

Doctors Orders

Hello and welcome to June.

While you are all out enjoying yourselves in the summer evenings to come, just spare a thought for your poor old PC. Home alone with just the odd drive-by virus for company. In fact, now that you're not using your PC much, now is the time to drop it in for a health check. Get rid of all those odd gremlins that have been driving you mad for the last six months.

But if you can't live without your PC for a few days, we now have a laptop hire service with a one day minimum hire so you never need be away from eBay/Facebook/twitter/emails etc. ever again.

Just when things were starting to get a bit quiet last month, fate stepped in to help us out with a series of power cuts. We spent the next few days changing power supplies. Some of the really unlucky owners also had frazzled hard drives and motherboards. It's amazing how when a customer's PC is in our workshop, it's protected by anti-surge power strips and anti-static workbenches. Once back home most do not even have a surge protector. A Belkin 4-way costs just £8.34, available at our shop.

Our own Office PC's have uninterruptible power supplies (UPS) and we've never lost one yet due to spikes or brown/black outs. They're not cheap at £82.50 but they'll let you keep working through a short power cut and protect sensitive computer equipment from anything the national grid can throw at it. We think that every business PC should have one.

So if you are a director of a local business, don't buy that set of Porsche floor mats you had your eye on, spend the money protecting your accounts PC instead, and postpone that early heart attack for a little while longer.

Craig

<http://twitter.com/CraigtheTrainee>



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Advanced security — build it yourself

The time when most people start getting interested in security products is when they have just brought their PC into the workshop to be reinstalled for the second time, after being trashed by a Trojan, AGAIN.

Prior to that, it's really hard work trying to convince some customers that spending £45.00 on a class product such as Kaspersky Internet security, is money well spent.

But if you are on a tight budget and don't mind putting a bit of effort in, there is another way. There are so many brilliant free products on the Internet now that there should be no excuse for anyone to have a PC crawling with viruses and spyware. So why do we see two or three PC's each day coming through our workshop door in this sorry state?

To be fair, there are also a lot of security programs on the Internet that are complete rubbish, so knowing which ones to download and which ones to leave alone is not always easy, unless you read your local repairer's newsletters that is.

If you are new to PC's and on a budget, we would suggest any of the security products on our download page.

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

But if you want 110% protection and don't mind programs that can get a bit techie, then read on.

Ask a dozen security experts what they'd put into their suite of anti-malware tools, and you'll get a dozen different answers. But the following products are considered the bees knees by advanced PC users. Many are also free.

Anti-malware detection and removal

G Data Antivirus 2011: In a February antivirus test report by AV-Comparatives, G Data earned the best score for virus detection, and it had a low rate of false positives. At £24.95, it's also modestly priced.

<http://www.gdatasoftware.co.uk/>

Immunet Protect: This free, cloud-based antivirus product was created by some former Symantec engineers. Cloud-based antivirus apps take up little room on your hard drive, and their defences against new malware outbreaks can be pushed out faster than with the conventional signature-based method. Unfortunately, this new technology has not been tested as comprehensively as more-traditional methods, but we think it has great potential (providing you have internet access). You can download Immunet Protection directly from the manufacturer.

<http://www.immunet.com/protect>

MalwareBytes Anti-Malware: One of the gold standards of standalone antivirus apps, it is highly recommended by all our engineers. It has not been evaluated, as far as we know, alongside Norton, Kaspersky, or any other leading AV apps — though most advanced users consider it an important tool in their AV arsenal. It's a free download at the MalwareBytes site. <http://www.malwarebytes.org/>

Firewalls

Comodo Firewall: A free combination firewall and antivirus app, Comodo's product is recommended by several sources. In recent tests by matousec.com, the firewall's performance was rated perfect. <http://personalfirewall.comodo.com/> (Comodo is also offering its new, free Comodo Internet Security suite that includes an antivirus component. Although a PC World review recommended giving this new product a miss, stating poor malware detection and a high rate of false positives).

Online-Armor Personal Firewall: We rate Online-Armor's product equal to Comodo, and it's earned accolades from many other reviewers as well. The software, available as a download at online-armor.com, comes in both free and paid versions — the latter \$59.95 product adds a Web shield feature, anti-phishing filter, and online banking protection.

