

SPEED UP THAT COMPUTER!

By George W. Myers

Click...wait, click...wait, click...go get a cup of coffee, click...make a phone call. Does this sound like your experience with your home or work computer? If so, get ready for a tip that can help your PC operate noticeably faster. Along with things like frequently defragmenting your hard drive and deleting temp files, the process of uncluttering your PC's memory can speed up that computer!

If you read my last article, you may remember I used the analogy of a desk in describing three fundamental components of a computer. The hard drive is like a file drawer, the processor is like the person working at the desk and memory is like the top of desk because it's where we store information that currently being used. If we're opening a web browser or a word processor, both the document we're working on and the program itself are pulled out of the file drawer and plopped on top of the desk.

In today's computing world many software companies write their software to update itself automatically. This is great, but what these software makers aren't telling us is that in order to do this the program that does the updating runs in the background – from the time we start our computers to the time we shut them down! If you look in the bottom right hand side of your display you can see what Windows refers to as the System Tray. You will see some tiny icons here and if you see two little arrows pointing left and you click on them, you may even notice that there many more of these tiny icons that were hidden from your view.

Each of these tiny icons represents a program that is running and occupying memory – without you having started it yourself! Eventually this can lead to having a "desk" that's so cluttered it doesn't leave you much room for the programs you open yourself and that means your computer will be running slowly. How do we stop these programs from running automatically, you ask?

We use the System Configuration Utility! This program isn't listed on a menu of any kind, so we require a little know how to open it. In Windows XP, we click Start, then Run, type "msconfig" and hit the Enter key. In Vista, we click the Start icon, type "msconfig" in the Search box and hit the Enter key. When the utility opens, we click the Startup tab and there will be a listing of all the programs that are starting automatically when the PC starts. Simply unchecking the box next to a program keeps it from starting this way.

Some programs need to start automatically, and we shouldn't disable anything related to antivirus or firewall programs. I recommend leaving anything that isn't recognizable alone. Expanding the Command column can sometimes reveal more information about the programs, since the names of the items in the list often don't tell us much about them.

Hopefully this tip will help your PC run faster and more smoothly!