

Tips offered to avoid common computer maintenance mistakes

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

Simply put, computers are expensive. While their role in the ever-evolving technological world deems them necessary, many people are naive to ways to ensure they last long enough to make the price tag worthwhile.

With January designated as National Clean Up Your Computer Month, there are a number of strategies and misconceptions regarding maintaining a healthy computer to keep in mind.

Virus prevention is one of the most important steps to take to keep a computer or laptop running in tip-top shape. Lori Nelson, owner of Computers Etc. in Holyoke, and Steven Wright, IT technician at PC Telcom in Holyoke, both said the most common problems with the computers they see that need repair are due to virus issues.

“It is very important to keep an up-to-date antivirus program on your computer to defray other costs of having it repaired,” Nelson said.

While antivirus software and regular system scans for viruses are recommended, Nelson also noted that having an antivirus program does not 100 percent mean that a computer is protected. As thousands of new viruses pop up each day, antivirus developers are constantly working to find solutions to combat new viruses.



Computers Etc. technician Trey Bivins works to replace the power supply on a computer tower Friday, Dec. 27.□□

—Enterprise photo

Computers Etc. technician Trey Bivins pointed out that avoiding unknown programs can help prevent viruses from infecting a computer. He also stated a computer will continually run more smoothly if it is kept free of temporary files and cookies.

Justin Grant, manager of the tech department at Computers Etc., added that many downloaded programs may come with free trials for other programs, which may install advertising-supported software. This slows down computers and opens the door for viruses.

Another aspect of computer care that is often overlooked deals with temperature. Wright explained that computers can overheat. If placed in a bag while still running, although rare, the computer can actually overheat, effectively ruining the device.

Wright also shared a more advanced option for maintaining a healthy computer for PC users. He recommends creating restore points before installing new software as to create a snapshot of all settings on the computer.

Becoming familiar with the add/remove programs function in the control panel is also recommended by Wright. If an unwanted program is found, he suggests to consider removing it from the computer.

“It is a good idea to maintain a healthy level of suspicion when dealing with unfamiliar programs and sites,” Wright said.

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Allowing outside access to personal computers can also leave people in a tough situation. Scammers claiming to be from computer manufacturing companies will make calls to people and state that their computers are acting up and ask to access the potential victim's computer. The scammer will then extract personal information from the computer.

Nelson stated that unless someone has specifically called a business for computer support, they should never allow access to their computer from someone who calls.

Links in emails can also lead to sites that appear the same as banking agencies, but are set up just to attain personal banking information.

Free gaming sites and pop-up ads can also put a computer's health in jeopardy. Grant noted that many viruses are loaded to a computer unknowingly to the user and without any actual program being downloaded. Cookies downloaded from sites automatically can cause viruses and worms.

A common misconception about viruses is that they are limited to personal computers and are not a problem for Macintosh products. This may have been more true in the past as PCs held a commanding lead of the market. However, as Macs become more popular, so do Mac viruses.

"Macs can absolutely get viruses," Bivins said. "If you are using an Apple product, you need to take the same care of it as you would a PC."

Nelson also pointed out that batteries on laptops are a source of much frustration for those who treat them as if they were a desktop. A laptop should not be plugged in at all times as it can ruin the battery.

Nelson suggests letting the battery run down before recharging and unplugging the device at night.

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According to Bivins, most computers have a lifespan of 3-4 years as technology on the older machines becomes obsolete. With that in mind, Computers Etc. has extended its annual free computer recycling event through Friday, Jan. 10.

While the store does not typically accept old computers for recycling throughout the year due to space issues, this is the fifth year that recycling is offered for a limited time. Old towers and laptops are accepted while monitors and printers are not. All data from hard drives is deleted for privacy issues.

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