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## Getting back to basics

by  
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Most people in our cozy town of Fair Lawn have grown accustomed, in this technologically savvy world, to accept and expect the *bells & whistles*, but how many folks actually make sure that the fundamentals are in place? Here are some examples of what you can do to establish an enhanced experience when working on your computer.

### **General Maintenance**

Your computer is set up to run in a standalone mode—it is **not** connected to the Internet, since you only use it for finances, word processing and spreadsheets. You have found that it is now a little slow. What can you do to help it run a little faster? Windows® is equipped with built-in tools to improve its performance. To access them, launch **Explorer (My Computer)**, then right click on the C: drive. The Properties window will offer access to the **Tools** options. There, you may choose to run the *Error Checking* utility (a check disk tool), the *Defragmentation* utility (to compress your drive to some extent) and a *Backup* program. Why would a backup program be included with system optimization tools? Any system worth working on, would have data worth backing up, this provides you with a minimal utility. Anyone who works on a system without performing any type of backup is *tempting the fates* and running the risk of having to recreate all of their work over again.

Another option is to click on Start/All Programs/Accessories/System Tools... there, you will also find a *Disk Cleanup* utility. This program will *empty* your temporary files (*cache*) from the machine to reduce used disk space. This will help if you have many files in the Recycle Bin that need to be removed. You could also click on the Recycle Bin and *Explore* to review your deleted files OR right click on it to *Empty Recycle Bin*. Of course, you could also purchase additional programs from vendors such as Symantec or McAfee (amongst others) to run more extensive tasks for the health of your computer.

### **Security**

Maybe you aren't the person working on a standalone system and you do connect to the Internet. What else can you do to improve your computing experience? Seriously consider installing an antivirus program and perhaps a spyware removal program, too. With the advent of high speed residential

Internet access, many people are infecting their computers and are not well prepared for the onslaught of code readied by hackers and other unrestrained programmers. By installing such programs, you are NOT assured of eliminating these attacks, but it is clearly the right start. As an aside, many computer vendors distribute their computers with antivirus programs preinstalled. *It is the consumers' responsibility, however, to ACTIVATE the product once it is received.* An inactive program loaded on a computer will be as effective as none. It is also critical that the virus definition updates subscription be maintained. Once the subscription lapses, your system will become relatively vulnerable again. As a rule of thumb, it is advisable to UPGRADE your program every two years.

In addition to installing an antivirus and anti-spyware program, you should also keep your system updated with program and operating system updates through (e.g., Microsoft) the vendor. If you are running a Microsoft product, you can easily access the updates through Internet Explorer, choosing *Tools* and clicking on *Windows Updates*. From within most Microsoft programs, you can select the *Help/Check for Updates...* options to maintain any updates and hot fixes developed for the programs. These options are not limited to Microsoft, most commercial applications come equipped with such features.

### ***Responsiveness of your system***

Did you ever notice that your system was performing in a suboptimal manner? Have you checked it for viruses and spyware, it comes up clean, yet it still seems to be slow? It may be time to look at the properties of your computer. If you have a PC running Windows XP and it has only 128MB of RAM (memory), then it may be time to consider investing in more memory. Even if you have an older machine, many times, it may be worthwhile performing an upgrade of this type. RAM prices are relatively low in comparison to the cost of a new machine and Microsoft's operating systems will, invariably, run better with more RAM. If you believe you have a need to increase your system's memory, consider visiting the site [www.belarc.com](http://www.belarc.com) to download their free tool ***Belarc Advisor***. This program will perform an inventory on your computer (without sending out information) and report to you about the hardware and software installed in the computer. The report is easy to read and provides valuable insights to your computer's setup. One of the conveniences of this report is that it will report to you how many slots you have for memory and what you have installed in each. For even greater convenience, should you want to upgrade RAM, there is a link on the report to [www.crucial.com](http://www.crucial.com), a reputable vendor of computer memory. Their site has an easy-to-use wizard to help you determine what you may install in your particular machine.

### ***Wireless Networks***

One of today's buzzwords is *warchalking*. *Warchalking* comes from the 1920's when hobos used to wander. It was their symbolic code used to mark homes (typically, on fences) of what to expect at the residence. Some came

upon unfriendly dogs, so a warning would be posted; others came upon generous homemakers that would offer proper food for the asking. By marking a home with a warchalking symbol, those that came later could know what to expect. In today's world with the advent of wireless communications, there are some unscrupulous folks that do warchalking and warcruising for free and open bandwidth to residential and commercial wireless networks.

Due to the drop in prices of wireless routers, many tech *newbies* have setup their own networks over *Wi-Fi* (Wireless Fidelity, also known as IEEE 802.11B (11Mbps wireless networks)) and *54G* (IEEE 802.11G (54Mbps wireless networks)). Unfortunately, some of the *caveats* are ignored: Security is not established for these networks and their Internet access becomes a shared resource for all those within range (often, including neighbors' homes). As a minimum, any wireless network should, at least, have WEP (Wired Equivalency Protocol) set on their network. By engaging WEP, the network is immediately given a level of resistance to those attempting to breach access—a password is generated to assure that the enjoining of the network is not *frivolous*. Most routers will allow you to generate a passcode based upon the conversion of a password into a *hexadecimal* format, whether it is a 64-bit or 128-bit *hex* value. Not only is this simple to enable, it is as basic as changing the default password on your router itself (hopefully, that's a *given*). It is also highly advisable to install a firewall on any network that has Internet access, regardless of whether you use a hardware or software implementation or both.

The suggestions provided above are clearly **NOT** a comprehensive or complete listing of recommendations on addressing the performance of your system or network, but are intended as a starting point for your awareness of how to address some issues. As a closing pointer to bolster your productivity on a Windows® system, here is a list of keyboard shortcuts that may prove useful:

Show <i>Desktop</i>	⌘ + D
Launch <i>Windows Explorer</i>	⌘ + E
Launch <i>Find a File</i>	⌘ + F
<b>Lock your computer</b> if you are connected to a network domain, or switch users if you are not connected to a network domain.	⌘ + L
<b>Minimize All Applications</b>	⌘ + M
<b>Restore Minimized Applications</b>	Shift+⌘ + M

**NOTE:** When using the **shift** in a keyboard shortcut, a command is typically *reversed*. (Try it with the **tab** key in a table.)

If you are interested in learning more about the items discussed above, feel free to contact Holzsager Technology Services, LLC at (201) 797-5050 or by e-mail at [support@tech4now.com](mailto:support@tech4now.com). For general information about other services for your home or office, kindly visit [www.tech4now.com](http://www.tech4now.com), there you may retrieve additional information bulletins and articles to help you use technology to your fullest advantage.