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Space Invaders: Making Room on Your PC

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With the ever-increasing size of applications, copious amounts of daily email, rapidly growing customer databases, and other storage challenges, many small businesses are finding it difficult to make room for storage on their PCs. The Internet especially hogs hard disk space with high-resolution images, multimedia clips, and data files that end up on your computer. Fortunately, there are solutions to your data storage woes, whether you want to optimize the space you already have, or add some more. Luckily for small business owners, most of these fixes won't break the bank, either.

Clean Up Shop

It's time to remove all those files you created months ago and never use, or the ones that came with your computer and you never use. They are taking up valuable disk space. Internet files are another culprit that you need to swipe clean.

Take Out the Trash

It's a good idea to empty your "trash" or "recycling bin" every so often - daily if you delete a lot. If you don't empty them out, the files will build up and use valuable space you thought you were saving by deleting them in the first place.

Uninstall the Unwanted

Most people pledge allegiance to one particular Web browser over the other. If this is the case on your PC, uninstall the unwanted browser using the "add/remove programs" tool. This goes for any other programs you don't use that are taking up valuable space. If your software is factory-installed, you've probably got plenty of files and programs in there that you'll never use -- some even include space hogging multimedia files. There are also files you don't need floating around that were originally used for installing an application. You might not see them because they tend to hide in obscure places. You can use an uninstaller to find all these unnecessary files and then decide whether or not you want to delete them. Recent versions of Windows come with their own uninstaller.

Clean That Cache

Cache is a portion of RAM that temporarily stores your most recently accessed data. Caching helps speed your system's performance because when you access the same data more than once, the operating system pulls it straight from the cache instead of searching the hard disk. When your cache gets too full, it can actually *slow down* performance.

One of the biggest cache hogs is Web page files. These accumulate quickly as you surf the Net and are loaded with large image files. You can periodically clear your cache and even reduce the amount of disk space used for cached pages in your browser. Internet Explorer lets you set how many days of history files to retain, and what percentage of your hard disk to allocate in your cached page files. By reducing these settings, you can reduce the amount of storage space that your browser takes up on your hard disk.

Use a System Cleaning Tool

You might find that a utility like [Norton SystemWorks](#) can be a big help in sweeping out the junk and making room on your hard drive. Norton SystemWorks is a suite of tools, including Symantec's most popular products like [Norton AntiVirus](#) and [Norton Utilities](#). One of the tools in Norton SystemWorks, [Norton CleanSweep](#),™ protects you from accidental file deletion while safely and easily removing unwanted programs. The Internet Sweep feature cleans away clutter accumulated by web surfing. Fast & Safe Cleanup automatically removes files you no longer need. And the Uninstall Wizard provides step-by-step guidance for removing old programs and their associated files.

Adding On

You've tried to clear some space on your clogged hard drive to no avail. It may be time for you to consider adding a removable device, or upgrading your hard drive, to boost your computer's storage space. You need to decide what you are going to be storing first of all. Is this space for archiving and back up, or for information you will be accessing on a daily basis? What do you consider more important, ample room or low cost? Speed or low cost? Portability or capacity?

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Upgrading

Hard disks are now available with enormous storage capacities. High capacity disk drives find your data swiftly, and are priced reasonably. Even your most important on-the-road business tool, the laptop, can have its hard disk upgraded. Those with PC card slots can take plug-in drives offering several gigs of storage space.

Removable Devices

Once you've decided to add a removable device, you need to choose your medium. There are several options available now, varying significantly in speed, cost, capacity and flexibility. You must decide which of these factors are most important to you before you decide which media to store your valuable files on.

- **omega Zip and Jaz drives** use high-capacity, removable disks. The disks are small, inexpensive and hold either 150 MB (Zip) or 2 gigs (Jaz) of data. The drives do not require special software, can be installed internally or externally, and are easy to use. Do some considerations on the prices for these; although the Jaz media are more expensive than Zip initially, in a price per megabyte comparison, the Jaz media is actually a lot cheaper.
- **CD-R/RW drives** use compact discs (CDs) to store up to 740 MB of data. The CDs are inexpensive, easy to store, and the CD-RW (re-writable) can be reused. Many computers now come with CD-Rs preinstalled. This medium is extremely portable and files can be accessed from any machine that has a CD drive.
- **Tape drives** are the industry standard of data storage, especially for larger systems. Small and fast, the drives can back up your whole system in just minutes. Accessing the data can be a slower process, however, and special software is required to record and access data on tape. Although costly, tape drives are reliable.

Avoiding Future Overload

You can avoid a severe clogging of system resources if you make a habit of archiving files you don't use frequently, emptying your trash or recycling bin regularly, and keeping the cache on your Web browser under control. Don't be afraid to add on or upgrade as your business grows; weighing your priorities and selecting a good product could put your mind, and your PC, at ease.

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