



## August/September Newsletter 2009

I just discovered a really neat auction website because of a “junk” email. Normally I delete junk emails without reading them, but the source was known and there was a link to info that would work well in a retiree newsletter I also edit. While there I spotted another link titled “Steals and Deals”. I took a quick peek and found (Directly quoted):

“If you want a real “steal” on just about anything and want it for a “deal” have I got the place for you. Just log on to [www.propertyroom.com](http://www.propertyroom.com) and you will find “Hot merchandise.” Literally “hot” as in previously stolen goods. I am not joking. This is a site that collects stolen goods that have been confiscated by police departments all over the country. If the rightful owners cannot be found, the merchandise is in the hands of the cops. A smart former police detective decided to make a business out of all these “lost” goods. He has agreements with police departments where they give him the goods; he sells them on his site, and then gives the municipalities a percentage of the profits. Everyone wins. The towns use it for the common good, the site makes money and the buyer gets a deal.” (The site also sells items from “trusted merchants”, but you can check a box and remove them from view.)

If you are the first bidder there will be \$1.00 in the bid box, but it can be changed (up or down—there is no minimum bid. Any other bid has to be at least \$5.00 more than the existing one. You can arrange for \$5.00 proxy votes by entering the top price you would be willing to pay. The auctions are timed, but do not actually stop until there has been no bidding for one minute. The old e-Bay trick of bidding in the last few seconds won't win on this site. If an item has a reserve bid (minimum price at which it will be sold), they note when it has been reached. Everyone is assigned a permanent bidding number, but you will see your bids listed with your user name.

I have been thinking about buying a laptop and

checked out their inventory. They had several Dells from a trusted merchant (CSR Technologies). I bid on one in the last 14 minutes and got a Dell Latitude D610 for \$305—including shipping and handling. Some product details are:

- Intel Pentium 4 (M) 1.6 Gigahertz Processor.
- Laptop is used/ refurbished and is in great condition.
- 14.1" Crystal Clear XGA Screen.
- Internal CDRW/DVD Combo Drive installed which allows you to watch DVD'S, CD'S and Burn CD's.
- 40 Gigabyte IDE Hard Drive installed, which should be plenty of storage space to load all of your pictures, music, programs, ect.
- Windows XP Pro operating system is installed along with spreadsheet, word document programs and everything you will need to get started with this laptop.
- 512 Megabytes of DDR2 memory is installed which is sufficient for most. If you need this laptop faster you can add up to a maximum of 2048 Megabytes of memory.
- Integrated Touch Pad and Track Point Mice Options, these two mouse options are conveniently located on the keyboard and palm rest.
- Internal Wireless 802.11 b & g Card installed which will allow you to connect to any wireless hotspot.
- Built in 56K Modem which allows you to connect to the internet with a phone line.
- Built in 10/100 network card which allows you to connect to the internet using high speed DSL/ Cable modem.
- Lithium Battery And Ac Wall Adapter (Due to our high volume of sales, we do not test or war-



ranty the battery life in any of our laptops).

- The following ports are integrated on this laptop : (2) Internal USB, (1) PC Slots, (1) Parallel (Printer), (1) 9 Pin Serial, (1) Monitor, (1) PS2, Internal Wireless Slot, and (1) S Video Ports

**Note:** I was going to do an August Newsletter while I was at my family reunion, but I couldn't get Open Office Publisher program to load on my new laptop from the disk I had with me. I needed some font component that I couldn't locate. Since I got home almost in the middle of August with lots to do, I decided to do a combined newsletter.

I had some issues with the power supply for my new laptop—it wasn't recognized and the battery didn't work. I contracted the company, left a message, and got a reply within hours. They sent me a new power cord at no cost and offered to ex-

Joan and I attended the August Napa computer group meeting. Their main presentation was on iolo technologies tune up/security utilities. I once saw their System Mechanic software on Give-away-of-the-Day. The programs were remarkable and the savings so incredible that both of us got the System Mechanic Professional Suite. Allison couldn't come back for our small group, so I will be presenting iolo's software at our September meeting. I won't have the physical products to give out, but Allison thought she could arrange for a download code that would give us the same discounts that were available at the Napa meeting.

