate it. PC engineers really are having to think on their feet and it's definitely sorting out the experienced engineers from the school leavers.

The criminals are also using ingenious methods to get the scareware onto your PC. Before Christmas scammers placed an ad in the online version of the New York times. Everyone who landed on the page with the ad got the scareware.

Technology executive Troy Davis was hit with the ad after he clicked on a Times story about Dubai. After his antivirus software warned him not to visit the article, he performed an analysis of the site and discovered that the Times was allowing advertisers to embed an HTML element known as an iframe into their advertisements. This gave the criminals a way to include embedded web pages in their copy that could be hosted on a completely different server, outside of the control of the Times.

That code redirected Davis's browser to the website that served a pop-up ad designed to look like a Windows system scan that had found security problems on his system

Strangely enough, as the scareware is getting more dangerous, they start to look more and more like Viruses which means that most good antivirus programs will now pick them up, but most still do not know how to fix them. All we can suggest is to check your antivirus updates regularly if they are not automatic.

Five productivity-enhancing Registry tweaks

A few simple Registry changes can quash annoyances, improve performance, and add new features to Windows.

Before you begin, create a restore point

Some of the best Windows improvements come from simple edits you can make in the Registry — the central database that stores configuration settings and options for all the hardware and software in a Windows system.

Editing the Registry is pretty easy — some might say too easy. Change or delete the wrong Registry key, and you may create more problems than you solve. So work carefully, and back up the Registry by setting a restore point before embarking on any Registry revisions.

- In XP, choose Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, System Restore. Check Create a restore point, click Next, and follow the prompts.
- In Windows 7 and Vista, click Start, type [SystemPropertiesProtection](#), and press Enter. Confirm any security prompts, click Create, type a name for the restore point, and click Create again.

Once your restore point's created, you're ready to launch Windows' Registry editor. Press Win+R to display the Run box, type [regedit](#), and press Enter. Confirm any warning prompts that appear.

Navigate the tree diagram on the left of the Registry Editor window just as you would move around an Explorer folder tree. Each of the folder icons on the tree is called a "key" in Registry lingo.

1) Shift your Start menu into overdrive

Have you ever noticed the short delay after you click the Start menu button, before Windows displays the menu? If you noticed the delay, you might have thought it was caused by system activity. But it's a deliberate, programmed pause controlled by a Registry setting. You can remove it.

In any Windows version, navigate to and select the following Registry key:

[HKEY_CURRENT_USER \ Control Panel \ Desktop](#)

Double-click MenuShowDelay in the right window, change the number in the Value data box to 0, and click OK.

2) Don't let stalled programs slow you down

This tip's just for XP: When a program hangs, Windows will eventually take notice within five seconds, asking whether you want to force the program to shut down. If you'd like to see that prompt sooner, select in the left pane of the Registry Editor the same [HKEY_CURRENT_USER \ Control Panel \ Desktop](#) key as in the previous tip; in the right pane, however, double-click HungAppTimeout.

Change the default of 5000 (milliseconds, or 5 seconds) to something smaller, such as 2000 (milliseconds). However, don't enter 0 — doing so may prevent applications from shutting down normally, which can cause other problems.

You can also enable AutoEndTasks (sometimes called "forced exit") to tell XP to ignore possible hung apps and simply to shut them down.

To do this, double-click the AutoEndTasks key in the right pane and change the value from 0 to 1. However, I don't recommend this change, because shutting down applications before they're ready can lead to unpredictable results.

3) Shut Windows down in the blink of an eye

If some of your applications are making Windows' shutdowns slow to a crawl, you can speed things up.

In XP, double-click WaitToKillAppTimeout in the same [HKEY_CURRENT_USER \ Control Panel \ Desktop](#) key as noted above and change its default value of 20000 milliseconds (20 seconds) to something smaller. As before, don't use 0!

In any Windows version, you can quash sluggish services — the processes used by Windows itself — when the OS closes. To do so, navigate to this key:

[HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE \ SYSTEM \ CurrentControlSet \ Control](#)

With Control selected in the left window, double-click WaitToKillServiceTimeout on the right and change the data value to something smaller than the default. (Again, values are in milliseconds; each 1000 milliseconds equals one second.) Note that Windows may change what you enter at some point, because some services require a specific minimum value.

4) Suppress Windows' annoying low-disk-space pop-up

Running low on disk space is aggravating enough without constant nagging about it. To turn off the taskbar's pop-up reminders about your overstuffed hard disk, follow the steps appropriate to your operating system.

