Top 10 New Computer User Tips

Backup important data

A computer or its hard drive can fail at any time and without warning. When it does all your personal documents, letters, pictures, music, and videos, is lost and in many situations cannot be recovered or costs lots of money to be recovered. Make sure you have backups of all your important data in case your computer fails.

Protect the computer

Make sure to protect your computer from electrical surges, brownouts, and blackouts. At the very least, every computer user should have a decent surge protector on their computer and phone line if they use a modem. Surge protectors can help protect your computer during an electrical storm and could save you hundreds of dollars in repair costs if it were to get damaged. It is also a good idea to have computers on a UPS, which can help prevent damage to a computer during a brownout or blackout.

Keep computer and its programs updated

There is no such thing as a perfect software program or hardware drivers. After the developer has released their program they may discover errors and release updates to fix these problems. In the case of major software programs and operating systems, there can be several hundred updates and service packs released during its lifetime. Making sure your computer and its programs are up-to-date can help prevent problems.

In addition to updating programs, programs that use other programs or plugins may also need updates, for example, it is important to make sure all the plugins for your Internet browser are also up-to-date.

Keep the safe from viruses, spyware, phishing, and spam

Every computer connected to the Internet or other networks need to be protected. If you are using Microsoft Windows, we recommend having some form of antivirus program installed and running on the computer. It is also a good idea to have a malware detection program running on the computer to pickup any spyware or malware that an antivirus may not have detected. Finally, every computer user should also be fully aware of other security risks such as chain mails, phishing, and spam while on the Internet.

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Read, understand, and watch for tricks

One of the most common mistakes a new computer user makes is agreeing to dialog text boxes, agreements, or other prompts without reading the dialog text box or understanding it. Before clicking any Ok or Install button, make sure you understand what you are doing. If you do not understand the prompt, click the Cancel button or close the box.

Also, while installing any program watch for any check boxes. Often free programs, plugins, and updates have check boxes that ask if it is ok to install additional programs onto the computer. For example, when installing the Adobe Flash plugin there may be a check box to install additional antivirus, firewall, toolbar, or other programs. If left checked (often checked by default), these programs are installed and may cause problems or frustration because it is not something you wanted.

Clean the computer clean

Keeping the computer physically clean can help keep the computer running smoothly, help prevent issues such as overheating, and help protect you from getting sick. While cleaning the computer, it is also a good idea to clean the data on the computer. Microsoft Windows users can run ScanDisk to check the hard drive for errors and Defrag to keep the data on the hard drive organized. It is also a good idea to go through the installed programs and uninstall anything you no longer use.

Be familiar with free alternatives

Be familiar with and know about free alternatives to popular commercial programs. For example, almost every computer user needs a word processor program installed on their computer. Instead of purchasing Microsoft Office, which is several hundred dollars use a free alternative such as Open Office that is just as capable.

Take full advantage of all the mouse buttons and wheels

Many new computer users only use the left mouse button. Use the mouse to its full potential by also using the right mouse button to access the context menu. For example, if you highlight text and then right-click that text it brings up a menu that allows you to copy, cut, and perform other options that text, the same thing applies to files.

Although most users already use the mouse wheel to scroll up and down on a web page, this wheel can also often be used as a third-button by pressing down on the mouse. Some computer mice also allow the wheel to be pushed right-and-left on to perform additional features such as moving forward and back on a web page.

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Finally, many computer mice also have side buttons also known as thumb buttons that can be programmed to do any number of features, including going back on a web page or opening a magnifier.

Use included help files and the Internet

Every program has online help that is usually accessed by pressing the F1 function key while in the program or through the file help menu. If the included help does not answer your questions, searching the Internet or using online help services such as Computer Hope can answer those questions.

Become familiar with and use shortcut keys

Every computer user should become familiar with and use keyboard shortcuts. Knowing these shortcuts can drastically increase your productivity on the computer and make your overall computer experience much more enjoyable.

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