

Top 10 Back to School Tips for a Safer Microsoft Windows

Experience

By Joshua Feinberg

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Joshua Feinberg
customersvc@smallbiztechtalk.com

Smallbiztechtalk.com <http://www.smallbiztechtalk.com>

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Author: Joshua Feinberg

Contact/Author: <mailto:customersvc@smallbiztechtalk.com>

Joshua Feinberg

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Top 10 Back to School Tips for a Safer Microsoft Windows Experience

It's going to take a lot more than an apple for the teacher to hold down your small business computer support costs.

By Joshua Feinberg, Editor of Smallbiztechtalk.com <http://www.smallbiztechtalk.com>

Are you tired of PC "lock ups" and "blue screen" error messages? Don't you wish Microsoft Windows would just "behave" itself and protect your invaluable bits and bytes like it's "supposed" to?

With most of you just back from summer vacation, now's a great time to review some simple steps you can take to make Microsoft Windows more reliable.

1. Never turn off your PC until you're told it's "safe" to do so.

Before you choose the Shut Down command from the Microsoft Windows Start Menu, many critical operating system files are still in use and open.

When Microsoft Windows tells you to "please wait" while shutting down, it's actually closing out all those files the "right" way.

2. Don't delete files or folders unless you know what they're for.

When you're running out of hard drive storage space, it can be tempting to look around in Windows Explorer and delete entire folders of programs that you no longer use.

However, by doing so, you'll leave behind a lot of excess baggage and may inadvertently "trash" your PC configuration.

3. Always remove software through Add/Remove Programs.

To keep your PC healthy, always remove any software that you no longer need through the Add/Remove Programs section of the Control Panel.

In contrast to the half-baked Windows Explorer approach described above, Add/Remove Programs should automatically remove the relevant files, folders, program groups, shortcuts, and Registry entries.

4. Review your backup plan.

If you have a tape drive or similar device on your PC, now's a great time to test your backup "system" by attempting to restore a few folders from backup media.

On the other hand, if your file storage is centralized on your company's file server, chances are the tape backup drive only covers your server storage.

If this is the case, be sure that you have no data files stored locally on your PC.

5. Get power protection.

Throughout the summer, you heard about how to protect your PC from summer storm damage.

The good news is that with the summer months just about behind us, you should have fewer power interruptions.

The bad news: there are plenty of utility power problems all year round. Don't let your PC and data become a power protection statistic. Get protected now.

Tip: For a primer on PC power protection, check out How to Keep Your Small Business Computer Systems Safe from Summer Storm Damage at <http://www.smallbiztechtalk.com/news/archives/tips050701-ht1.htm>

6. Install and maintain antivirus software.

If your company is heavily dependent on the Internet and e-mail, you cannot afford to ignore the risk of computer virus infections.

It's also not enough to just have antivirus software on your PC. You need to be vigilant about updating the software on a weekly basis, preferably more often.

While you're at it, be sure that your antivirus software can protect your files, as well as your web browser and e-mail Inbox.

7. Keep the bad guys out.

If you have a local area network (LAN) with centrally managed Internet access, you probably already have some type of firewall in place at the server level.

But if you have a standalone PC and full-time Internet access, through a cable modem, DSL

account, or similar technology, you stand an extremely high chance of being hacked.

The good news: you can cut your risk dramatically by investing in a personal firewall.

Tip: For personal firewalls at a price point that every small business can afford, check out ZoneAlarm Pro (<http://www.zonealarm.com>) or the more comprehensive Symantec Norton Internet Security (<http://www.symantec.com>).

8. Stick to hardware devices that have been tested by Microsoft.

As Plug and Play has become more popular, installing hardware is usually either a piece of cake or something vaguely resembling brain surgery.

However, you can dramatically improve your odds of hardware configuration success by referencing the Microsoft Windows Hardware Compatibility List at <http://www.microsoft.com/hcl>.

9. Avoid consumer versions of Microsoft Windows.

Microsoft has two distinct "classes" of operating systems: business and consumer.

The business-oriented product line includes Microsoft Windows XP Professional, Microsoft Windows 2000 Professional, and Microsoft Windows NT Workstation 4.

All other 32-bit versions of Microsoft Windows are generally designed for consumers, sell for a lower price, and have nowhere near the reliability of the business-class products.

Tip: Microsoft Windows XP Home, which comes out on October 25th, may end up being the first truly "reliable" consumer-focused version of Microsoft Windows.

10. Spend a few minutes each week enhancing your PC skills.

Unless you want to be dependent on computer consultants for every minor question, or beholden to overworked technical support hotline staffers, you really should concentrate on beefing up your PC troubleshooting skills.

In addition to the tremendous gratification of being more self-sufficient and empowered, you'll be gaining valuable skills that can save your employer money.

And be sure to remind your manager of this when it comes time to negotiate that "big" raise! (Shhh, just don't tell the boss I put you up to it.)

Tip: If you don't already subscribe to "Tips", sign up for a free subscription at <http://www.smallbiztechtalk.com> . We'll help you get up the PC support learning curve faster!

The Bottom Line

There's a lot you can do to make your Microsoft Windows and PC usage more enjoyable and less frustrating.

Use this Back to School Top 10 List as the starting point to get yourself and your company to an all around "safer" Microsoft Windows experience.

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