



JIMS VIRTUAL WORLD

A NEWSLETTER BY THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Put your PC maintenance routine on autopilot

Most people do one of the following when their computer begins to slow down (besides get angry):

- Improve their computer by buying more memory.
- Decide to tweak their computer's settings.
- Figure that their computer is old, there's nothing else they can do, and that it's probably time to buy a new computer.

All these solutions will boost a computer's performance. However, what's to keep your newly blazing PC from slowing down again after a couple months or years? A badly fragmented hard drive will bring even a top-of-the-line new computer to a grinding halt.

One option is to create a preventive maintenance plan—a plan that's easy to set up and set in motion so you never have to think about it again.

The following sections provide information on how to automate a maintenance schedule to keep your PC running smoothly. These procedures differ from version to version, but overall you'll find these tasks work for Windows 7, Windows Vista, Windows XP, Windows 2000, Windows Millennium Edition (Me), and Windows 98.

Create a preventive maintenance plan for your computer

When people notice their computer's performance slowing, the most common reason is the hard disk. Your computer's hard disk is a non-removable area that holds all the information available from your computer. Over time, hard disks begin to lose their ability to store data efficiently. The Windows operating system provides three great tools to help keep your hard drive humming smoothly. These tools are Disk Cleanup, Disk Defragmenter, and Check Disk.

Ideally, you should run these tools on the following schedule.

Preventive Maintenance Activity	Recommended Frequency
Clean up the hard disk of temporary files	Weekly
Rearrange (defragment) the hard disk	Monthly
Check the hard disk for errors	Weekly

Of course, who has the time (or the desire) to keep up with this schedule? The best solution is to let Windows do all of the work. Windows allows you to set up and automate these tasks, so you never have to worry about them again.

Clean up your hard disk (weekly)

Your computer amasses temporary files over time. These files can come from any number of sources, the Web being one of the largest offenders. After a while, these temporary files will slow down your computer.

About once every week, you should run the Windows Disk Cleanup utility to clear your PC of these temporary files.

Rearrange your fragmented files (monthly)

Whenever a file becomes too large to store in a single location on your hard disk, your computer breaks that file into parts (or fragments). Don't worry, though. Your computer keeps track of all these fragments, piecing them together whenever the file is accessed.

However, as fragmented files accumulate on your hard disk, your computer becomes gradually slower. This is because your computer has to go through all these fragmented files in order to piece the correct parts together again.

While there's nothing you can do to prevent the fragmentation of files, Windows does have a utility (Disk Defragmenter) to help deal with this situation. Disk Defragmenter rearranges fragmented files, resulting in increased free space on your hard disk and quicker performance from your PC.

About once every month, you should run the Windows Disk Defragmenter utility.

Check your hard disk for errors (weekly)

Whenever a program you're using crashes, your computer may create errors on your hard disk. These errors will eventually slow your computer to a crawl. The good news is that Windows includes a Check Disk program. Check Disk corrects these types of errors from your hard disk, resulting in better PC performance.

About once every week, you should run the Check Disk utility.

Let Windows do all the work

These automated tasks—while they seem simple enough—are the foundation on which your computer's performance rests. Lucky for us, Windows can completely handle these tasks. You never have to worry about them. You just set up your maintenance tasks once, automate them, and let Windows take care of the rest.