

## GOOD HOUSEKEEPING (on a computer)

This is a commonly used term to describe a variety of activities which you can undertake to minimise problems with your computer and to allow it to continue to run well. It also implies keeping the machine clean and tidy... part of which is to do with how you manage your files.

Many, but not all of the tasks can be automated, so why not include some of what follows in your staff handbook and policies?

A clean and tidy working environment applies to your computer as well. They attract dust which can make cooling fans noisier, cause mouses and keyboards to become sticky and can make screens harder to read. So, **keep them clean**: follow manufacturers instructions, use a small hoover and wipe with a lint free cloth and water. If you have a spillage, don't panic. So long as you turn everything off quickly, it may well cause no damage (however, sugar is problematic). Drain out all the water and allow to evaporate/dry. This is particularly true of **keyboards**. However, bear in mind that keyboards and mice (together) cost less than £10.

There is another element to cleaning and this involves making sure that the computer does not get infected with viruses or any of the other 'nasties' that tend these days to come from the internet. The best way to do this is to have a **firewall, an anti-virus programme (up to date) and anti spyware software** (see Virtual Riders website – resources-security), and to use them all the time. When you are surfing the net **don't download things which can't be verified** by someone or somewhere else (that you think is reliable). This should be incorporated into your acceptable use policy.

On a practical note, keep wires tidy (health and safety), make sure equipment is PAT tested regularly and turn off equipment when it is not needed (environmental policy).

**Backing up** your work is a useful safeguard as is **proper file management** (see separate briefings) but there are regular and routine technical tasks which will make your machine work better, longer. **Never save documents to the desktop!**

Try and **keep your hard disk free of useless clutter**. This takes the form of temporary files which software may create and then forget to delete (there are some good utilities that can do this for you – see the utilities-essential system section of the Virtual Riders website). Make sure to **delete all your temporary internet files** (*tools-internet options – temporary internet files – delete files* in Internet Explorer).

Sort out your correspondence. In other words, manage your email. Permanently **delete junk mail** and **archive** according to the policy you decide (for example, you could say that all staff must archive emails that are over 12 months old and either back them up or store them on a server).

**Keep your software current**. Make sure you are using the latest versions of your programmes (if you can afford it) and that programmes you no longer need are uninstalled from your system. **Keep your drivers updated**.



Once you have done these things, **empty your recycle bin** (which should be done regularly anyway) and then you are in a position to **defragment your disk**. When a file is saved onto a hard disk, it is stored in the first available space. If that space isn't big enough for the whole file, then a bit of the file is stored there and then the next bit is stored in the next location. You can end up with one file split into many different chunks. The computer keeps a record of where each chunk is and when you ask for that file or run that programme the file is put back together as required. Doing this slows things down. Defragmentation puts those files back together into one, so making the machine faster.

Every version of Windows has its own idiosyncracies but what they have in common is that they are forever growing in size. Every upgrade (and most application installations) add things to the Windows directories which are not always deleted when they are finished with. Virtually everything that runs on your computer leaves a trace, even when it is deleted!

One of the main places that those traces get left is in the registry. This is a central reference point for Windows where it collates everything relevant to making your machine and its programmes work. **Checking and cleaning the registry** is good housekeeping, but should not be done manually unless you are an expert. There are a number of programmes which will do this for you.

So, this covers most of the housekeeping tasks. They have to be done and if you have staff to do this they must have time to do it. Some of the tasks (such as defragmentation, which can take hours) can be scheduled, but as a rule heavily used machines should be looked at weekly and general office machines between 1 and 6 monthly. Build this into your staffing, timetabling and core costs.

There is however, one failsafe way to make your machine run at its best year after year. Firstly make sure you have backed up all your data (do you keep a copy off site?), have all your original programme disks and the latest updates and drivers, make sure you have a record of all your logins, favourites and passwords and then reformat your hard disk and reinstall Windows again. Doing this every one to two years improves the performance of any computer!

Finally, if you don't undertake these tasks, you will not suffer... at the beginning! But as time goes by the risks will increase and putting things right can be very costly (especially if there was important data lost). Housekeeping, like eating greens will be good for you in the long run. And if you get stuck, call virtual riders you will find someone who can help to sort you out.