Article: COMPUTERS BEHAVING BADLY
Topic: Tinkering
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Righto, for all you people who are completely 'technically challenged', my apologies now, you may as well just turn the page.  On a scale of Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced, this is for the Intermediates.  They are the people who either have an inkling and want to know more or who plain-old like knowing how stuff works.

In this article I am going to show you some common, quick ways to get that little extra out of your PC.  Because every machine has subtle differences, everything won't be able to be used verbatim, but the general theory should hold.

Let's start with the way your PC boots up.  Hopefully you would have seen a message on the screen as soon as the machine starts stating something along the lines 'Hit Del or F2 to enter Setup…'  And how many of your actually have tried that?.  Do it and you'll discover a plethora of menu options that will scare Granny's socks off.  But you'll find an area, usually labelled Boot Options where you can disable the feature to look for a floppy unit during boot up.  You can also change the boot order.  Typically the best option is CD first then Hard Drive second and disable all the rest.  I also like to disable the PC from awakening due to modem or network activity.  This you'll find in the Power Management area.

These sort of changes can shave many seconds off the boot up cycle.  Yes, I know it's only seconds but every one counts and then you won't feel so bad that the monstrous anti-virus program is taking so long to load.

For the XP people, once booted, go into Control Panel, System, Advanced, Settings and untick all the boxes in the System Failure area.  Then select 'none' in the Write Debugging Information area.  While in the Advanced tab, select Error Reporting and disable it.

Now click on Start, Programs, Startup and note the programs that get started every time you start the PC.  Any there you can't recognise?.  Theoretically, you should be able to right click each one and delete it.  This just stops it starting when the PC boots – it doesn't actually delete the software.  Most programs listed here simply start each time on the assumption that you will need them.  You may not!.  And when you do use them they will do their thing anyway.  They are put here to make the program start faster when you do use it.

It comes back to where you want to spend those valuable few seconds mentioned earlier.  For example; spend them at startup and have Word load faster or have a faster bootup and let Word load its stuff when you want to use it.

A program called 'msconfig' is another area you can tweak the startup process.  Go to Start, Run and type in msconfig.  Hit Enter and you see a pop up window where you can go to the Startup tab.  This is the Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Startup Process.  It shows every program that runs each time you start your PC.  Some things, like your virus software, you'll see here and should obviously be left ticked.  But some things are complete rubbish, slow your PC or are just malicious - this is often where viruses, adware and spyware programs can be first detected.

The Catch-22 is knowing what programs are useful and what can be removed.  Sadly there is no quick answer fore that.  Experience, prior knowledge and gut feel play a big part.

But the quickest fix for a speed boost is to simply get more memory.  Don't be fooled though in thinking that doubling your memory will double your speed.  But you will get a noticeably improvement.

For those I haven't put into a blind panic, hopefully I have pipped enough interest to tinker around with some settings to see how things work.

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