<http://www.online-armor.com/>

Windows 7 firewall: If you have Windows 7 installed, you should not need a third-party firewall, according to our general manager. We believe that Win7's built-in protection takes some beating.

Other

Browser protection: Linkscanner is a free browser-security product from AVG that scans Web pages and content for malicious links. Unlike most other browser-security products, Linkscanner blocks only malicious elements on a Web page — not the whole page. <http://linkscanner.avg.com/>

Hard-drive defragmentation is still worthwhile

“Ask the Doctors”

“Today's hard drives are 10 times faster than the drives of old — is defragging really still worth the bother? Back in the days of my first hard drive, a 20Mb Seagate ST-225, defragging was important. But so far as I know, there are no measurements that show that defragging a modern drive has more than one or two percent impact on performance. Please correct me if I am wrong!”

You're right that defragging isn't as important as it once was. But there's more to defragging than simply improving hard drive performance.

Windows normally stores the files on a hard drive in a series of blocks. When a drive is new or well-ordered, each file's blocks can be written to the drive more or less sequentially. But over time, holes open in that orderly sequence as files are changed or deleted; they are then filled with bits of data from other files. Eventually, a file's blocks may end up scattered all over the disk.

When a file's blocks aren't contiguous, the drive heads have to seek out the blocks, physically navigating to each block's location. Each seek adds to the time it takes to read retrieve the entire file.

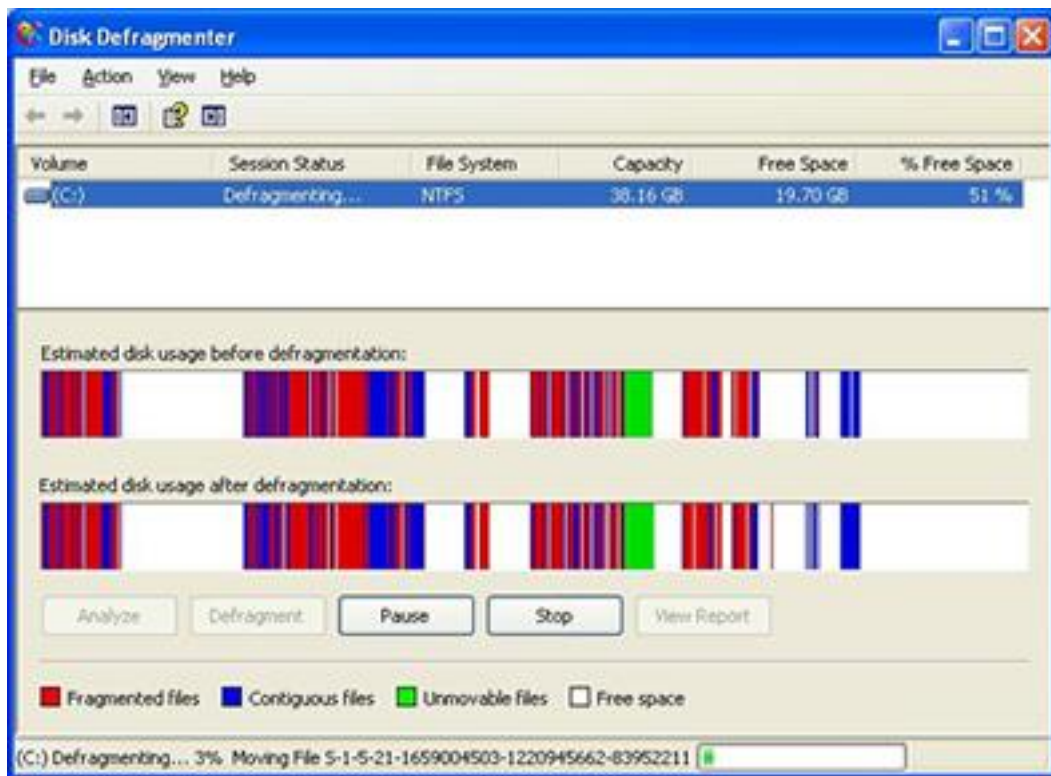
Defragging corrects this by moving data blocks back to contiguous, sequential series — the system can again access the files smoothly and quickly, with little or no extra head seeks.

The seek times of today's hard drives are over 10 times faster than those of that ancient Seagate drive mentioned. So the benefit of reducing seek times is an order of magnitude less. You probably won't notice any difference accessing a given file, whether the drive is defragged or not.

