# Computer Tips and Tricks

Free Booklet
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**Computer**
*AMBULANCE*
Serving Residential & Small Business

# Practical, Tried-and-Tested Computer Tips from Computer Ambulance's Technicians.

## I get tons of junk mail every morning – can you recommend a reliable Anti-Spam filter that will help stop these clogging up my inbox?

The first line of defence in this case might be to change your email client from *Outlook* or *Outlook Express* to *Thunderbird* – available to download at:

http://www.mozilla-europe.org/en/products/thunderbird/

This is an alternative to *Outlook Express* that has in inbuilt spam filter. In addition, you can download an anti-spam program such as *Cloudmark Desktop.* We test at least a dozen Anti-Spam utilities every month and by far this is one of the best we've come across and is available at:

http://www.cloudmark.com/desktop/.

It has a very high accuracy rate, (therefore, not mistaking your genuine emails as junk) and won't crash your system. The feedback from our customers on both these programs is excellent.

## Is there anything I can do to speed Windows XP loading up – it seems to take forever?

Our first recommendation would be to add more RAM (memory). You should have at least a minimum of 256MB, but 512MB or 1GB is optimal. In Windows XP, you can check how much RAM your system has by going to *Control Panel*, *System* and looking in the *General* tab. The more memory you have – the easier it will be for Windows to find space for all those drivers and programs during boot time. (Caveat: anything more than 1GB on Windows XP, and the Law of Diminishing Returns kicks in pretty fast).

One of the biggest contributors to a slow boot-up time is the long list of programs configured to load when you first turn on your computer. Not only do they take time to load but they also eat your computer's memory and processor cycles. To stop so many programs loading up at start-up, go to Start > Run and in the box type "*msconfig*". A configuration box will then appear. Select the "start-up" tab and uncheck any programs which you don't use anymore.

## How do I delete my data from my old computer so it is totally unusable if it gets into the wrong hands?

So you've given your old computer the last rites and now you want to wipe it's hard drive clean. Our first piece of advice would be to make sure that the data that *you will* or *might need again* has been backed up to a reliable backup medium.

Once you are satisfied that your data has been backed up safely. You can choose from a number of commercial applications that will safely delete all your data to irretrievable state. One such application which we would recommend would be Active Kill Disk Professional. Available at: http://www.killdisk.com/ (in fact, this piece of software meets the stringent standards set by the *United States Department of Defense* for secure deletion of data). Once this application had been run on your old drive – there is no going back and you can rest assured that even if your old hard drive does get into the hands of the most determined fraudster, the data on it will be totally unreadable.

## Where can I get rid of my old computer in an environmentally friendly way in Dublin?

Here is a short list of the recycling centres for computer equipment in Dublin.

Dublin South – Ballymount Recycling Centre, Ballymount Lane, Ballymount Industrial Estate OR Ringsend Recycling Centre, Ringsend, Dublin 4.

Dublin North – Shamrock Terrace Recycling Centre, North Strand Road, Shamrock Terrace, Dublin 3 OR  Estuary Recycling Centre, Seatown East, Swords Co. Dublin.

Dublin West – Coolmine Recycling Centre, Coolmine Industrial Estate, Dublin 15.

**We want to do a basic clean-up on our PC that has gone really slow lately. I'm sure there is loads of stuff on it that we don't even need any more— where do I even start?**

A good place to start might be to download and run a free program called *TreeSize*. Available at http://www.jam-software.com. This easy-to-use program will tell you, by means of colour coded bar charts, which files and applications are taking up the most space on your system. For example, it will easily find for you those 12GB music folders that you don't even use anymore. It will also indicate which applications are taking up the most space. Then go to the *Control Panel* and go to the *Add / Remove Programs* list and remove those programs you don't need anymore. Finally, download and run a program called Ccleaner www.ccleaner.com to get rid of any temporary internet files that are clogging up your system. (*Ccleaner* is perfectly safe to use and will not delete any important files)

**How can I secure my wireless network so that "passers-by" outside with laptops cannot access my data?**

Here are 3 relatively simple tips to make your wireless network safer:

First of all, your wireless network must be locked. (An unlocked wireless network is like putting your own personal filing cabinet on O'Connell St. and then letting any passer-by have a "look in"). It also means that people can steal your bandwidth i.e., they can piggyback on your internet connection, getting a free internet connection, while at the same time slowing your own connection down. The best way to lock your network is to use an encryption method such as WEP (a bare minimum) or WPA (more secure). WPA or WPA2, if your network hardware is compatible with it – is much more secure than WEP. Make sure the password you use is strong. A password for your wireless network such as "united2008" is not strong whereas a hexadecimal password such as

"87BDA07EDE2C93EAB7986E4B9BA7349D6553B57764F48EFAB1681DEE5782F1B2"

is much more secure.

Change the network name to something other than the default. For example, your wireless network might be called *Eircom 5236 889985* or *Netgear WGT 624*. These should be changed. Telling potential hackers what kind of router you have only makes life easier for them.

Another thing which you can do to secure your wireless network is to make sure to change the default login code of your router. Most routers either have admin or public as the default login codes and *password* as the password! Most hackers are already au fait with this security weakness. These too should be changed to something more secure.

## My wireless connection keeps on dropping intermittently for no apparent reason?

There are numerous reasons for dropped wireless connections. Here are some of the most common solutions for intermittent wireless connection problems that we come across.

