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Spring Cleaning for Your PC

Have your roller blades been collecting dust? Think your closet is getting cluttered? Believe it or not, your computer can become disorganized too. In a matter of months, unwanted applications, fragmented files and other messy problems can seriously slow your computer's performance. This spring, make sure to include your computer in your annual clean-up regime.

Cluttered Hard Drive

Do you know what applications are on your hard drive? Most likely, there are a lot of memory-gobbling programs you never use. Look through your directories or your start menu to find out exactly what's there. Run all unfamiliar programs. If you uncover something you don't need, such as a sound card utility or an old installation program, you can "un-install" the application using your PC's Add/Remove feature. However, Add/Remove often leaves behind vestiges of the application or won't let you remove certain selections. To make sure a program's gone for good, run system cleaning software such as [Norton Clean Sweep](#), a part of [Norton System Works](#).

There are many programs you do need, but don't want to run every time you boot up your computer. Nevertheless, a number of these non-essential programs find their way into your start-up menu and automatically load along with the other applications. As a result, you're running extra programs and unnecessarily reducing your operating speed.

For a list of exactly what's running at any given moment, hit Ctrl/Alt/Del. To remove most unwanted applications from your start menu, go to Start Menu/Settings/Taskbar & Start Menu.

Memory

"Thrashing" is the processing, laboring sound some computers make when they run applications. Thrashing occurs when a computer that doesn't have enough free disk space stores a disproportionate amount of information in its virtual memory. Consequently, the computer has to spend time swapping information back and forth with virtual memory every time it runs an application.

The best way to reduce thrashing is to increase the amount of your computer's random access memory (RAM). The amount of RAM you need depends on the type and number of programs your computer operates. For example, a multitasking Windows 95 operating system could use, on average, 32MB of RAM whereas high-end systems operating graphics and multimedia should have at least 64MB.

Fragmented Files

Each time you make changes to a file, the new information usually does not get stored with earlier information from the same file. Over a period of months or years, parts of files become spread around your hard drive in a process called fragmentation. In order to locate the far-flung parts of your files, mechanical heads in the hard drive have to move back and forth between different tracks -- this is very time consuming!

In order to reorganize files and correct fragmentation you should regularly run a DEFRAG program such as the one included in Norton Clean Sweep.

Recycle Bin

When you delete a file, it doesn't actually disappear, it goes to the Recycle Bin. For a period of time, you can still retrieve an item from the bin. This feature is a blessing for the indecisive among us; however items stored in the Bin can take up a lot of space.

When disk space gets very low, Windows will ask you if you want to permanently delete recycled files. As a default setting, Windows allocates 10% of free disk space to deleted files -- that's 10% of space taken up by unwanted files! You can change the default setting to a lower number by right-clicking on the Recycle Bin, selecting Properties, then changing the percentage. Under Properties, you can also manually empty the bin.

Web Browser Cache

Each time you visit a Web site, your Web browser captures documents and images from the

pages you've viewed and stores them in its cache -- a temporary storage folder. The cache can instantly call up templates from the sites you've visited, eliminating the need to download the same information during subsequent visits. This recall ability speeds your browsing. However, all the stored site information can also take up significant disk space. Fortunately, there are ways to minimize the size of your cache:

- **Cache size.** Under Tools/Options/Settings in your browser, you can reduce the size of your cache and the number of days that your cache stores records.
- **Clean out cache.** Under your browser's Tools/Options/Settings, you can also periodically clear out your cache history.

Cookies

A cookie is user information or data that's created by a Web server and stored on the user's hard drive. Using cookies, Web sites can track a user's browsing behavior. Thanks to some cookies, users don't have to reenter their ID information every time they visit a particular Web site. However, many cookies provide no value to the user and can take up space on the hard drive.

If you browse often, you should periodically eliminate unwanted cookies. Locate your cookie folder on your hard drive and delete cookies from sites you don't regularly visit.

Image Quality

Unless you have an updated, memory-rich video card, high screen resolution can slow down your performance. High-resolution images have a greater number of dots of information, or pixels, and appear sharper. However, lots of pixels will take your computer longer to render new images. To adjust your image to a lower resolution go to: Control Panel/Display/Settings or Properties.

Your color palette and wallpaper image choice can also affect your computer's speed. Patterned or detailed wallpaper makes it more difficult for your computer to display other images, such as Web pages. Instead, opt for simple, solid color wallpaper schemes. Also, under Display/Settings or Properties, consider reducing your color palette to a lower figure such as 256 colors.

Updates

Sometimes, a programming glitch can really slow you down. Chances are, your supplier has already fixed the problem and there's a newer version of your application available. **Norton Web Services** makes it fast and simple to update your applications.

From Internet debris to fragmented or unwanted files, there's a lot to remember when it comes to thoroughly organizing your computer. However, regular clean-ups don't have to be a chore. With a comprehensive and easy-to-use program such as **Norton System Works** and Clean Sweep, all it takes is a click of the mouse to keep your computer in top shape. And that means you can spend more time cleaning your closets, kitchen, office, car...

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