But the aggregate seek times still matter. We now use our drives far more intensely than we used to. (My first hard drive held 10 megabytes of data; nowadays, I take individual photos larger than that.) So the total number of seeks our hard drives perform today has increased by an order of magnitude.

Speed aside, there other benefits from defragging. For example, it improves your odds of recovering a deleted file, folder, or partition; it reduces overall wear and tear on the drive heads; and it helps minimize noise and heat during normal operations.

Initial disk defragmentation can take hours. But after that, it takes just a couple of minutes if you run the process every day. Because you can run defragging as an unattended process in all current versions of Windows — no third-party tools needed — one might ask: why would you not defrag?



Windows 7 'Compatibility Checker' Actually a Trojan

Beware any email that includes a link to a program that describes itself as a Windows 7 compatibility checker promising to verify whether or not your system can run Microsoft's new operating system.

Prominent security firm BitDefender first reported the attack earlier this month, but noted that the problem has not yet become widespread. However, because the Trojan appears genuine, it could actually have an enormous impact on users in the near future.

Trojan Emulates Microsoft in Emails

As one might expect, scammers are using the popularity of Windows 7 to spread malware. "This Trojan in particular is appealing to many users because of the interest in Windows 7," said Catalin Cosoi of BitDefender's Online Threats Lab.

The Trojan, which arrives via email attachments, isn't accompanied by the standard awful grammar we've come to expect from these kinds of criminals. Instead, they've copied and paste actual Microsoft marketing text from the legitimate Windows 7 Upgrade Advisor page:

"This software scans your PC for potential issues with your hardware, devices, and installed programs, and recommends what to do before you upgrade," the fraudulent emails read.

Trojan Allows Hackers Free Reign

Those who take the bait and launch the email attachment will in fact initiate a file containing a Trojan horse called Trojan.Generic.3783603. Some may recognize the name from a Facebook password scam not long ago.

Once the Trojan is installed, it installs a stealthy keylogger designed to soak up banking information and credit card data.

Of course, if you're looking for such a program that will determine if your computer can handle Windows 7, you can download Microsoft's genuine "Windows 7 upgrade advisor" from our download page. <http://www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/links.htm>

We have all got used to the various phishing emails purporting to be from the banks, UPS, EBay and many other institutions requesting our personal information, but it's easy to get caught out by something that is of particular interest to us.

It will be a boring day when everyone is too afraid to open an email from an unknown sender. Providing you have a good antivirus program such as Kaspersky or Avast (available from the link above) and keep it up to date, it should grab the Trojan even if you do, in a moment of weakness, click the link.

Do small local networks pose extra security concerns?

"Ask the Doctors"

"I have three computers, but normally I use only one at a time. They are not networked. "On occasion, I have the need to send information from one to the other by e-mail or USB flash drive.

"On such occasions it would be slightly more convenient to have them networked. I had planned to network them in the beginning, but someone told me that if I operate them separately, as I do now (and without much inconvenience), that there was much less likelihood of a virus infecting them all and bringing them all down at once. Does this make sense? If not, then I might network them."

Malware usually moves around through the transmission of an infected file. Whether you move the file through a network or on a floppy drive makes little difference.

So, if none of your shared files is infected, then you can safely move them from machine to machine by any means, including a local network.

In fact, all your PCs are already on a network — the Internet, which is quite literally a network of networks. Being connected to the Internet is a far-greater danger than having your PCs connected locally. (Hopefully, you're following normal safe-computing practices — such as running a good firewall, anti-malware software, and fully updated software.)

If you have all your PC's connected through the same broadband router, either wired or wireless, you probably have all the hardware you need to create a local area network (LAN).

Setting up a network used to be an arcane art, but it's much simpler now. Three good tutorials are:

1. Microsoft's home-network tutorial, "Setting up a home network" (specific to Vista, but also useful for XP and Win7) <http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows-vista/Setting-up-a-home-network>
2. PC World's article, "How to Set Up Your Home Network" http://www.pcworld.com/article/102461/how_to_set_up_your_home_network.html
3. About.com's page, "Home Networking — Setting Up a Home Network" http://compnetworking.about.com/od/homenetworking/Home_Networking_Setting_Up_a_Home_Network.htm

So go ahead. Network! You'll be glad you did.