I was also amazed by iolo's business attitude and practices. You can run their software on up to three computers at one time for no extra cost. You can also change computers as many times as you want to—you just have to uninstall the programs on your "third" computer first. You also don't have to buy upgrades to any of their new versions as long as your yearly fee is up to date. I got the email for an upgrade to their new version 9 (which was what we bought). In it iolo offered an upgrade to version 9 and extension on your yearly fee for \$19.99. Since their yearly fee is normally \$39.95, they are actually paying people to upgrade. I haven't heard of any other company doing that.



iolo's suite of products contains programs to repair, speed up and protect your PC. You can buy the programs separately, but the difference in price makes getting the whole package a no brainer, even if you don't install all the pieces

The site told me I had won the auction and in a few minutes I had an email confirmation.



—Beth

change the battery. The new power cord solved everything and my battery now has a life of three plus hours

I bid on a flat screen monitor and won it for \$50, and picked it up in City of Industry on my way home for a \$4.95 fee (no shipping charges). The screen isn't any bigger than what I had before, but it sure takes up a lot less room. The normal pick up window is 10 days, but I asked if they would hold it a few days longer (by email prior to bidding). Their response time was great, and they didn't mind the extra time.

iolo technologies makes award winning software that protects and optimizes windows computers. The range of products in their suite includes:

### System Mechanic

Fix and Speed Up your PC



- Fix errors, freezes and crashes
- Clean, defrag and compact the Registry
- Speed up PC boot time and web speed
- Clean out clutter to free up disk space
- Defrag RAM and recover wasted memory

### Virus Protection



- Block viruses, trojans, rootkits, worms and more
- Disinfect dangerous email attachments
- Real-time protection with a small footprint

### Hacker Protection



- Keep private information in and intruders out
- Control incoming and outgoing communication
- Stealth mode makes your PC invisible to hackers

### Secure Data Deletion



- Permanently delete files, pictures, or documents
- Securely wipe data before you sell or donate a PC
- Works with drives, cameras, MP3 players & more

## Deleted File Recovery



- Recover accidentally deleted data from any device
- Rescue photos, music, documents, emails & more
- Works with PCs, memory cards, USB drives & more

### Smart Computing Tip Of The Day

Smart Computing Magazine sends these tips via e mail. They also have them archived on their website:

[www.smartcomputing.com](http://www.smartcomputing.com)

## Clean Up Your Room/Desktop - Part II

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### INTRODUCTION

Last month we started on managing your icons. In this issue, we'll be continuing the saga of the icons. When you have completed the exercises below and learned the various activities involved, you will be on the road to becoming an "expert" to your friends. You can then play the role of teacher rather than student.

Currently, there are many different Windows versions in use so the material which follows may bring up a slightly different listing of choices on your machine, when one right-clicks on the desktop. With all these varying situations, it is very difficult to present the many fine points exactly.

In general, the differences will be obvious by simple inspection. When they are not, the most direct approach is just to experiment to see what is produced when a choice is made. Generally, all such choices are reversible. In the process, you will get to better understand what is happening. To me, the aspect of experimenting is usually the best approach to understanding and learning.

Remember what I have been preaching for years in my articles. As you become more conversant with using your computer, you will gain more confidence in expanding your horizons with the most amazing machine that mankind has produced. But, it is only a "machine," and you should be in charge of it, even though Microsoft tends to try and make it in charge of you. You are the boss, and the sooner you let your computer know that, the sooner you will stop feeling intimidated by it.

### DESKTOP

In the latest Window's XP and Vista, MS has

made a lot of changes, including the default desktop displayed.

I personally don't like it, but that's a matter of my taste. However, MS did leave the door open to go back to the older style of desktop, which you may prefer. If you right click on the desktop, there should be a choice to have a classic Windows desktop. Try selecting this and see which you'd rather have. You can always revert back to the new style if you choose.

### ARRANGE THE ICONS

Right click on an empty space on the desktop and a menu will come up. The first item on the XP listing is "Arrange Icons by." Put the focus on "Arrange Icons by," and you will get a list with lots of choices on how you want them arranged.

