

I know, I know. Whenever you're on the computer, you always want it fast. Fast, fast, fast!. Everything you do, whether it is download pictures, upload pictures, download files, anything really, you want it fast.

Well, do you want the good news, or do you want the bad news? Well, I guess I'll give you the bad news first just because it might be better to tell you things right of the back and not let the suspense rise. Ok. The main issue is that, well, the more usage your pc experiences, the more issues will arise, thus slowing it massively down. Why? Because, over time, Windows-based PCs often succumb to a glut of startup programs, Windows services, and hidden files and templates.

Trust me. I know. I've been there. I used to run my pc without a clue of some of the programs going on in the background. Clearing things up will make a really big difference.

The good news? Well, a simple "house-cleaning" (so-to-speak), will really help your pc go a long way. It can be anything from sweeping out the Windows Startup folder, optimizing network settings, or using software to clean out the Windows Registry, there is a lot you can do to revive a struggling system. There are, of course, some people who are in big trouble and just don't know much about computers. Well, so more good news is that you can start solving problems (believe it or not) on your computer just by restarting it! Well, then again, there is always that over clocking of things, specifically your processor and your graphics card.

The following ways, shown below, are ways that will help you squeeze every last bit of that juicy speed you can for the full cup of a smooth, fast running computer. Best of all, most of these options can be done by you, are free programs (freeware), or cost a nominal fee.

The Basic Tips for All

Things Not Going Well? Reboot it all! If you really wanted it too, and trust me, you could, you could run Windows months on end, of course, then again, you really shouldn't. Depending on what you run and do on your computer, Windows can just get slower and slower and slower. By just simply restarting your computer will you already free up the RAM and others things that are slowing your computer down.

Time for some o' that Defrag! As technology gets better and improves every 18 months, so does the necessary space to hold all of the new programs and games. Drives are just going to get bigger and bigger, faster and faster. Why, there's already even external terabyte drives out there (selling for a good \$1200)! The main issue here is that they are becoming more and more of the traffic jam to the system performance that you desire. You yourself can smooth things out by using Windows' Defragment utility. Click *Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Defragmenter* and click the *Analyze* button in the program window. Windows will produce a report on your disk, giving you an idea of how fragmented your files are. Once that's done, you can choose to kick off a full defrag session. Now for some bad news again: It's slow!

Also, on the same note here, drives filled to capacity are much more prone to fragmentation than those with plenty of free space. Before you begin defragging a drive, make sure you create free space for Windows to work with so it can fully optimize the layout of your files. Delete junk you don't use any more, or move it to some removable media... leading us to the next tip!

Take Out That Messy, Smelly, Over-Spilling Garbage! When I say Windows saves everything, I mean Windows saves *everything!* Temporary files, browser cache, old program installation files, the list goes on and on. And guess what, Windows is probably stashing it on your hard drive. Clear out the accumulation with Windows XP ([news](#) - [web sites](#))'s Disk Cleanup. Click *Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Cleanup* to put the program right to work, scanning your drive and looking for files it can delete or compress.

While in the Disk Cleanup dialog box, check the items you want Windows to delete. You can also click the *More Options* tab to wring further efficiencies out of your PC--for instance, nuking all but the most recent restore point data, which is used to recover Windows from serious crashes. Run Disk Cleanup every month or so to prevent unused or unnecessary files from taking over your disk. If you want to keep a tight rein on Windows' temp files going forward--and improve your personal privacy, to boot--download [IE Privacy Keeper](#), a free little utility that makes short work of dusting clutter from your disk.

“Media Files, I command you to open fast!” If you have that desire to launch an image, video, or audio file quickly, you really can't do much in Windows alone. To really accelerate things, I recommend [Irfanview](#), a marvelous little program that opens nearly every type of media file in a flash. It even lets you touch up photos and images. One thing: Irfanview won't optimize your system in any way, but, it will let your system access media files a lot faster. Best of all, it's free.

Give Your Searches Some Battery Power I've spent so much time searching for files and data in Windows and Microsoft Outlook that it's not even funny. Want to avoid the laughs? Tweak the Windows search facility. Click *Start, Search, For Files or Folders*. In the Search Results folder interface pane, click *Change Preferences*, then click the *With Indexing Service* link. Click the Yes radio button and click *OK*. Windows will now index files on the disk during idle moments, resulting in much faster searches. Another option: Install the heralded [Google Desktop](#) search utility. It produces lightning-fast searches on the desktop. Just keep your eye out for any [security updates](#) Google may release.

