

Quick and Easy Updates

Let's take a look at some quick and easy updates you can do to make your PC work better, run faster, or correct insidious problems. All are low or no cost, and can be done without any specialized knowledge.

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#1: New Mouse

I recently have noticed a computer phenomenon at several client offices. The computer behaves erratically, is slow to respond, or requires several clicks to make programs work. What's wrong? The Mouse is worn out! The clicker may have lost its "springy-ness", the contacts are worn, or it may take a lot of pressure to click. On older mice, the ball and roller mechanism has a layer of gunk or is worn. You may not notice it, as the phenomenon appears very gradually.

Replacing a mouse is one of the quickest, cheapest fixes you can do, especially if your mouse is still the roller-ball type. Flip it upside down and have a look – is there a round opening with what looks like a gray ping-pong ball inside? Time for a new laser mouse, they are far more accurate, and have better performance.

If your mouse is a laser-type, (a small red or blue light underneath) then you might try a quick-fix: clean the laser light lens with a Q-tip or air blaster to get the dust off. If it still behaves erratically, then replace it.

If your mouse is more than 3 years old, the best solution is a new mouse – I have seen basic wired mice for as low as \$5 each. Wireless mice can be had for as little as \$20. Make sure you take your old mouse with you to the store so you can match the plug type and general size of your mouse – yes, they come in small, medium, and large sizes too!

#2: New Keyboard

Anything mechanical is subject to wear, and a keyboard is a prime candidate for replacement. Perhaps a key is missing, the letters are worn out, or you really have to pound on the [Enter] key to make it enter. You have no excuse not to replace it, a basic keyboard can be obtained for as low as \$9, and even a fancy unit with ergonomic features has dropped down to about \$25 or so.

Even better, try this: how about a wireless keyboard/mouse combo? Microsoft makes an excellent version for under \$35! The Microsoft Wireless Desktop 800 comes with a mini-USB plug, wireless mouse and keyboard. You'll rid yourself of two wires that cause "wire clutter" from the back of your PC!

Better yet, with a wireless keyboard and mouse, you can experiment with new typing positions and adjust your office ergonomics without the restrictions of where the cables can go. Along with worn-out mice, I also notice a lot of bad ergonomic workstation setups. Here's a guide to good computer ergonomics:

<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/positions.html>

#3: More RAM

RAM (Random Access Memory) is one of those things of which can be said: “the more the merrier”. This upgrade is a bit more challenging than changing a mouse or keyboard, but yet has great payback. I have never seen a situation where more memory made a computer problem worse, only a change for the better.

Computers and software are more and more RAM-hungry. The old guideline for WindowsXP was 512MB (MegaBytes) was good enough. I say put in 3GB (GigaBytes), the maximum WindowsXP can handle. If you are using Windows Vista or Windows7, get a minimum of 4GB. Below is a listing of how much RAM each version of Windows can utilize:

Windows Edition	32-bit version MAX	64-bit version MAX
Windows XP	4GB (3GB usable)	128GB
Windows Vista Home Basic	4GB	8GB
Windows Vista Home Premium	4GB	16GB
Windows Vista Business	4GB	128GB
Windows 7 Home Basic	4GB	8GB
Windows 7 Home Premium	4GB	16GB
Windows 7 Professional	4GB	192GB

To find your computer’s memory capacity, the simplest method is to go to www.crucial.com. Crucial is a premiere computer memory supplier, and they have a nice lookup function or a “find it for me” option. RAM is pretty cheap these days, and the payback in overall faster computer operation is worth the effort. You will need to open up the computer case and poke around inside to find the memory slots. Note that you may need to remove the existing memory in order to get the maximum RAM, but again, this is not difficult. If you need a guide on how to replace RAM, most manufacturers have online repair diagrams, schematics, or in the case of Dell and Hewlett-Packard, instructional videos!

#4: New Monitor

Nothing perks up your (computer) mood like a new flat-screen monitor. Get rid of that old energy-wasting CRT (TV-tube) monitor, and get a new, efficient LCD or LED flat screen monitor. I prefer the LED-type flat screen, I find the colors more vibrant over the LCD type.

To give you an idea of how much energy is wasted with the old CRT, imagine this: a typical CRT uses as much energy as a 200-watt light bulb. By comparison, most LCD or LED monitors use only 25 watts *or less*. Do yourself and your electricity bill a favor and upgrade to a new monitor. A typical 17” to 20” LCD monitor can be obtained for about \$99 and a comparable LED monitor for about \$129.

Summary:

Sometimes it is the little things that can make a big difference. These four upgrades can add some life to your PC, improve its speed, save some energy, and/or make spotty performance vanish.

If you have questions or comments, please contact me by phone or email. As always, many thanks for reading!
-John Becker