If you have carefully positioned all your desktop icons in the various areas where you want them and you use the "Arrange" feature, they will all line up like soldiers, starting at the upper left part of your screen. Then you will have to manually reposition them to where they were before you started. Again, this is a good area in which to experiment.

### AUTO ARRANGE

In the window that pops up when you click on "Arrange Icons by", you will see an entry named "Auto Arrange." If you check this, your icons will always stay arranged, but not in any groups that you have established.

They will all line up like soldiers and stay that way even if you move them. They will jump right back into line. I personally don't like using this. But, you can try it to see if you'd like it. "Auto arrange" is the equivalent of constantly invoking the "Arrange" command.

### ALIGN TO GRID

I personally use the "Align to Grid," which auto

aligns all icons so that rows and columns are straight. With this checked, sometimes when you move an icon, it snaps to a different point on the grid.

It will always snap to the nearest point. When this happens, just click and drag it to where you want.

In the early days of XP when one had temporarily booted into safe mode, and then returned to normal mode, the desktop layout was totally garbled up. Microsoft apparently improved things in recent times, the original desktop layout does return now.

### **ICON ARRANGING UTILITIES**

There are also a variety of simple programs available free on the Internet to save and then restore your desktop layout. This can come in handy when something/someone has messed up your desktop layout. The one I used is called iconlayout.zip" but the page for this appears to be gone now. This link appears to have a similar free program at ZDNET.

<http://downloads.zdnet.com/abstract.aspx?kw=Save+desktop+icon+layout&docid=185169>

What these utilities generally do is add two items into the dropdown list when you right-click on your desktop - "Save desktop icon layout" and "Restore desktop icon Layout." Browse around for something similar, if you'd like to have this handy utility, or try this ZDNET link.

### **CHANGING ICONS**

Except for a few Icons, of which Windows is very possessive, the icon images that display for the shortcuts on your desktop can be changed to suit your desires. When you right click on an icon, and select properties from the window which shows, a small window will come up; near the bottom right of that window is a button marked "Change Icon." If you click on it, another window will open, with other Windows-supplied icons which are available. The selection is somewhat limited, but there is a "Browse" button.

If you have any icon library files on your computer, click on the "browse", and navigate around to find these libraries. When you find one, double click on it, and a whole bunch of icons will appear, find one you like, then double click on it, click OK, then when you close the window, you'll have a new icon for that shortcut.

### **ICON LIBRARIES**

If you'd like to get some icon libraries, one of the best places to go is [www.zdnet.com](http://www.zdnet.com). Once you get there, just navigate around to their download area, and then do a search for "icons." You should get lots of results. These are generally free files and there are lots available, so have fun.

Google is also a good hunting ground for icons. Do a search for "icons for Windows XP." You'll get lots of hits, most of which are free downloads.

The spacing of icons, color, and many other properties of the desktop layout can also be changed. But, that's outside of this area for now.

In a future article, we'll go over the ways to change your desktop colors, the sizes of things, the display resolution, and many other elements that can make your display "better", and easier to use.

### **STARTING PROGRAMS**

Left click on the START button on the lower left of your desktop. On the menu which comes up, left click on "All Programs." This should bring up a large window that lists all the programs installed on your computer. This is probably where you have been to run a specific program. You would move the cursor over the desired program and click; the program would then run.

Some of these items are links to start the program, and others are folders, which you must click to display the links that are within the folder. How about making copies of the startup links for the programs you use often. Doing this is simple. Put your cursor on a program shortcut, and then right click.

There should be a listed item "Create Shortcut." Clicking on this will create another shortcut, with a (2) showing that it is the a duplicate of the original shortcut. Then, drag this onto the desktop. You can now edit the name to remove the (2), or make it any name you would like.

### **CONCLUSION**

At this point, take a break, and make sure that you are now well versed in the icon activities presented above. It would also be a good idea to play with the capabilities you have just learned, in preparation for the next venture. This will be a major step for many of you, as we'll be making new folders, adding icons to the desktop, and storing all the icons we don't need in a folder which we'll

call "Icons in Storage."