Microsoft: Office 2010 Will Be Hottest Office Yet



Microsoft isn't afraid it might jinx itself with bold sales predictions for its upcoming

Office 2010. In a recent interview, one company representative said they expect Office 2010 to be the most rapidly-adopted Office software yet.

Why the bold predictions? Well, you can forgive Microsoft for being a bit arrogant -- after all, Windows 7 has virtually flown off shelves, to the point where it's nabbed the number two position in the world amongst currently-used operating systems, just behind Windows XP.

At least one Microsoft executive thinks all that Win7 love is bound to spread to the company's other products.

"This version will be the best ever in terms of adoption speed, both because of the interest we are seeing and the Windows 7 adoption curve," said the senior VP of Microsoft's Office group, Chris Capossela.

Difference Between Office 2010 and Office 2007, 2003

So, what's the big difference between Office 2010 and its predecessors, Office 2007 and Office 2003?

The simple answer is cloud computing. In a move to compete directly with Google's Apps software, Microsoft will allow users to collectively tinker with Excel spreadsheets, Word documents, and OneNote notebooks so long as they're connected to the web. Imagine completing one column of an accounting spreadsheet and having your friend in another country finish the next column, and so on.

Microsoft Needs the Boost

The predicted boom brought by Office 2010 couldn't come too soon, as sales for Microsoft's massive business division, a \$19 billion sector, are expected to drop 3 per cent by the end of this fiscal year.

Unfortunately for Microsoft, Capossela's bold predictions are being challenged by industry analysts. Sarah Friar, of Goldman Sachs Group Inc., thinks the process of moving towards Office 2010 will be a bit slower than Microsoft thinks.

"It's still a precarious recovery," Friar said. "We're in the camp of expecting a more moderate migration. It's kind of, 'steady as she goes.' It's not a raging rush to upgrade."

We say Office 2010 looks a lot like its predecessor, and once again offers much more software than most people could ever need. Criticisms thus far surround long, mandatory print previews and the lack of a decent spam filter.

We'll have more on Office 2010 next month if it is released later this month as predicted.

Turn off power hungry PC peripherals automatically

When you turn off your PC, do you have to crawl around under your desk turning off the printer, monitor, speakers etc.? Or do you just leave it to burn electricity all night?



We have some rather clever mains extension sockets that detect if you turn off your PC and cut the power to the remaining sockets. It also shields your PC equipment from mains voltage spikes. There is a separate little button on a fly lead that you can stick under the desk to turn on all your devices together.

These are for sale in our Northampton shop at **£14.95** while stocks last. More info at:

<http://wattsclever.com/product/pc-control-unit>

Blue screen of Death (BSOD) survival guide: Every error explained

Most Windows users are familiar with blue screen errors - the so-called Blue Screen of Death or BSOD.

Lots of people assume that such a major error can only be caused by a hardware fault, so if their PC is new, they march it straight back to the retailer, but BSOD's can also be caused by software errors, conflicts and even malware.

While no one likes to see those white letters on a blue background, if you actually read the error messages, they can point you to what might have caused the error.

This website covers the most common error messages and how to use them to resolve the problem.

http://www.maximumpc.com/article/features/blue_screen_survival_guide

New Barbie to become a Computer Engineer!

The popular vote of the 2009 Barbie Global Career Survey was, you've guessed it, a computer engineer.

Now you may think that this news will make little difference to who's governing Great Britain, Global warming and the melting of the ice caps. But to Mattel (the manufacturers of Barbie) there is nothing more important than making sure she has the right kit.

Here's the kit Mattel is going with (from its website):

"To ensure the doll accurately reflects this occupation, Barbie® designers worked with the Society of Women Engineers and the National Academy of Engineering to ensure that accessories, clothing and packaging were realistic and representative of a real computer engineer. Looking geek chic, Computer Engineer Barbie® wears a t-shirt featuring binary code and computer/keyboard icon along with a pair of black knit skinny pants. Computer Engineer carries a Barbie® smart phone, fashionable laptop case, flat watch and Bluetooth earpiece. With stylish pink-frame glasses and a shiny laptop, she is ready to conquer the day's tasks on the go or from her desk".

Before all the details were finally released to an eagerly awaiting world, much discussion ensued in the Computer Doctor's tea room regarding the possible clothing, gear, and work environment accessories with which Barbie might be outfitted.

