

4 Things Computer-illiterate Users Should Know When Running Windows

By Miguel Leiva-Gomez



Microsoft Windows is a very easy operating system to use, and the latest versions certainly have taken security seriously. However there are still many people who don't know enough about their computers to use them properly. Words like "CPU," "hard drive," and "RAM" is commonplace for tech-savvy people, but the average person isn't as familiar with the concepts and easily falls victims to scammy gimmicks and expensive computer repairs. If you're not so literate with computers, here are four things you should know that might help you in the long run.

1. Don't Listen to Websites Promising to Speed Up Your Computer

In most cases, you'd probably land on a pop-up advertisement promising that your computer will run much faster after you try out their software. I assure you that this is a gimmick intended to make you pay money for software that only takes up space on your hard drive. If you really want to make your computer faster, you're going to have to pay some real bucks to get its hardware in shape.



Everything running on your computer depends on the hardware to run smoothly. Go to your local computer store and ask for a quote on a hardware tune-up. Most likely, if you bought your computer less than two years ago, the process will be painless and inexpensive. Make sure they don't get cheap and install a bunch of low-grade parts on the PC just to give you a temporary boost in speed.

The software you really need to make your computer run faster comes with Windows already. **Disk Defragmenter** is one of them. All computers running a Windows version above 3.0 can defragment their drives, and you'll find the defragmentation utility in the Accessories sub-menu of your "Start" menu. The utility finds files on your hard disk that have been scattered all over the place and puts them all in one place, making them easier to find.

Other third-party utilities might speed your computer up efficiently, also, but don't listen to the pop-up ads that advertise a utility that can speed up your computer. Use things like Tune-Up Utilities (<http://www.tune-up.com/>) or something you can purchase from your local computer store.

2. There Are Two Types of Memory on Your Computer

This might be rather rudimentary, but there are cases when people can't distinguish between **random access memory (RAM)** and **storage**. Both types of memory store things, but RAM only does this temporarily.

RAM stores everything you're running right now, at this very second. This page you're reading, for example, occupies a certain space in your RAM and will disappear once you close the page. Active components of every program are committed to this memory. A computer's RAM takes the form of small cards that sit in slots on the motherboard.



Storage is the kind of memory that stores everything your computer *has*, like installed programs and the operating system. This memory often resides in the hard drive or solid state drive. Both devices have the same purpose, but are designed differently. A hard drive has multiple platters that spin, and read/write heads that manipulate and retrieve data. It's sort of like a vinyl record player that can also write to the record. Solid state drives are designed with flash memory, much like the memory on your digital camera or phone.



3. Windows UAC and Security Isn't Enough

Sure, Microsoft can boast about how its product has immense security and how you are less likely to get infected by a virus, but that doesn't eliminate the possibility of a virus finding its way to your computer. You should always install an anti-virus application on your computer to keep it safe from threats, particularly one that regularly updates its database. There are many mixed reviews about anti-virus software (<http://cdn.stopadwares.com/free-downloads/stopzilla2/?wb=lokvbeh4970f44473-104785f>), so you'll have to do a little bit of homework to find out which one is right for you. Our favourite is Microsoft Security Essential

(<http://maketecheasier.com/a-quick-look-at-microsoft-security-essentials-free-antivirus-software/2009/06/24>) though.

Try to avoid buying an AV from a company that's not reputable. Do a Google search for "anti-virus review." You'll see a whole bunch of reviews related to many different anti-virus programs. Even better, search for "top 10 antivirus software." Just so you know, BitDefender hits the top for 2012 and it's affordable, priced at \$30. That's much better than paying insane prices for a computer repair after an infection.

4. Windows Update is Your Friend

Some people might tell you to turn off Windows Update because of bad experiences they've had. DON'T DO THAT! Microsoft usually releases an update within a week of discovering a new vulnerability. By updating your computer regularly, it keeps your computer running with tighter security that others might not have. If you don't feel comfortable turning on automatic updates, at least let Windows prompt you when new updates are available so you can pick and choose them individually. Some of the updates released by Microsoft plug up serious security holes in the operating system.

A Final Word

I remember when I was much younger and got my first computer with Windows 95. It was something exciting, an unadulterated realm where I could do practically anything I wanted. There was only one problem: My computer became infected with all sorts of viruses after only a month, and I remember all the trouble I went through to get it cleaned up. Everything started running slower after a while, and I had no clue why. With the tips I mentioned above, you'd fare much better than I did and probably wouldn't go through as much trouble. Happy computing / Windowing / whatever you do!

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