Basic Computer Use

You can use a computer for a million things: Web Browsing, Checking Email, Social Networking, Gaming, Media, and the list goes on. Unfortunately, not everyone knows to properly care for and operate them.

I am going to explain just a few things that will keep your computer happy and healthy and help you be less frustrated with that piece of technology you rely on.

Shutting down your computer

* Have you ever had a computer that started running slower and slower the longer you had it? If the computer is older than six or seven years, I would say just replace it and start over. HOWEVER, most people complain about this within the first two years of buying a new computer. That can be overwhelmingly frustrating considering you shelled out a lot of money for it. Ask yourself this question, “Did I shut it down when it wasn’t needed?” If the answer is not “Yes” to EVERY time, then it’s likely you have a HDD going bad. HDD’s are mechanical. They have moving parts and pieces that, unless the computer is powered off COMPLETELY, are still running. You wouldn’t leave your car running in the garage overnight just because you have to use it again tomorrow…apply the same concept here and your computer will thank you.

Windows Updates

* This is an argument as old as Windows itself. Yes, in the past, there have been updates that have caused issues with computers…and you may even have been one of the unfortunate souls to experience it. The truth is, less than 1% of ALL WINDOWS UPDATES have had a negative effect on computers since Windows 95. Windows Updates are important and very often vital to the proper operation of your computer. The process allows security patches to update your antivirus programs, driver updates to keep your peripheral devices working, and OS upgrades to make your computer easier and more fun to use. By NOT allowing these updates to happen, you are making your personal information more vulnerable to attacks and creeps on the internet and potentially creating MORE issues. If you are still not sold on the idea, then just make sure you keep a regular backup of your data, create a system restore point, and youll have everything you need to revert back if something does happen.

Backing Up Data

* I am willing to bet that most of you have YEARS of pictures and videos of kids, pets, family long passed and even more saved on your computer. But, how many of you have those saved in a second or even third location? What happens if your HDD or OS fails completely and that information is not recoverable? Its not necessarily IMPOSSIBLE to get it back…but it’s definitely expensive (Level 1 data recovery at an off-site location requires a clean room and STARTS at about $300 and goes up to the thousands depending on the level of corruption). External HDD’s are getting cheaper all the time. I think you can get a 2TB external HDD (roughly 2000GB, or the equivalent of MILLIONS of pictures) for around $60. Most of them come with their own company’s version of backup software (Western Digital, Seagate, etc.) that you can install on your computer and run on a regular basis. Standard recommendation for backups is once a week to once a month, depending on your level of usage. NEVER consider your actual computer or another for that matter as a backup device (the same goes for flash drives…they are meant for temporary storage). More importantly, have TWO backups of everything…just in case. I have lost all my data before, and it is a terrible feeling that I would not wish on anyone. It can be heartbreaking, especially to those that have children or family that is no longer with us. Just a few minutes a day every week will save you a lot of frustration and money in the end.

Viruses, Malware, Spyware, etc.

* Everyone gets the same look on their face when I tell them they have malware or traces of viruses. Even with an active and healthy AV program, it is still possible to get malware (viruses and spyware are much less likely). Malware is short for Malicious Software, essentially, its anything software related that interferes with the operation of the computer. It can be something as simple as a program that pops up randomly, or it can be as serious as something that locks down your computer entirely. These types of things can be installed very easily if you’re not paying attention. Next time you’re installing that Java or Flash player update; do not mindlessly click through the windows just to get to the finish line. READ the windows and see if there are any check boxes that suggest other software to install, or want you to change your browser search engine. If there are, uncheck them. Clicking on ads on the sides of web pages is another issue. These will ALWAYS redirect you to some 3rd party page that is associated with the site and more often than not link tracking cookies to your computer. They are mostly harmless but occasionally, youll run into one that just starts creating chaos on your screen. Always navigate to the REAL website and look up what the ad is showing just to be safe. There are countless ways things like this can happen but if you follow these simple rules youll be just fine :
1. Do not open emails or attachments from email addresses you do not recognize.
2. Do not give your log in information for ANYTHING to ANYONE.
3. Do not click on web page ads.
4. Immediately close any popup windows
5. Do not allow ANYONE to remotely access your computer unless you have initiated the process. \*\*\*there has been a large uptick in phone call scams where people claim your computer is infected and they have to log into it to fix it. It’s just a scam to get you to pay them money. They may claim to be from Windows, Microsoft, Apple, or even Geek Squad…None of these companies will EVER call you to inform you of a problem on your computer if it’s at your home.
6. Finally, keep an active antivirus running on your computer at all times.

Antivirus software

* Ive lost count how many times I have informed a client of virus infections on their computer and they all give me the same speech. “I cant have a virus because im running X, Y, or Z that came with the computer!” Newsflash!!!! Those are free trials of low-grade AV programs that you actually have to activate. Furthermore, you still have to put in credit card info for the initial free trial anyway. If you are not paying for antivirus (with very few exceptions), you are not protected. Do your research, or talk to your preferred IT professional and youll get plenty of good recommendations. Once installed, keep it up to date. Do not let it expire or you will be back in the same boat you were in in the first place. One final not on AV software…just because you have a good one that’s active, doesn’t meant you’re impervious to malware and such. It’s like a flu shot for your computer. It’s protected against 99.9% of the stuff that’s out there, but there is always something new that it may not detect because theres just no knowledge of the strain of infection yet. Fortunately, that’s rare. If it does happen, again, contact your preferred IT pro and they will help you straighten things out!