In XP, navigate in the Registry Editor's left pane to this key:

[HKEY_CURRENT_USER \ Software \ Microsoft \ Windows \ CurrentVersion \ Policies \ Explorer](#)

Right-click in the right pane and choose New, DWORD Value. Type NoLowDiskSpaceChecks and press Enter to create the key. Now double-click the new icon and in the Value data box, enter 1 and click OK.

In Vista or Win7, Navigate to here in the Registry:

[HKEY_CURRENT_USER \ Software \ Microsoft \ Windows \ CurrentVersion \ Policies](#)

If an Explorer subkey is present under Policies, click it.

If the Explorer subkey doesn't exist, create it. With Policies highlighted in the left pane, right-click in the right pane and choose New, Key. Type [Explorer](#) and press Enter to create the key.

Next, with Explorer highlighted in the left pane, right-click in the right pane and choose New, DWORD Value. Type [NoLowDiskSpaceChecks](#) and press Enter to create the key. Now double-click the new icon; in the Value data box, type 1 and click OK.

5) Add an encryption option to your context menu

If your hard disk is formatted with NTFS, you can encrypt files and folders in XP Pro, Vista, and Windows 7 — although your mouse may give out before completing the operation. It's eight steps! Right-click the file, choose Properties, click Advanced, select the encryption option, click OK twice, confirm or change options, and click OK one more time.

As you can imagine, this encryption method gets old very quickly. You can streamline the process to a couple of clicks by adding an Encrypt command to Explorer's context menu.

Here's what to do: Navigate in the Registry Editor to this key:

[HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE \ SOFTWARE \ Microsoft \ Windows \ CurrentVersion \ Explorer \ Advanced](#)

With the Advanced key selected in the left pane, right-click in the right pane and choose New, DWORD Value. Type EncryptionContextMenu and press Enter. Next, double-click the EncryptionContextMenu icon, change its data value to 1, and click OK.

The next time you right-click a file or folder in Explorer, you'll see a new Encrypt option on your context menu. If the folder you right-click is already encrypted, the command changes to Decrypt.

If things go awry, just push the panic button

Should one of your Registry tweaks go wrong, and merely undoing your changes doesn't rectify matters, simply launch System Restore by choosing Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, System Restore. Follow the instructions there to select the restore point you created before you started your tweaking, and your computer will return to its previous state.

Save Open Office Documents in MS Office Format

You've always been able to save Open Office documents as MS Office documents by using the drop down box in the "Save As" window. But in later versions you can change the defaults so that all documents save with MS Office file extensions'



Open Writer and click File > New > Text Document. Select Tools > Options, double-click Load/Save in the left pane, and choose General.

choose Text document as the Document type under Default file format in the right window, and choose Microsoft Word 97/2000/XP in the drop-down menu under Always save as.

Do the same for spreadsheet and presentation documents by selecting each in the Document type drop down box and choosing the correct MS Office document in the Always save as box. There are also various other configuration changes that can be made to make Open Office work closely with MS Office and you can see the full instructions at:

http://news.cnet.com/8301-13880_3-9864262-68.html

A Winner for our Fabulous Netbook PC.



Yes, we finally have a winner of our beautiful little Asus netbook. The lucky winner shown below is Mr John Hunt from Northampton and he assures us that he will make good use of his prize.

Don't forget we have a super new competition on the back page for a stylish 22" 1080 widescreen monitor.

Self help Tutorials

We had an email from a customer using our remote access service saying. "I love the way that your tech support takes over my PC remotely and fixes all my problems". "I didn't think that I would ever say this, but I do miss the sense of satisfaction I used to get after struggling all evening to fix a problem, then finally cracking it".

I am not sure that most of our remote support customers would agree but I can understand the sense of satisfaction after a couple of hours wrestling with your PC.

I know that lots of our customers like to feel on top of their PC's and able to reconfigure it to their needs and also fix any minor problems that come along.

Unlike most repairers, we have for a long time been placing helpful information on our website for our customers to learn more about their computers.

