



Leave it on or turn it off?

By Jennifer Ohl, Midwest Software Specialists, Inc.

In this white paper, I will address frequently asked questions by my customers- should I leave my computer on when I'm not using it? Leave it running all the time? Shut it down in the evening?

When people ask these questions, they are weighing the benefits of saving money on electricity versus wear and tear on the computer by turning it on and off. For years, many have claimed that continually shutting down and restarting computers will wear out the power switch and drive motors. Advocates of leaving the computer on say that starting a cold computer puts extra stress on the read/write heads inside the hard drive. This may have applied to older drives, but newer hard drives use safer processes for spinning up the hard drive after a break.

Some PC users also worry that the stress of heating up components and then letting them cool down again can cause premature failure. Some PC parts expand as they warm and contract as they cool; repeating this cycle numerous times throughout the day may cause more wear than leaving a computer on all the time.

Wasted Energy

As far as electricity usage is concerned, modern PC's don't consume much power. Nonetheless, there is no doubt you will save some money by shutting down overnight, and when you're gone during the weekends. The components in your machine require a large surge of electricity when you first start up the machine, but the burst of energy consumption will not offset the savings you'll see by shutting down on a regular basis.

There are other advantages to turning off your computer a few times per week. Every time you restart, your operating system flushes out older files that it's not currently using. This reduces clutter on your hard drive and in RAM (Random access memory- explain), it may even provide noticeable performance improvements. If you have a broadband connection that is always on, turning off your PC means that no one can attempt to hack into your data. (Of course you should protect yourself with the use of a firewall and antivirus software). Leaving your computer on all the time leaves your data at a higher risk of damage due to blackouts, brownouts and power surges.

The middle ground

If you're not sure which path to take, you might want to strike a balance between shutting down every time you exit the computer and leaving your machine running at all times. When you know you'll be away for more than a few hours, or before you go to sleep, go ahead and shut down.

Shutting down may conflict with one of the other primary reasons people leave their computers running- convenience. Nothing beats sitting down to a computer that's all ready to go at the moment you need it. If a complete shut down doesn't appeal to you, you can select to Hibernate or Stand By, which consume little electricity, yet let you restore your computer to a ready state much more quickly than a cold start up.



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About the Author

Jennifer Ohl is a maintenance and reliability consultant based in Chicago and Miami. She was Regional Manager of Consulting Services for a leading maintenance software manufacturer and subsequently founded her own company, Midwest Software Specialists in 2001. For twelve years, Jennifer has been helping companies implement maintenance systems that reduce costs and increase profits. Jennifer has an MBA in Finance and Operations and a BA in Business.