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PC maintenance for small businesses >

Executive Summary:
Keeping your business's computer system free of bugs is a matter of paying attention and taking a few defensive steps.

By Janeson Keeley

If your business is dependent on your computer functioning well, frequent system crashes, a virus infection, or a hardware crash can cost you significant time and money.

Here are some tips for keeping your computer functioning smoothly.

Keep your system updated. Celie Holmes, Roanoke area director for Fast-teks On-Site Computer Services, says, "First and foremost, make sure that your operating system is up to date." Set your computer to download and install updates automatically.

Use protective software. Both Holmes and Alecia Nash, owner and president of Renaissance Computers, report that virus infection is the most common cause of computer problems. They recommend AVG anti-virus software (www.avg.com). Nash also suggests using Advanced System Care (www.iobit.com) to clean up your system, and Malware Bytes (www.malwarebytes.org) to protect your computer from malicious software. All are available as free downloads, but Nash cautions, "Most free anti-virus software is for home and non-profit use only. If you're a business, you need to purchase the software." Keep this software updated, as well.

Keep hardware clean. Holmes suggests keeping a can of compressed air handy. "Use it to blow across openings," she advises. "Do not use a vacuum cleaner. It may cause a static shock, which can damage your computer."

Protect your data. Nash recommends that businesses have both on-site and off-site back-up systems and procedures in place so that important data can be restored in the event of a system crash.

Follow reasonable security policies.

- "Don't let your children use your business computer. They will cause

problems," warns Nash.

- Don't use your business e-mail address for personal correspondence. Web-based e-mail sites such as GMail (www.google.com/mail) offer a layer of protection between your computer and potential e-mail viruses.

- Be aware of any data protection and confidentiality laws that apply to your industry, and follow them strictly.

Know when to call a professional. Following the guidelines above will help reduce the chance of developing computer problems, but there are two big warning signs you should heed in order to prevent a system crash:

- Your computer takes longer to start up than it used to. This can indicate a virus infection.

- Your computer's fan is running a lot. Holmes notes, "Dirt and dust can degrade a computer to the point that it overheats severely, causing burnout of expensive parts."

It is also a good idea to call in a professional when you get a new computer or wireless router. "Find someone who will take the time to understand your business and customize preventive methodology. There is no cookie cutter formula," explains Nash.

If you're a business owner who relies on your computer on a daily basis, you want to minimize your downtime and maximize your productivity. Use a combination of do-it-yourself practices and professional services to keep your information secure and your computer running optimally.