Styling suggestions ranged from duffle coats and anoraks to t-shirts complete with coffee cup rings. While accessories included old Dilbert books, little tins of cat food, rude t-shirts, mountain boots, and a dozen frustrated "IT Kens" all vying for her attention.

The two things that everybody agreed upon was the obligatory thermal processor paste under the fingernails and various assorted Philips screwdrivers concealed about her person.

Now I've never worn anything that has been approved by the National Academy of Engineers, except maybe the orthodontic brace I had aged 10, which looked more like it was built by a scaffolding company. So maybe now is the chance to throw off the Frank Spencer look and finally get with the cool dude... scene...thingy...

A straw poll of my colleagues revealed a nearly unanimous vote for a uniform based on Barbie's pink glasses and hip hugging ski pants. Only one workshop engineer refused to give up the desert boots, knee length khaki shorts, faded t-shirt showing "soup stains through the ages" and a baseball cap worn sideways.

She said that she just wouldn't feel the same if her tattoo of "Stubbs the Zombie" was covered up by a pair of black knit ski pants!

All in all, I'm glad to be able to report that male computer engineers all over the world will finally be able to connect with their feminine side, all thanks to Barbie.



Best Range yet of PC's & Laptops at Northampton shop

If you are on the lookout for a new PC or laptop, we've never had a better range in our tiny shop as we have at the moment. Because we are limited for space, the models we choose to show all need to have something special. Either they represent best value for money or cutting edge technology, or other significant features which will be just what you are looking for.

All new PC's and laptops now come with Windows 7, and the two refurbished PC models on show (giving excellent value for money) have Vista home premium installed.

The real bargain of the show is the Acer bookshelf PC (the size of a book) complete with 19" Acer flat screen & speakers and Microsoft keyboard & optical mouse, all for **£299.95**. These are limited stock and when they're gone they're gone.

www.computerdoctors.co.uk/shop/desktop.htm

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

Take charge of Windows' User Account Control

Windows can be a terrible nag, and in Vista and Windows 7 it can be most annoying when popping up its User Account Control (UAC) security prompts.

UAC implementation proved clumsy in Vista, and it can still annoy in Win7 — but there are ways to make it less so.

How to rein in UAC warnings in Vista and Win7

In both Vista and Win7, you can choose among several different levels of UAC interaction.

The idea of UAC is great: it tries to ensure that no software has unauthorized access to administration-level privileges. If you're interested in a quick refresher on UAC and what it's supposed to do, Microsoft's "Explore the features: User Account Control" Web page will help.

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-vista/features/user-account-control.aspx>

Here's how to take control of UAC:

Vista: First introduced in Vista, UAC made Windows far more secure than XP. But it also made Vista frustrating to use — with security pop-ups erupting at every turn. Many experienced Vista users simply turned UAC off. That stopped the annoying security nags, but it also defeated the whole point of having UAC in the first place.

The following steps should make Vista's UAC more tolerable without eliminating it altogether.

- **The hard, but fully controllable, method:** Microsoft Technet's article, "User Account Control Step-by-Step Guide," shows several ways to configure Vista's UAC. If you truly want to master the subject. [http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/cc709691\(WS.10\).aspx#BKMK_S3](http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/cc709691(WS.10).aspx#BKMK_S3) You'll find what you need in Technet's excellent reference, "Understanding and Configuring User Account Control in Windows Vista." [http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/cc709628\(WS.10\).aspx](http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/cc709628(WS.10).aspx)
- **The easy, more-generic way:** If all you want to do is quickly beat Vista's UAC into submission, then WinAbility Software's small, simple, and free TweakUAC for Windows Vista will do the trick. <http://www.tweak-uac.com/home/> This slick little tool gives Vista's UAC a radio-button interface (see Figure 1) that's almost as easy to use as Win7's.



Figure 1. The free TweakUAC tool makes Vista's basic UAC settings almost as easy to control as Win7's.

Win7: In an admin-level account, open User Accounts by clicking the Start orb. Next, click Control Panel, User Accounts and Family Safety (in Control Panel's default view), and then Change Account Control settings.

In the dialog box that pops up (see Figure 2), move the slider up or down to the level of notification you're comfortable with — between Always notify and Never notify. The dialog box provides capsule explanations of what each increment does. Complete explanations are available in the Help file or on the Microsoft page, "What Are User Account Control Settings?"