- You are trying to connect using Windows XP Service Pack 1. One of the major reasons Microsoft brought out Windows XP Service Pack 2 was to fix the numerous wireless networking flaws with SP1. So first you should check whether you have Service Pack 2 or not. (Go to Control Panel > System > General Tab)

- If you're experiencing wireless connection drops using a laptop, it is possible that your wireless network card has a feature known as *power management* enabled. *Power Management* should be disabled.

- Make sure you have the latest drivers for your network card installed. (A driver is a basically a piece of software the makes sure a hardware component is able to "communicate" with your version of Windows). Having the latest driver version means any driver flaws have been ironed out by the manufacturer.

- Another solution to this problem would be to change the *Preamble Type* on your network card (of the computer that is dropping the connection). To change this, go to Start > Control Panel > Network Connections > Right Click on your Wireless Connection > Select Properties > Click on Configure > Select Advanced Tab > Look under the left hand column called "Property" > here you should see Preamble or

- PLSC header > change the default setting from auto/short/long to "long only". (What is *preamble* anyway?- *preamble* is what determines how long a wireless card will wait for a return response for a wireless router, if it does not receive a reply within a set period of time, the wireless link just times out, setting the *preamble mode* to "long only" gives it the maximum possible time to get a signal and greatly improves connection quality.

# I run a small business and have lots of important files on my computer — what should I be looking for when it comes to a backup system?

The best backup systems are usually automatic i.e, they do their job with minimum user intervention. They are less prone to the foibles of human forgetfulness or laziness!

An interesting trend that *Computer Ambulance* has noticed is that most customers who require data recovery have computer systems that are *less than 24 months old.* So having a "newish" computer does not mean to say your hard disk drive will not fail, if anything a new computer just gives the user a false sense of data security. You *always* must have your data backed up. Here are some characteristics of a good back-up system:

*Reliable* – it can stand the test of time and will not fail you when you need it most. Good backup systems do not require constant maintenance and should the worst happen, you should be able to retrieve your data back quickly and painlessly.

*Up-do-Date* – You can have the most sophisticated back-up system in the world, but if it is not up-to-date it can be useless to you. Murphy's Law applies here. The files which you worked on two weeks ago and did not back up will be the very files you will urgently need after a crash.

*Comprehensive* - Your back-up system should back-up *all* relevant files that are important to you. For example, a backup system that only backs up your "My Documents" folder can leave you with the painful discovery, after a computer crash or hard drive failure, that your emails, contacts and accounts package data files are all missing.

*Easy Verifiable* – You should be able to easily and quickly check the backup medium, to make sure the backup solution is doing the job it's supposed to do.

*Portability* – You should have the ability to take your back-up medium off-site for extra security. Potential risks in any location include flood, fire, theft and power surges. For example, if you run a small business, you should have ability to easily take your backup files home with you.

## I work with a networked computer and there is a private folder I would like to keep "private" — how would I do this without resetting file permissions etc?

You can create shared folders on your computer and then hide them. When users view the computer from *My Network Places* or *Network Neighbourhood* , they see all the shared resources. They don't however see the shared folders that are hidden. The person who created the folder is the only person who knows it exists. Here is a neat trick to create a hidden folder on your computer that other users of the network cannot see.

Create a folder. Let's call it something like *PrivateFolder*. Locate it on the C:\ drive. Now share it on the network. To make it invisible to all users, but yourself, simply add a "$" dollar sign to the end of it. For example, C:\PrivateFolder$. When you want to view this folder from another computer in your office. Simply go to Start -> Run and enter [\\computername\privatefolder$](\\computername\privatefolder$) and, hey presto, your very own private folder will appear.

## My inkjet printer until recently has been working fine — but lately the print-out from it seems all distorted?

In most cases this is caused by a clogged inkjet nozzle. Luckily, in most inkjet printers there is an inbuilt nozzle-cleaning feature. To activate this feature, go to the *Control Panel*, select *Printers*, select the icon for the printer you use (e.g Lexmark X 1150), right click on it and then select *Properties*. Then click on the *Maintenance* tab. Click on "*nozzle clean*" and the inbuilt nozzle-cleaning feature of your printer should start. The process usually takes around 6-7 minutes.

**When I turn on Windows Vista – all I get is an error message, that seems to prevent the rest of Windows from loading – is there anything I can do to make it start properly?**

This sort of problem is usually indicative of a corrupted system file or registry in *Windows Vista* and most of the time, the fix is quite simple.

Insert the recovery or installation DVD that came with your computer. (Your computer must be configured boot from a DVD)

Restart the computer. With the DVD in your DVD drive and your computer set to boot-up from DVD – you will be presented with a number of options.

First, select your L*anguage Preference.*

Click on "*Repair your Computer*"

You will then be presented with the *System Recovery Options* box, click on the version of *Windows*, you would like to repair, in this case select *Windows Vista.* Click Next

You will then see an option called *System Recovery Options*, Click on *Start-up Repair*. *Windows Vista* will now try to repair the corrupted registry or file. Click on Finish when the operation has completed.


**I own an XP desktop computer that every so often just cuts out on me completely. The problem does not always happen, but when it does it's very annoying. Any ideas of what it could be?**


From our experience, these symptoms match a number of possible problems including bad memory (RAM), an overheating CPU (processor) or a failing video card. Most likely however, your problem is down to a defective power supply unit. A power supply unit is a component inside your computer's case that distributes power to your system's motherboard and all internal devices.  When the internal power supply is failing, sporadic "out-of-the-blue" system shut-down is usually the most common symptom.  A new power supply unit is easily replaced.