Next month, we'll pick up where we left off, and go through a variety of procedures that you should understand relative to controlling and manipulating windows. We'll also "play" with icons, setting up a storage folder for the excess icons that are presently on display. And, we'll go through the process of getting some new icons on the desktop to save searching for them when we want to use them.

Remember, if you learn a little bit each day, your new skills will make using your computer much easier.

If you find this material useful, you may want to download this article in PDF format, from our web site [www.brccs.org](http://www.brccs.org). This allows readers to keep the material either as a PDF file, and/or Ron Hirsch print it out, and place it in a loose leaf notebook, for future reference.

## System Mechanic 9 Professional Features and Enhancements

iolo technologies, LLC, Los Angeles, CA

[www.iolo.com](http://www.iolo.com)

### New Tools and Features

#### Tune-up Definitions™



The body of ongoing research knowledge maintained by iolo Labs is translated into a regularly updated database that System Mechanic uses as a blueprint for identifying and resolving new problems and performance issues.

#### EnergyBooster™



Frees up system memory and CPU resources to give Windows additional horsepower. Uses iolo Labs' Tune-up Definitions and user-defined profiles to identify background programs and services that can be temporarily shut down. Allows users to restart any program that was previously shut-down by EnergyBooster.

#### Total Registry Revitalizer™



Integrates all of System Mechanic's powerful registry tools into a single all-in-one tool. Functions include registry backup, registry repair and cleaning, registry compact, and registry defragmentation.

#### PC Health Status Gadget



A Sidebar Gadget for Windows 7 and Vista that provides real-time reports on system health, security, and overall status. Includes a running list of recently performed repairs and optimizations, and offers quick access to commonly used tools, such as Memory Mechanic™ and the new EnergyBooster™

#### Incinerator® for Recycle Bin



Incinerator® technology can now be optionally integrated into the Windows Recycle Bin, providing both standard file deletion and a Department of Defense 5220-22M compliant technique for maximum security when deleting files.

### Enhanced Features

#### Registry Tuner



Based on extensive research from iolo Labs, System Mechanic 9's registry cleanup and repair technology has been dramatically improved:

- Up to 5 times higher problem-detection rate compared to previous versions
- Improved overall speed and efficiency of scans
- Improved problem reporting provides more detailed scope of errors

#### Startup Optimizer™



With expanded Tune-up Definitions that include thousands of new programs and services researched by iolo Labs, System Mechanic 9's Startup Optimizer tool optimizes Windows boot times like never before.

- New Windows services optimization
- Thousands of new programs researched by iolo Labs

#### Memory Mechanic®



Memory Mechanic has been completely reengineered for all-around improvements in both speed and effectiveness.

- Memory defragmentation works up to 85% faster than before
- Up to 25% more memory is freed due to more effective memory leak detection
- The short pause that occurred after memory defragmentation in prior versions has been eliminated due to technology improvements

#### Privacy Cleaner™



Activity log tracks left by dozens of new programs as you use them can be securely cleaned away by the improved Privacy Cleaner™ tool in System Mechanic 9, which now employs military-grade Incinerator® shred-

ding techniques. Newly supported programs include:

- All major web browsers, such as Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome, and more
- All major online chat programs, such as AIM, Yahoo, MSN, and more
- All major web toolbars, such as Google, Yahoo, and more

### All-in-One PC Cleanup



System Mechanic 9's all-in-one PC Cleanup Power Tool™ has been greatly enhanced with additional junk file patterns, new ways of detecting and removing insidious system clutter, and improved scan speeds.

- \* Removes new file patterns exclusive to Windows 7, Vista, and the latest XP service pack supported
- \* Removes clutter from all major web browsers, such as Internet Explorer, Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari, Opera, and more

\* Removes clutter from all major online chat programs, such as AIM, Skype, Yahoo, MSN, and more

\* Removes clutter from all major web toolbars, such as Google, Yahoo, and more

### Smarter Boot-Time Tune-ups



All of System Mechanic 9's boot-time operations come with a series of prompts and options that offer you increased control in order to avoid inopportune delays while starting up the PC.

You can set up black-out times during the day where no boot-time tasks will be performed. New prompts at PC shutdown and startup give you the ability to run or postpone boot-time tasks at that time.

