

Tips, Tricks and Advice from your local "IT Guru"

This month I want to talk to you about speeding up your Windows computer. For reasons too technical and boring to go into, Windows suffers from the delightfully named "Windows Bloat". What this means is that over time your PC will slow down. This is not, as lots of people believe, to do with the amount of data you have, so the fact that you have tons of music and photos will not cause too much of a problem unless you are really tight for disk space, it's more to do with the number of programs and updates you have installed over the years and the way that Windows generally manages itself.

Despite what many people will try and tell you there are only three sure fire ways to speed up your PC: Remove huge bloated Internet security suites, Install more memory or do a complete wipe and reinstall. Lets take them in order of preference..

I've made my opinions on the huge bloated security suites commonly sold with PC's or in large computer stores clear before in this column, so I'll just say that a fair increase in speed can be gained by ditching them and going for one of the smaller free antivirus programs such as AVG. It's easy and cheap, so it's always my first option.

Next is memory, RAM (Random Access Memory) is what your computer uses to run its operating system and programs, and basically, the more the merrier. All Windows systems have a sweet spot in the amount of memory where things start to zip along, and that's the starting point for good performance. With XP its 1Gb and with Vista it's 2Gb, they will work with less but it's a struggle. I know Microsoft recommend 512Mb and 1Gb but take my word for it, my numbers are based on real world experience. I have seen XP system running on as little as 256Mb and it's not pretty, and anyone selling a Vista system with less that 1Gb should be made to use the system for a week and then see how they feel! You can have more, but anything over 4Gb on either operating system is really not worth it. Go to www.crucial.com and run the memory scan there, it will tell you what you've got, what you can have and how much it will cost. If that's a bit daunting, take the base unit of your PC to a local computer expert and ask them to tell you what you need to get your system up to or above my recommended amounts. The cost of memory has really fallen over the last few years so expect to pay under £50, which makes it a very cheap way to get a big performance boost.

If you already have the recommended amounts of RAM and your system is still slow then the next best option is a reinstall of Windows from a known clean source such as the recovery disks that came with the PC. This will make sure that you clear out all the junk that has accumulated and that you have nothing nasty running in the background. It's not a step to be taken lightly, and you need to make sure you have all the disks you need to reinstall any software and devices, *and most important of all you need to make sure all your data is backed up*. I'll say that again, **make sure all your data is backed up!** Really this is a job best done by an expert and again, I wouldn't expect to pay more than about £50.

People will tell you that you can run registry cleaners or use PC Tune up software but I've never found these make the slightest difference and you can do more harm than good.

If you have a PC that's a few years old or one that has been incorrectly specified, chances are that one or all of the steps above will make a huge difference to it's performance and cost you little.

Windows 7

By the time you are reading this Microsoft should be only a few days from releasing the latest version of Windows. I've been asked a lot if it's worth buying and I will devote next months column to the pro and cons, but for now I will say that Windows 7 is miles better than Vista and if you have held off buying a new PC because of the bad things you heard about Vista then now's the time to go ahead.

If you have any questions or anything you would like me to cover in this column, email me at look@4-11consultants.co.uk

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