



FROM BEHIND THE SERVICE COUNTER

Let's call this month's edition: Myth Busters

It is very frustrating to know that many misconceptions, mostly products of the past, are still bouncing around out there and affecting the way people think, operate and shop for their computers.

Here's some of the bigger ones;

Free anti-virus programs - while there are a few very good free AV programs out there, the vast majority are worth exactly what you pay for them, NOTHING! ...and internet providers offering "free" AV are actually doing so just to keep the garden variety viruses off THEIR system but does little to provide comprehensive protection for you.

We quite often get clients who explain symptoms that we know are virus related but they insist their anti-virus has never found a problem. That would be because the product they're using isn't capable of detecting sever problems so it can't report what it can't uncover. Every dog has it's day and "the top rated " products change as one developer improves their product, relative to their competition, so relying on old or anecdotal opinions is quite often misplaced confidence. Call your local computer guys to find out what the current "best one" is. They're the ones that clean machines all day long and know what works and what doesn't.

The difference between Windows Pro and Home is...? - To the home user the simple answer is NOTHING. Pro is a commercial version of Windows that has additional functionality to connect to corporate servers and allow IT departments to remotely access and service computers on their network. THERE IS NO ADVANTAGE TO THE AVERAGE HOME USER TO BUY A PRO VERSION OF WINDOWS. Having said that, many off-lease computers that lived their first life in a large corporation come with PRO installed. It's just not a big deal either way.

Defragging - To better understand the implications of defragging, allow me to quickly explain how the hard drive functions. The magnetic platters of the hard drive, once formatted, have electronic boxes (sectors) into which data is stored. These sectors are linked by a table of contents (file allocation table) to provide a roadmap of which sectors are linked to provide sufficient space for a complete file to be stored. Typically the computer finds the first available space on the platter and fills it with data and then moves to the next open space and so on until the file has been completely stored. So it is not unusual for a file to be literally scattered, or "fragmented", all over a hard drive.

Once upon a time, when hard drives were as big as washing machines (okay, so I tend to exaggerate...) and had very limited capacity, having all the files organized on the drive in one contiguous line was advantageous to help with reading the file. In essence, it was like dropping the needle of a record player and grabbing all the data in one pass. But now with advanced technology, the speed with which the hard drives can find and transfer the data to the computer makes defragging almost redundant. If you are still convinced you need to do so, we'd recommend defragging once a year. Actually, I personally can't remember when I last defragged a drive...

Registry cleaners - These days we are surrounded with insurgence into our mental space with warnings of doom and gloom trying to convince us that a grave danger exists if we don't respond to a call to action, usually resulting in a sale of some product that may or may not actually benefit the purchaser. This is one of those products.

The registry is a group of files listing all of the info your computer needs to find hardware and software and to enable the operating system to load. Occasionally an entry become redundant or "dead", typically when a program is removed and doesn't clean up after itself or when there's a hardware changed and some old entries remain.

When your computer starts, it reads all the registry entries and occasionally finds a dead entry and it does one of two things, it notifies you that it can't complete the instruction, or more than likely it just skips the line and moves on. The registry cleaners removed these benign lines. The only thing they really do is a) save you about 1 to 2 seconds of boot time or less likely but more dangerously, b) remove good lines of info and cause real problems. Cleaning your registry is as necessary as defragging your computer (see above)

Well, that's enough for this month. Next month we'll tackle;

- a) Using multiple AV, malware, system monitors, etc. to protect your system.
- b) What once popular programs have long since become obsolete?
- c) How adding more RAM improves computer speed... or does it?
- d) Using compression to free up hard drive space

See you then!

Happy computing and be careful out there!

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