Joan and I got all this for \$29 with a possible \$20 second year fee. A single program was \$19.

## How can I keep my PC clean and tidy?

By Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc.

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Like changing your car's oil or replacing your home's air conditioner filter, a little PC cleaning pays off with a faster, more reliable, and longer-lasting computer.

Although nothing suggested here is either rocket science or inherently dangerous, always follow the medical adage, "First, do no harm". So don't do anything that makes you uncomfortable (perhaps have a more experienced person clean up while you watch and learn), and back up your system and data. Then reboot, to get a clean start, and don't open any programs,

Before starting, to measure what your cleanup deletes, determine how full your hard drive is. Open My Computer, Right Click your hard drive (usually labeled "Local Disk (C:)"), and click Properties. Note how much space is used and free, then close the dialog box.

Next, use Windows' built-in disk cleaning tool. Click Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Cleanup, and the drive to clean, likely C. Choose what to clean; default selections are usually what you need. To be extra thorough, if your system has been running problem free, click

the More Options tab and then Clean Up System Restore. Confirm your choice and click OK.

Delete Web browser temporary files. Using Internet Explorer, click Tools on the Menu Bar, Internet Options, and Delete Files under the General tab. Other browsers provide similar functions, sometimes using "cache" to refer to the collection of temporary files.

Delete unneeded personal files, items outdated and no longer used. While most Microsoft Office programs (Word, Excel, etc.) store their files in the My Documents folder, you may have changed this default location. And other apps likely have their own favorite places to stash files. Look around, since cluttered files make Windows work harder to get things done and waste time and resources when they're backed up. If you collect photos, music and such, delete those you no longer want or need, perhaps saving them on CD/DVD or ISB drive. Sorting files by size or date helps find deletion candidates.

If you run PC-based email software, it's worth periodically purging Sent and Trash folders, perhaps pitching material older than a certain date. Then look for a Compact Folders option, sometimes on the File pulldown menu, which squeezes out unused space from email folders.

Weed out software no longer used or useful by uninstalling applications with Window's Control Panel Add/Remove Software tool.

The Recycle Bin, which preserves erased files for recovery until it's emptied, has likely grown during this cleanup process. To empty it, Right Click its Windows desktop icon and click Empty Recycle Bin. Note that programs such as Norton Utilities may offer other cleanup options for the Recycle Bin and other Windows components.

Finally, remember that when writing to your hard drive, Windows places bits of each file in the next available open space on the hard drive.

While Windows can reassemble them, having many files fragmented slows access to them. So, to store all files as single entities, periodically defragment the hard drive. To do this, click Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Defragmenter, select a drive, and click Defragment.

When finished, compare the amount of hard drive space used and free to what you saw initially. If this is the first cleanup you've done in a while, the amount of space recovered may surprise you.

Many books give much more detailed instructions for PC cleanups. Search Amazon.com for "degunking windows" and "cleaning windows" to see choices (but don't be distracted by instructions for cleaning house, office, and car windows!).

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## Smart Computing Tips Of The Day

### Shop For A DVR

HD DVRs (high-definition digital video recorders) have the extra storage capacity and advanced video outputs you need to record and output HD shows from your cable or satellite provider in all their glory. When shopping for an HD DVR, pay close attention to the number of hours they claim to record because HD recording times are often a fraction of the standard-def recording times. Look for models with large hard drives—500GB or larger is ideal—and buy only a unit that has video outputs that are compatible with the video inputs on your HDTV. HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface) or DVI (Digital Video Interface) connections are ideal, although component video will also carry an HD signal. Avoid S-Video and composite connections whenever possible, as they only carry standard-def video signals, even if the content stored on the HD DVR was recorded in HD.

### DVR Storage Capacity

One DVR (digital video recorder) spec—the maximum hours of content its hard drive holds—is usually easy to find on the box or sales tag. But think of a VCR for a moment. Depending on the recording settings, a standard T-120 VHS tape will hold two, four, or maybe even six hours of material, but as the hours go up, the quality goes down. DVRs usually operate by a similar principle, using selectable levels of video compression to squeeze more onto the drive. For a better sense of the drive's capacity, look for the hours it will hold at the highest quality. If you're looking for an HDTV-compatible DVR, remember that high-definition programming requires around 10GB per hour, which can quickly fill a drive.