<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows7/What-are-User-Account-Control-settings>

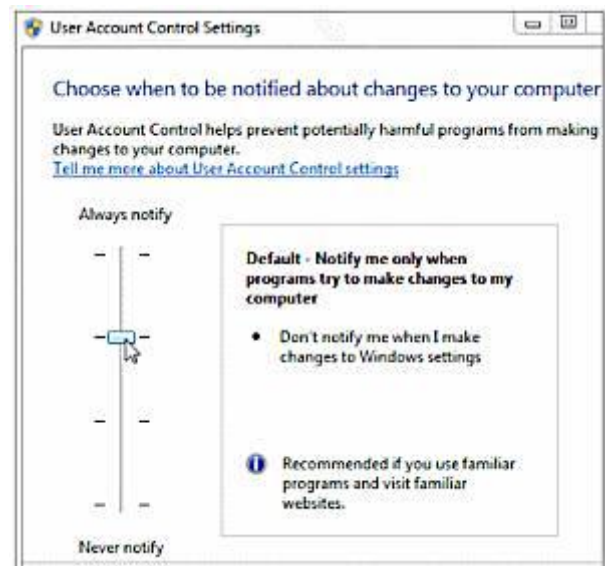


Figure 2. Win7's UAC can easily be regulated via this simple slide control.

Make your choice, click OK — and you're done. So you see: UAC doesn't have to be a headache!

Computer Basics - Saving files & File Names.

what Happens When You Save: Memory (RAM), and Disks?

When you are working on your computer, your work is in the computers electronic memory (also called RAM). If the power goes off, the electronic memory is erased. This is bad - it means your work disappears. The memory is also erased when you turn your computer off, when you are finished working with it.

In order to keep your work safe while your computer is off, you have to put your work onto a disk. This is called "saving" your work. When you save your work, the computer copies your work from the electronic memory, into a file on a disk. So a disk is for keeping your work while the computer is turned off.

There are different kinds of disks: floppy disks, the hard disk (also called the hard disk drive, or the hard drive - the "hard disk" is inside the "hard drive"), CD's, etc.

The hard disk is the main disk in your computer. This is where all your programs are kept, and you can keep your data there, also.

When you are working (for example, when typing a letter in your word processing program), you should "save" your work every 5 to 10 minutes, in case the power goes off or in case something else goes wrong. This will copy your work into a file on a disk, where it will be safe from a power failure, and also after you turn your computer off.

What is a File?

A "file" is one unit of information on a disk. Everything you store on a disk is stored in files. A file may contain a letter you typed to a friend, a list of addresses, a photo, or your tax information. All your data must be stored in files, or it will be erased when the computer is turned off.

Note: Programs are also stored in files, so don't delete files if you don't know what they are for. They may be part of one of your programs.

Saving: File Naming Rules

The first time you save a file, you should tell it what "file name" to store your work under (note that "some" programs will automatically put a file name in, but it is much better if you name your own files, so you have a better chance of finding them later).

The first time you save your work, you should use the "Save As" command, to tell your computer what "file name" to save your work in (in "some" programs, if you use the "Save" command the first time you save, it will act as if you clicked on the "Save As" command, but

this is only in some programs, so you should develop a habit of using the "Save As" command the first time

you save a new file). The "Save As" and "Save" commands are usually under the File menu (in most programs).

So, when you are typing a new document on your word processing program, the first time you go to save it, click on "File" to bring the File menu down, and click on "Save As" to bring the "Save As" dialog box up.

In the Save As dialog box, you can tell the computer where to put your file and what to call it. I won't get into where to put your file here, except to say that if the computer is putting your files in "My Documents" that is fine for now.

Then you have to tell the computer what "file name" to call your file. You should name your file according to what is in it (for example, if it is a letter to your son John, call it "Letter to John" not "Letter"). When you name your file, on computers with Microsoft Windows, there are also some computer requirements:

Use letters and/or numbers.

Use NO punctuation (and especially NO full stops).

In fact, your file names can contain some punctuation, but some of the punctuation characters have special meanings to the computer, and cannot be used. Your file names can contain apostrophes, dashes, underscores, and commas, but it is much easier to remember the rules if you use only letters and/or numbers, and avoid all punctuation.