Fast-Forward Them Menus If the Windows Start menu and other application menus take a moment to appear on screen, you can speed things up by disabling shadows. Right-click an open area of the Windows desktop, click the *Appearance* tab, then click the *Effects* button. Uncheck the *Show shadows under menus* check box. You can also uncheck the 'Use the following transition effect for menus and tooltips' checkbox. This disables the fade effect that can sometimes add overhead to menu displays. Click *OK* and click *OK* again to

adopt the new settings.

And Now... The Advanced Tips

Right Now! Stop using Internet Explorer! Immediately! Microsoft's Web browser is a darn hog. Switching to the [Mozilla Firefox](#) or [Opera](#) browser can produce swifter program launches, quicker page loads, and an over-all smoother ride. In my personal experience, Firefox has proven the fleetest browser, but Opera consumes the least system memory--useful for older systems with 128MB or 256MB of RAM.

Tune Internet connections. Be honest here, do you really think you are getting the most out of that broadband connection? Go over to [SpeedGuide.net](#) and find out. Run the TCP/IP Analyzer routine in your browser to check the health of your connection. You can find it under the *Broadband, Broadband Tools* menu on the left side of the page.

If you want, you can download the free SG TCP/IP Optimizer utility (also under Broadband Tools), which tests for the most effective MaxMTU value (maximum transmission unit--basically a data packet size) for squeezing more data through your broadband link. Tell Optimizer what type of connection you're using, run through the diagnostics, then let the utility fine-tune your settings.

Decontaminate that Registry! Do you install a lot of software and devices? Have you owned your PC for a couple of years? If you answered yes to either of these questions, your Windows Registry is probably a mess!

The Registry is the central database where Windows stores all the configuration data for your system. The problem is that database can get filled with a lot of junk, be it entries from long-since-removed programs or from hardware you no longer use. So what is the answer? Use a freeware or shareware utility like [RegClean](#) to find and erase those dead-end entries. You might also consider the \$20 [Registry Mechanic](#).

Travel Lite Windows is packed full of stuff we simply do not need, which is why the folks at LitePC cooked up [XPLite](#), a \$40 utility that strips unwanted features out of Windows XP. Use the software to de-feature your Windows configuration until it loads in a fraction of the time of the standard package. There are also versions for Windows 2000 ([news - web sites](#)) and Windows 98 ([news - web sites](#))--handy for wringing performance out of truly aged PCs.

Expert Tweaks

Slim down startup services. Every time you boot up, Windows XP launches dozens of covertly named programs and services, many of which you just really don't need at all. You can use Windows XP's Services facility to get things under control. Click *Start, Run*, then type *services.msc* to launch the Services facility. Click the *Extended* tab at the bottom and look for service entries marked Automatic in the Startup Type column. Click on a service entry to read a description of it to the left. For instance, my PC automatically loads a Bluetooth service, even though I haven't plugged the Bluetooth PC Card into my notebook for nearly six months.

Double-click any offending items, then select *Manual* from the Startup Type drop-down list box. Now this service will only be loaded when you tell it to. Finally, click the *Stop* button to unload the service from Windows.

Time For the Really Fun Stuff Want something for nothing? Try overclocking the processor in your PC. The BIOS software in many systems and motherboards lets you manually set the clock rate of both the CPU and the front side bus that runs between the processor and system memory. Nudge these up a few percentage points, and you can add oomph to the most demanding games and applications.

To do this, go into the PC's setup program by pressing the appropriate key during boot-up and before Windows starts (you'll be prompted with text on the screen). Then find the area where CPU settings are accessed (often in the Advanced section). Use the interface to nudge up the CPU or FSB speed, depending on what is available on your system. Save the settings and reboot, and the system will run at the new clock rate.

Don't try to do it all at once. Rather, dial in **small increases**, running a benchmark program such as [3DMark](#) between each boost to test the overclock configuration. Once you hit a failure, **reduce** the **clock rate** until the system is stable again.

A word of caution: While most CPUs can be safely overclocked, there is a risk is that an overclocked CPU may **fail** due to **overheating** and **stress**. So it's a good idea to make sure your system is well **ventilated** and equipped with working fans before turning up the thermostat. Also ensure you have your **data backed up**, because overclocking failures can be both **quick** and **catastrophic**.

Push Them Pixels! While we're overclocking, you might try amping up graphics performance by pushing the graphics card to new levels. You'll need a third-party utility like the free [RivaTuner](#), which lets you muck around with the settings on many ATI and NVidia-based graphics cards. As with CPU overclocks, the risk of frying the GPU (graphics processing unit) goes up with the clock rate. But most graphics cards are more forgiving of memory overclocks, so you should focus most of your efforts there.

Now, how's that new lease on life? If you're still not getting the kind of performance you want out of your PC, you may be in need of some strategic upgrades. E-mail me at jac006@sbcglobal.net for some more tips, ideas, and answers to some of your problems.

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