Bits and Bytes

Arkansas' Premier Computer Club

Bella Vista Computer Club - John Ruehle Center

Well, it looks like spring has finally arrived, so it's time for spring cleaning. Don't grab the phone and call Merry Maids, they do house cleaning, not computer cleaning. Just like everything around us, over time computers get dirty. Dust, pet fur, and spider webs can be detrimental to the health of your computer. Dust builds up on fan blades. Pet fur can collect on case openings and reduce air flow. Dust settles on components, especially the heat sink on the processor, and acts as an insulation blanket. All of these make the computer run hotter. Computer don't like hot, they want to be cool. A computer sitting on the floor will get dirty faster than one setting on the computer desk. As you walk around the computer and stir up a little dust, the computer fans will suck it in the case. So, what's in your computer case? If your computer is five years old and never been cleaned, it's probably time. If you're not up to the task, bring your computer to one of the Open House Help Clinics. For the rest of you brave souls, here's what you'll need; a soft cotton cloth, glass cleaner (without ammonia), a can of compressed air, and a vacuum cleaner with dust brush attachment. Open the computer case. Use the can of air to blow the dust off the components, especially the fans and heat sinks. If you have the vacuum cleaner running you can use it to capture a lot of the dust rather than let it settle on the furniture. Don't go poking around inside the computer with the vacuum cleaner hose. You can spray a little glass cleaner on the cotton cloth and carefully wipe the dust from the inside of the case. Don't touch the motherboard or any of the components. Close the computer case and clean the outside with the cotton cloth and a little glass cleaner. If you're using a ball mouse, remove the ball. Carefully clean the dirt off the rollers inside the mouse (don't use a Q Tip). Clean the ball with the glass cleaner and put it back in the mouse. Use the vacuum cleaner dust brush to gently vacuum the keyboard (with the computer off). If the keys are dirty, a little glass cleaner on the cotton cloth will do the trick. To make sure you get all the cookie crumbs out of the keyboard, turn it upside down and blow it out with the compressed air. Use the vacuum cleaner dust brush to vacuum the back of the monitor. If your monitor has a glass tube, use the glass cleaner and cotton cloth. Do not spray the glass cleaner on the glass, spray it on the cloth. If you have a flat panel monitor, get a fresh cotton cloth and dampen it with plain water. Gently wipe the face of the monitor in straight lines from top to bottom or side to side. Don't scrub it in a circular motion. If you want to spend the money, you can buy wipes that can be used on computer monitors and flat panel TVs. Your monitor will be a lot easier to keep clean if you don't let anyone touch it with their fingers. Never use a pencil or ball point pen to point to something on that flat panel monitor.

Now, let's get rid of the "stuff" you don't need. Over time information you don't need gets left on the hard drive along with information the computer generates but fails to remove. Start by cleaning up your e-mail program. The Inbox is where your new e-mail appears when you start the program. It is not a place to store e-mail messages. Delete the messages you don't want to keep. For the messages you want to keep for a short time, create folders in the program and move them into those folders. For the messages you want to keep forever, print the message and file the paper copy or place a copy in an E-mail folder in your My Documents or personal folder. The next time you copy you're My Documents or personal folder to a CD or DVD you'll have a permanent electronic copy of those important messages. Delete the old messages that are in the Sent Items folder. Finally, empty the Deleted Items folder. Next, clean up Internet Explorer by going to the Browsing History section and deleting temporary Internet files, cookies, history, form data, and passwords. You have the option to delete or retain favorites website data and InPrivate filtering data. Let's do a thorough ~~house~~ computer cleaning. Go to the Control Panel, Add or Remove Programs (Windows XP) or Uninstall a program (Windows Vista and 7) and uninstall all of those programs you never use. You might consider downloading Secunia's free Personal Software Inspector to see if any of your programs pose a security risk because they haven't been kept up to date. The program provides a direct link to the update site. This is a good time to go through your personal folders (My Documents, Pictures, Videos, etc.) and delete files you no longer need. Now, to get rid of the "stuff" the computer has generated, run Disk Cleanup. If you're using Windows XP the one thing you do not want to do is compress old files. Everything else that appears on the list for Windows XP, Vista, and 7 can be deleted. If you're using Windows XP, run Disk Defragmenter. If you're using Windows Vista or 7 you can run Disk Defragmenter or let it defrag on schedule. Update your antivirus and malware detection and removal programs. Before you run these programs check the settings to make sure they're looking at everything on the hard drive. You don't want the program to not look in an area where a virus or malicious program might be hiding. The ultimate in computer cleanup includes cleaning the registry. When you delete folders, files, and programs, information in the registry doesn't always get removed. Registry cleaners are used to identify and correct the errors. For those who have never done this, a word of warning. Don't hop on the Internet and download the first registry cleaner you find. If you Google "registry cleaner reviews" you'll get almost three million hits and each review will probably list a different programs as the best one to use. There are a lot of programs that will scan the registry and identify the problems but only correct a few errors unless you buy the program. Use a proven safe program that creates a backup copy of the registry before cleaning. When you run a registry cleaner for the first time on an older computer, you'll be amazed at the hundreds of errors.

The editor of the Bits and Bytes is suffering from a mild case of writers block. If you have a topic you would like to see covered in the newsletter, add it to the Suggested Topics for Bits and Bytes Articles sheet located on the table at the back of the room.

Having a problem with your computer? Having a problem doing something on the computer? Stop by one of the Open House Help Clinics we have at the John Ruehle Center and see if we can solve your problem. These clinics are from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the first Saturday and the third Wednesday of the month. The clinics are open to the public so you can invite a friend or neighbor.