You can even use full stops, but you should not put full stops near the end of the file name, within the last 4 characters. If you accidentally use a full stop near the end of your file name, you will probably have trouble getting that file back again later (if this happens, a technician can help you get your file back again).

Here are some examples of GOOD file names:

- 2004 Taxes for Bob Smith
- Personal Budget 2004
- Car Prices 2004
- Investment Notes from June 2003 Course
- Daily Weight for John starting March 2003
- To Do List
- Letter to Prime Minister, Feb 23, 2004

Note the use of two commas in this last file name. This is OK, and it is rather handy, but just be careful not to use full stops, especially at the end of your file names.

Here are some examples of BAD file names [the problem is listed with each one].

- **John** [This does not say what is in the file (if this is a letter, calculations, genealogy information, etc.)].
- **Letter** [This does not say who it is for].
- **Letter to John.** [This has a full stop at the end of it, which causes problems].
- **To Do List March 20/04** [This file name has a slash "/" between the "20" and the "04" so the computer will not accept it].
- **Letter to "Mum"** [The quotes around Mum will not be accepted by the computer].
- **Interest * Principal - List of Payments** [This file has an asterisk "*" in it, which the computer will not accept. The dash "-" is ok].

So, rather than memorizing all the details and risk having a problem, keep it simple: When you name a file, use only letters and/or numbers, and use no punctuation.

Basic Computer Words: Program and Data

A "program" is a set of instructions for the computer. A program tells the computer how to do something. Some examples of programs are a game like Solitaire or Hearts, a "word processing" program for doing typing on, a "spreadsheet" program for doing calculations on, a genealogy program for recording and keeping track of your genealogy information, and a "paint" or "drawing" program for drawing pictures on.

"Data" is your information, your work. Some people think of data as "facts" (either written facts or numbers). This could be a letter you typed in, some addresses, some calculations, your tax information, a short story, genealogy information, a picture or photograph, etc. Data is what you put in the computer.

Everything put in the computer is either a program or data.

The program is your tool. The data is your work. You use the "program" to work on "your data."

Laptop Hire



We have been asked by several customers to make some provision for them hiring a laptop while their PC or laptop is being repaired, or for any other reason.

The other request was to keep the cost down. To this end we have succeeded. We are approximately 2/3 the cost of our nearest rival . Click below for more info.

http://www.computerdoctors.co.uk/pages/laptop_hire.htm

External USB drive blue-screens Windows

"Ask the Doctors"

"I'm running Win7 Ultimate and had been using my 1TB Seagate Free agent external drive with no problems until recently. For some strange reason, I had a blue screen one day while it was hooked up, and ever since then it's not recognized it in Windows Explorer. It does show up in the device manager, and I removed the driver and reinstalled it, but it still won't show up in Explorer. Some of the things I saw in a Google search didn't help. I didn't buy the drive from you and the shop I did buy it from were particularly unhelpful. Can you help? "

Win7 is actually pretty hard to kill. If something generated a Win7 Blue Screen of Death (BSOD), then your PC is having a really bad day.

Because an external drive was involved, my suspicions immediately fall on the USB port or cable. I've experienced blue screens myself (though not on Win7) when USB sockets shorted out.

USB isn't just a signal medium; it also delivers five volts of power for USB devices. When a USB cable or connection goes bad and shorts out, it can misroute enough power to fry (or at least stun) the associated electronics. And, that can cause major ugliness in any operating system.

For now, you need to find what's broken. You can test your drive by plugging it into a known-good socket on the problem PC or into another machine.

To test your sockets, plug in a USB device you know works, such as a flash drive.

Since most PCs have multiple USB ports, fixing a dead socket is not worth the effort or expense. If you're short on ports, hang a powered USB hub off any working socket — or install an add-in card with a whole new bank of USB sockets.

If it turns out that your external drive is dead, let's hope your warranty will cover a repair or replacement.

Either way, I suggest you buy a short USB extension cable and plug it into your PC. Then connect your USB drive's cable to the free end of the extension cable.

When you connect or disconnect the drive, do so where the two cables meet. That way, all the stress and strain of plugging and unplugging the drive will be absorbed by the easily-replaced cables and not the USB sockets on your PC or external hard drive.

That way, you just may be able to avoid ever having this kind of moment again!

Last month's competition winner

Last month's winner of the eSATA external hard drive was Mr Harding of Hartwell. Seen here receiving his prize.



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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/
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