



## Seven Ways to Clean up Your PC's Digital Clutter

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### 1. Set a Starting Point

Because you may make some changes to settings on your operating system, it's a good idea to set a System Restore point before you begin. The System Restore Utility stores snapshots of your computer's settings, so if a problem occurs, you can reset Windows. To set a Restore Point in Windows XP, Select Start > All Programs > Accessories > System Tools > System Restore. Under Restore Point Description, type a name, such as **before maintenance** and click Create. To set a restore point in Windows Vista, Click the Start button > choose Control Panel > Select System and Maintenance > Click Restore Files from Backup > Select Create A Restore Point > Click the Create button.

### 2. Clean Up Your Startup

You may have noticed that your computer takes longer to start up than when you first got it. Many programs are designed to automatically insert themselves into your computer's startup sequence. The programs loading at startup accumulate and it takes longer. To disable certain programs from automatically loading when you start your computer, follow these steps:

In Windows XP, click Start > Select All programs > Select the startup folder. Right-click on the applications that you don't want to start automatically and click delete. Next, click Start > Select Run > type **msconfig** and click OK. Click on the Startup tab to view the programs that automatically load when you start the computer. For any programs that you do not want to start automatically, remove the check mark next to the item. Click OK when you have made your selections (Note that disabling an application does not remove it from your PC.)



In Vista, select Start > Select Control Panel > Select System and Maintenance > Choose Performance Information and Tools. Click Manage Startup programs, and Vista will open the Software Explorer Utility which provides a detailed list of the programs that automatically boot up in Vista. Click the Show For All Users button. To eliminate a program from starting up automatically, select the application and click the disable button.

### 3. Tidy Up Internet Explorer

Click on your internet icon and then select Tools/Internet Options and then click on the General tab. This dialog box allows you to maintain the performance and security of Internet Explorer. From the delete browsing history window, you can purge files that are stored, such as passwords and **cookies** that may pose a risk to your security and privacy. (When you enter a web site using **cookies**, you may be asked to fill out a form providing information such as your name, address and User ID. This information is packaged into a cookie and sent to your Web browser which



stores it for later use. The next time you go to the same web site, your browser will send the cookie to the Web server).

If you need to free up some drive space, click the Delete Files button under Temporary Internet Files. This option lets you remove copies of web pages, which are stored so that Internet Explorer can quickly load them.

#### 4. Update Your Applications

Many programs offer an “update” feature that allows the application to search for and download the latest version from the manufacturer. You can configure some programs to check for updates each time you open the program. We suggest that you make a list of the applications you use regularly; and, once a month, open those programs, select the update feature and allow the application to update itself. If the program doesn’t provide an integrated update option, check the manufacturer’s website and look for the Support or Downloads section. Then search for the updates that are compatible with your program.

#### 5. Maintain Your Hard Drive

Applications sometimes create temporary files that are no longer necessary once you have closed the program. The more “junk” files you have on your hard drive, the longer it will take for your computer to open files. The Windows Disk Cleanup Utility is designed to locate and remove the unnecessary files and free up storage space on your computer. To open Disk Cleanup in Windows Xp and Windows Vista, Click the start button, >then All Programs, >then Accessories, >then System Tools > and then Disk Cleanup.

In Windows XP, the Disk Cleanup Utility will search your hard drive and give you a “files to delete list” of junk files on your PC. Vista will prompt you to select a specific drive before scanning and then generate a “files to delete list.” When you have chosen the files you want to delete, click on OK and Yes. After you have removed your junk files, it’s a good idea to run Disk Defragmenter, which is a utility that rearranges data on your hard drive so it’s more efficient. In Windows XP and Vista, Select Start, > All Programs, > Accessories, > System Tools and > Disk Defragmenter to run the utility.

#### 6. Back Up Your Data

The operating system and programs on your computer can be reinstalled if your hard drive crashes, but you’ll lose any important documents, financial spreadsheets, emails and photos you haven’t backed up. Both Windows XP and Vista include utilities to back up your files, and you can also use the backup utility to restore the data, should catastrophe occur.

In Windows XP, Click Start, > All Programs, > Accessories, and > System Tools and > click Backup, which will launch the Backup Or Restore Wizard. Click Next, > Select Back Up Files And Settings, and then > Click Next. At the “What Do You Want To Back Up” window, you’re offered the choice among My Documents And Settings, Everyone’s Documents And Settings, All Information On This Computer, and Let Me Choose What To Back Up. Once you’ve selected the files you want to back up, click



Next. Click Browse and select a location to save the data, such as to an external hard drive or your hard drive (you can burn it to a CD or DVD later on). Click Next and Finish to run the Backup utility.

To run Vista's Backup utility, click Start and choose Control Panel, System And Maintenance, and Backup Your Computer. At the Backup And Restore Center window, you can choose either the Back Up Files option to copy specific files and folders or the Back Up Computer option to create a copy of your hard drive that can be used to restore your PC after a system crash. Select a location to save your backup. (Vista won't allow you to save the backup on the system drive where the OS is installed, so you'll need to save the data on an external storage device, a secondary hard drive, or a partition of your hard drive.) Click Next. If you chose either the Documents And Settings options or Let Me Choose What To Back Up option, the Backup utility will let you pick and choose the types of data it will locate and copy. Click the checkboxes to select or deselect the category and click Next after you've made the selections. At the next window, the Backup utility offers How Often, What Day, and What Time drop-down menus to let you configure future backups. Click Save Settings and Start Backup to begin the backup process.

## 7. Create a Maintenance Schedule

If you have performed the tasks we have covered so far, you're probably wishing there was a way to automate the maintenance process. Windows XP's Scheduled Tasks feature and Vista's Task Scheduler feature are ideal for the job. In Windows XP, click Start > All Programs > Accessories > System Tools > Scheduled Tasks. Double-click the Add Scheduled Task icon > click Next. At the next window, you'll find a number of utilities mentioned in this update, including Backup, and Disk Cleanup. You can also click the Browse button to schedule a task for specific programs on your PC.



The Task Scheduler feature of Vista is a bit more complicated than Scheduled Tasks, but the basic steps of task creation are similar. Click Start, Control Panel, and System And Maintenance. Under Administrative Tools, select Schedule Tasks. Click the Create Basic Task option and follow the steps in the wizard.

### **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.