Our recently introduced, free user guides have had a large number of downloads and the list of guides now include:

Internet Guide for the Movie Addict

Internet Guidebook for An Audiophile

The Incredible Free Manual for Every Mac User

The Underground Guide to the iPhone

Twitter: Best Practices & Tips

The Ultimate Guide to your Windows Mobile Phone

A Computer Geek's Smart Productivity Guide

Building a Media Centre for your Home

The Only Easy Guide To Computer Networks

The Big Book of BitTorrent

A Newbie's Getting Started Guide to Linux

The Idiot's Guide To Photoshop

The Big Book of iTunes

The Idiot's Guide to Building Your Own PC

Laptop Buying Guide

PSP Up- and Downgrading Guide

Guide to searching the Internet

How to build a Gaming PC

www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/freeguide.htm

These are multi page PDF files that you can print and read at your leisure, but if you are more interested in learning the inner workings of the PC we have unearthed a website that has 126 tutorials on all aspects of PC working. Being a tutorial they are easy to understand and show you each window and which button to click, so are OK for even the most inexperienced user.

The titles include How to trace a hacker, How to update your drivers and even the basics such as, How to cut, copy and paste in Windows.

I am sure that you will find something of interest that will make you computer that much more useful.

www.bleepingcomputer.com/tutorials

That Vast Email server in the Sky

Ever wondered where all those emails go, that never get to the person they are addressed to?

Yes, so have I!

We tend to think of an email as having a presence, a bit like a letter, but in actual fact they are merely a series of slight voltage fluctuations in a piece of copper or fibre optic cable, to be absorbed or negated by the latest Cheryl Cole album going the other way down the same cable. Probably being downloaded by the Smiths teenage son at number 23.

So blame Wain Smith for losing your email!

Emails and Internet access are usually the reason people buy a PC and they are the two services that give us the most problems.

Trying to get 8 megabits of data each second down a pair of copper wires 3 miles long and designed in the 19th century to transmit Morse Code, is bad enough. But add a filter on each phone/fax/skybox/burglar alarm and a wireless connection your end and it's amazing that it works at all.

And Spam! Don't get me started on SPAM!

Spam is such a big problem now that just by putting a blacklisted word in an email can send it to the junk-mail folder. Microsoft Outlook is one of the most critical email clients. MS used to publish a list of words that would send the email to junk mail, but obviously the spammers used this list to allow their email to get through. So the list is now secret and gets updated about every three months with MS Office Update. So an email that got through last week may not arrive next week because Microsoft has moved the goal posts.

All the other email clients like Outlook Express, Windows Mail, Thunderbird, Windows live Mail plus all the online ones like Hotmail, Yahoo etc., all have different rules for defining junk.

Obviously, you don't want an inbox full of Viagra emails, but you might quite like to know that your local knitting wool shop has a special offer on Sirdar Aran, "A bargain at Only £1.75".

So as the emails that you want to receive slowly disappear into oblivion, how do you make sure they arrive safely?

Answer! Put the sender on your "Safe senders list". All email clients have one and if they are on your list, they will never go to junk mail.

To show you how for your email client:
www.computerdoctors.co.uk/newsletter/safe_senders.htm (and don't forget to add newsletter@computerdoctors.co.uk)



This months competition is for a stylish AOC 22" widescreen 1920 x 1080 LCD monitor.

This really is a beautifully designed monitor with a fantastic crisp and clear picture.

You can see the full specification on the AOC website and lots more pictures from different angles

http://www.aoc-europe.com/en/monitors/tft/22_F22S.php

Don't think that you have no chance of winning.

Our competition is only open to people in our catchment area (*see below) so give it a try, you never know, yours might be the only winning entry. You don't have to be an existing customer, so if you don't want to enter, be nice to your friends and help them with the answers.

As usual there are a few easy questions to answer but all the answers are on our website. **Good Luck**

www.computerdoctors.co.uk/competition

*NN1 – NN18, NN29, MK19, MK40 – MK46, LE16.

Competition ends 25th February 2010

Contact us

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If this has been passed to you from a friend and you would like your own regular copy, just go to:

www.computerdoctors.co.uk/newsletter



Map to our Northampton Workshop
www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/map.htm

General information & to book a call out

Tel: 01604 411 444 (9-6 Mon-Fri, 9-1 sat)

Sales & On-Line Purchases

Tel: 01604 415 984 (9-6 Mon-Fri, 9-1 sat)

Fax: 0872 115 5359

Email: sales@computerdoctors.co.uk

Shop: www.computerdoctors.co.uk/shop

Technical Support

Free: tech@computerdoctors.co.uk

Remote: www.computerdoctors.co.uk/care

Web: www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/askthedoc.htm

Email test Facility:

mail.computerdoctors@keme.co.uk

