

The River Cities
DAILY TRIBUNE

‘Living In a Tech World’ Column

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10 Ways to Muck-up Your Tech World: #4 & 5 – Install Lot’s of Programs and Never Cleanup Your Disk

Here are two more good ways to muck-up your computer: install lots of programs (especially pre-release Beta versions) and never clean up or defragment your disk. Once you install a program and then decide to get rid of it, even if you use the uninstall utility, chances are, remnants of the installation are going to stay on your hard drive. Combined with data files, a lot of web surfing and day to day use you will eventually fill up a drive. Then there is the natural fragmenting that occurs when you write any data to the drive. If your goal is to slow down your computer so that it takes forever for any program to load or close you will soon reach it.

There are a lot of programs available on the web. Many are useful programs and many are free. It becomes very tempting to try a lot of them. Some are beta versions, meaning they have been released prior to testing them fully to let a lot of users experiment with them and report problems before the official release. Many of these programs, while well intended, can create problems because they are not well written or create unintended consequences. If you test a lot of programs and then uninstall the ones you don’t think you will use you are probably still be leaving files on your computer and entries in the ‘registry’ where programs write their links to the Windows operating system. There are also programs that are not what they pretend to be that are intended for surreptitious tasks and pirated copies of expensive paid programs like Photoshop (known as “warez”) that are illegal and likely to be infected. Even Mac’s have been infected with viruses from pirated versions of Photoshop.

But the potential problems should not keep you from installing programs that you want or want to try. After all, why have a big hard drive if you can’t install all the programs you can use? The solution, in addition to being careful of what you install, is to use some disk cleaner regularly to remove unnecessary data and programs. Start with Microsoft’s tools ‘Add/Remove Programs’ found in your control panel to uninstall what you aren’t going to use. Then open Explorer, right click on the hard drive (usually Main drive “C:” or similar) and choose Properties. This will bring up a window that shows how much drive space is used and not used and there is a button labeled “Disk Cleanup” Click on that and follow directions. There is also a good free program called CCleaner that you will find online (<http://www.ccleaner.com>). This highly rated program does a great job of cleaning up not only unnecessary files but it also can clean up your registry of entries that are no longer valid.

One of the results of installing and uninstalling lots of programs (or adding and deleting data of any kind) is that it fragments your disk. Disk fragmentation occurs because of the

way information is stored on the disk: On a new, clean disk, when you save a file it's stored in contiguous sections. If you delete a file the space becomes available again. But if the next data that is saved is larger than the first space it uses the next empty space. That makes the file fragmented, or divided. To access that file, then, the disk's read heads won't find all the parts of the file together but must go to different locations on the disk to retrieve it all. That makes it slower to access. If the file is part of a program, the program will run more slowly. A badly fragmented disk will slow down to a crawl.

You can use the disk defragmenter built into Windows (Programs | Accessories | System Tools) or a third-party defrag program to rearrange these pieces of files so that they're placed contiguously on the disk. One such program is "JKdefrag" (<http://www.kessels.com/Jkdefrag/>) and there are others. Several of the non-Microsoft programs are faster and better than the one built into Windows.

I have other links on our website for similar helpful programs. If this seems like I'm encouraging you to add programs...well, I guess I am. But these will more than offset the small amount of space they take up with the work that they do.

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