## BENEATH THE SURFACE: DeepPeeping the Web

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Last summer Google announced it had passed the one trillionth mark in its list of known and

searchable Web pages.

If you think Google does the best job of searching the World Wide Web you will be in for a big surprise. By 'big' I mean a search engine that goes way beyond standard search engines like

Google, which only look at the surface of the Web compared to the vast, deep, and so far uncharted depths of the Web. I say “you will be in for a big surprise” because a deeper search engine is only in it’s initial research stages.

**WHAT WE SEE**



Standard search engines only skim the surface of the Web. Kind of like you’re looking over the surface of the ocean, instead of looking into its vast under-sea life. The plan is to create a search engine that will open 90% of the Web to searches.

A study at the University of Utah is trying to find a way. The study searches typed text rather than

the hyperlinks that the present search engines use. A beta version of DeepPeep is available at: <http://www.deeppeep.org/>.

We have a long way to go but eventually almost the entirety of the Web will be searchable. Web pages exist already that tell you the best taxi fare, flight schedules, and shopping catalogs. Deep-

**WHAT WE MISS**



Peep wants to give you access to this information. A whole new way of searching has to be worked out first.

Scientists have said that 90% of what we know was discovered in the last 50 years. DeepPeep is working out a way to get that knowledge to you.

**It’s out there . . .**



**DeepPeep is finding the way to get it to you.**

## Social Networking – What is it, really?

By Phil Sorrentino, President, Sarasota PCUG, Florida  
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Social Networking is all over the news; Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter are the ones that get the most play. So what are they, really? Well, they’re websites that provide another way of keeping in touch with friends, family, and associates. What are some older social networking methods? Maybe, the Telegram, the Telephone, Visiting on Sunday, Writing Letters. These are all ways of keeping in touch with your family and/or circle of friends. Yesterday we had these less technical ways of keeping in touch. Today we have the computer to help us keep in touch via email, instant messaging, Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) telephone, and social networking. Social networking has encouraged new ways to communicate and share information. Social networking websites are being used regularly by millions of people, and it now seems that social networking will become a regular part of everyday computer life.

Social Networking is probably the newest tech-

nology and revolves around an internet website that provides social networking services. How about this for a definition of a social network: A site that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system; to create a list of other users with whom they have a connection; and to view their list of connections and those made by others within the system. With that in mind, a social network focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities. Most social network services are web based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as e-mail and instant messaging.

On many of the large Social Networking sites, participants are not necessarily “networking” or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network, such as on Facebook and Twitter.

While it could be said that email and regular websites have most of the essential elements of social networks, the social networking sites make it easy to use. Here’s a look at some of the more popular sites.

LinkedIn ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)) – LinkedIn is mostly for business people and professionals. People use it to maintain contacts and to develop new business opportunities. To use LinkedIn, you create a profile where you describe yourself, listing work and education history, skills, specialties, etc. Just like a resume. Once you have your profile, you start connecting to others. That's the driving force behind LinkedIn. You use your connections to promote yourself and build relationships.

Twitter ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)) – Twitter is a micro blogging service. When it started out, people used it to tell others what they were doing at various times during the day. Now it has evolved into a way to tell people about your activities and then provide a link to further details. SPCUG as a group could have its own Twitter account. Once we had it, interested members could “follow” it and receive our group information known as “tweets” delivered to them. A Twitter “tweet” has a limit of 140 characters. This may possibly be a substitute for our use of Constant Contact to contact the membership for changes in educational class schedules.

Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)). Facebook is sort of a cross between LinkedIn and Twitter. Facebook used to be mainly for students, but has become more mainstream. Like LinkedIn, you build a profile of yourself, where you talk about what your interests and hobbies are. Like Twitter, you can do micro blogging about things you want people to know. In Facebook, you have friends as opposed to connections or followers.

Users of Social Networks, in general, can upload a picture of themselves, create their “profile” and can often be “friends” with other users. In most social networks, both users must confirm that they are friends before they are linked. For example, if Alice lists Bob as a friend, then Bob would have to approve Alice's friend request before they are listed as friends. Some social networking sites have a “favorites” feature that does not need approval from the other user. Social networks usually have privacy controls that allow the user to choose who can view their profile or contact them, etc.

Privacy of Social Networks is a big concern. On large social networks, there have been growing concerns about users giving out too much personal information and the threat of sexual predators. Users of these networks need to be aware of data theft and viruses. However, large networks

often work with law enforcement to try to prevent such incidents.

Access to one's information is also of great concern. Many social networks such as Facebook, provide the user the choice of who can view their profile. This prevents unauthorized user(s) from accessing their information. To edit information on a social network account, the site usually requires you to login or provide an access code. This prevents unauthorized users from editing an account such as posting pictures or changing personal information.

Social Networking is a promising new technology for staying in touch. Give it a try, there must be some group of people you would like to keep in touch with.

#### Smart Computing Tip Of The Day

##### **The Best Defense**

One of the best ways to keep your computer from getting loaded down with malware is to never let the stuff in the door. WinXP includes a basic firewall with the operating system (and it's activated by default), but it can't hurt to run a few extra layers of protection. First, though, let's check to make sure your WinXP firewall is up and running. It's pretty simple to access the firewall. Click Start, Control Panel, and then Windows Firewall. If the firewall is set to Off, simply select the radio button for On and then click OK.

Now comes the step of adding another layer of protection. There are several free firewalls available on the Web that do a marvelous job of protecting your computer from unwanted intrusions. One of the most reliable is ZoneAlarm (free; [www.zonelabs.com](http://www.zonelabs.com)). Once installed, ZoneAlarm will prompt you to determine which programs are authorized to access the Internet. After that, ZoneAlarm will block the rest (or at least seek permission to allow a new program to access the Internet).

Of course, the enterprise-level offerings, such as Symantec's Sygate Enterprise Protection and McAfee Total Protection For Enterprise, include powerful firewalls, so if your company uses programs similar to those, make sure they're up and running before you leave for a business trip. You can also try out the antivirus and personal firewall solutions from F-Secure ([www.f-secure.com](http://www.f-secure.com)) free for 30 days.

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## Optimize Your PC

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I saw an e-mail from PC World inviting me to speed up my slow PC. This directed me to a link for a "free scan" of my computer using PC Pitstop Optimize 3.0. Recently, we had a discussion at our general meeting of slow system performance, so I decided to give it a try and document the effort here. It may postpone an inevitable Windows re-install, but we will see.

The scan yielded some interesting results and offered to do it for me if I purchased the program (for about \$30.) I looked at the results and wondered how I might be able to do this manually for free? I looked around on Google and found some step-by-step guides on basically accomplishing the same things that PC Pitsop's Optimize would do if I paid the \$30. I ran the program and it began to scan my system. Interestingly it ran 3 scans of my Download speed. Not sure what that was about. It then displayed several pages of results: Junk Files, Internet Settings, Startup Programs, Registry Fixes and Performance Tweaks. When I reboot, it reminds me of what it can do to make things run better by displaying red messages. I will try some manual fixes and watch to see if the start-up scan gets progressively greener.

Looking at what Optimize tries to do I first decided to run CCleaner, a free program that has been a recent DOQ offering (2009 DOQ-2). Alternately, you can download it from [www.ccleaner.com](http://www.ccleaner.com).

### Junk Files

The first Optimize Results screen listed the junk files that I could safely delete. In my case, Optimize listed Temporary Files, Recycle Bin and Internet Caches. Using CCleaner in the Cleaner option under the Windows tab, files for Internet

Explorer, Windows Explorer and System are listed by default, so I ran the "Analyze" tool. I was reminded to close Firefox to enable the Internet Cache to be cleaned as well. After several minutes it was complete and it said that ANALYSIS COMPLETE—(526.859 seconds), 555.9MB to be removed. (Approximate size). As a comparison, Optimize indicated that 729 MB would be cleaned. I ran the "Run Cleaner" option.

### Internet Settings

The second Optimize Results screen looks at Internet Settings and explains that they may be tuned for faster throughput and may provide a substantial increase in Internet performance. In my case, my connections (HTTP, TCP/IP and Firefox) had no recommended adjustments. However, you may try using the Optimize free scan yourself and see that you have some that are recommended. In that case, you may try to Optimize your settings manually. Search Google for "TCP Optimizer", download and run it. Select "Optimal", then apply. Look around carefully and see what else you might optimize.

You will need to reboot.

### Startup Programs

When Windows starts up it automatically loads a number of programs, many of which you may not need. As you install more and more programs, this list can continue to grow. In my situation, there were several Startup Programs that Optimize considered "unnecessary." (You could run the free scan and see what it says about your system.) The ones listed on mine were: InstallShield Update Service (2 instances), Adobe Acrobat Speed-Launcher, QuickTime Icon and Realtek HD Audio. Using CCleaner I went to Tools and then selected Startup. I looked at the programs that Optimizer 3.0 suggested and right clicked on them and chose "Disable".

## Registry Fixes

Programs sometimes leave incorrect information behind in the registry, either because they ninstall improperly or because the files associated with the entries have been moved or deleted. Cleaning the Windows registry would hope to keep your PC in working order and keep the system running at peak performance. Using CCleaner, select Registry and then "Scan for issues". You can then choose to Fix them. Afterwards, not too many of the Optimize findings were changed.

## Performance Tweaks

Optimize made some recommendations to adjust some settings in the Registry. Using the suggested tweaks I searched the Registry and made the adjustments to the keys that I could find, al-

though not all of the ones recommended could be found. As always, back up your registry first! (CCleaner would have done that prior to fixing the registry in the step above.) Start, Run "regedit", then Edit, Find and enter the string. Right click and adjust the value.

## Additional Fixes

Use Auslogics Registry Defrag  
Defrag your hard drive!

Uninstall Optimize 3.0... You might want to reinstall it and run a new scan after you have done all of these steps to see if you made progress.

You should see a faster booting, faster running machine!

Good luck!

## If Your Computer Gets Wet...What?

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What to do if something wet spills on your electronic device or it falls into wet whatever? The following is not guaranteed but represents years of experience.

Quick, unplug it! Unless there is a likely shock hazard. Look up the instructions (best to do this when you buy it). Find out if there is any prohibition against using ALCOHOL. Alcohol can dissolve some materials.

There are generally two items to have handy. One is *distilled* water to first wash off and dilute any spill, especially anything that might be conductive. The second is alcohol, 90+% isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol. Ethyl alcohol or ethanol – 90% – will work too. Alcohol has an affinity for water. Rinsing the item first with the distilled water and then with alcohol will dilute, pick up water, carry it away, and evaporate quickly. The higher percent alcohol 90% vs 50% have a greater affinity for water.

Time is important. You do not want water to soak into an otherwise insulating medium, especially water that contains something conductive like salt. It will leave a conductive residue that will short out portions of the device. That is why you want to *rinse first* with distilled water to carry away any conductive residue and then the alcohol to

remove the water film. *Most tap water has dissolved minerals* that remain after the water evaporates, hence the distilled water to rinse these away.

After, and I repeat AFTER, the above cleaning, you can use *very modest heat to help dry out* the item. You can use a hair dryer at some distance. Make sure you don't heat the item any hotter than is comfortable to hold. Some plastic materials deform at relatively low temperatures.

Remember the order: (1) rinse with distilled water (2) rinse with alcohol (3) *warm gently* with hair dryer or warming oven.

For items immersed in flood waters, the above approach can be tried but the outlook is not promising. Generally the conductive flood waters have had time to soak into the various insulating materials and are almost impossible to remove. Still, it may be worth a try, especially if you have the time and possible success is worth the effort. Distilled water and alcohol are not very expensive. Most circuit boards are coated with varnish to resist moisture. In this case, wash repeatedly with distilled water. Use a soft brush to remove any remaining film such as mud. Then, the alcohol followed by the dryer. Using the dryer prematurely can "set" the offending material to the point that it may be almost unremovable. So save it for the very last step after you are sure things are clean. Your efforts may save part if not all of the equipment.