

The ultimate preventive maintenance checklist

What's the support pro of 1999 and beyond to do for preventive maintenance on user machines? Here's a checklist of 29 things you can do to keep your users happy and online.

- 1. E-mail your computer users.** Let your clients know in advance what will be happening on the preventive maintenance visit. Users get attached to their systems, and seeing something change can be upsetting to them. In the e-mail, ask them if anything strange is going on with their system or if they have any questions for you. Often a user may be hesitant to let you know something is wrong, thinking it's no big deal or afraid of having a finger pointed at them for being the problem. One of the most common complaints you'll receive is that the computer is getting slower. More often than not, the user is becoming a power user, becoming more familiar with the software they are using. This may be a good time to upgrade the computer to realize productivity gains from the user.
- 2. Empty the Recycle Bin.** Some users need to be reminded to periodically empty the Recycle Bin.
- 3. Delete .tmp files.** Before running ScanDisk and Defragmenter, delete all *.tmp files that have been created prior to the current day. It will surprise most people to learn how much hard drive space has been used by .tmp files.
- 4. Delete files that begin with a tilde.** When cleaning the system of garbage files, readers might also like to check for any files beginning with a tilde (~). Make sure that all your application programs, such as word-processing, spreadsheet, and graphics programs, are closed first since sometimes the temporary file you are currently viewing uses a tilde. If the application programs are closed, the tilde files can be deleted. Some users find they have a lot of these on their systems!
- 5. Delete old .zip files.** Users tend to unzip the files but then leave the zipped file on their computer.
- 6. Delete .chk files, and switch the swap file.** For those with permanent swap files, it's sometimes a good idea to set the swap file back to temporary and then permanent again. This cleans out any garbage (and therefore any possible corruption).

- 7. Run ScanDisk and defrag the drive as needed.** If your Windows 95 users aren't running these utilities themselves, it doesn't hurt to check the disk and make sure the number of disk errors and the percentage of fragmentation are within acceptable limits. For Windows 98 clients, use the Task Scheduler to automate ScanDisk.
- 8. Check browser history and cache files.** Check that the user history files and Internet cache settings are set properly (cache size). Delete the cache files and history files then reset the history files to no more than three days unless the user specifically needs to store that information longer. By freeing up the cache, downloads from the Web actually speed up since there is more space available to store the temporary files.
- 9. Clean out Windows temporary Internet files.** If the browser is Microsoft's Internet Explorer, clean out the c:\Windows\Temporary Internet files folder.
- 10. Confirm that backups are being done.** Do you have a network solution for automatically backing up user files to a server? If not—and if you're relying on end users to back up their own files—ask users when their last backups were done. Make sure they're rotating their disks. Drag their My Documents folder onto a server drive for them. Remind them to verify the backups by trying to restore a sample file or folder.
- 11. Update drivers as needed.** Make sure you've installed the latest drivers for printers, modems, sound cards, video cards, and other devices.
- 12. Create or update the boot disk.** Every Windows user should have a boot disk and every NT client should have an emergency repair disk. While you're making your rounds, poll your users and make sure they have the disks they'd need in case of an emergency. NT clients need to have their emergency repair disks upgraded with the RDISK/S command every time there's a change in the network setup, such as the addition of new users or new devices.
- 13. Check the operating system and applications.** Update your OS and applications with the latest service packs or updates. Save your company some money; don't try to support multiple versions of the same application.

- 14. Check the connections.** Users love to move their equipment around. Make sure all the plugs are snug in their connections. And make sure your users are using surge protectors and not a string of extension cords to power their machines. While the computer is open, re-seat all connections including expansion cards, CPU, memory, data cables and power connections. You'd be surprised how often an expansion card isn't seated all the way, especially AGP video cards and PCI cards.
- 15. Take inventory.** Update your master inventory of computer assets. Verify serial numbers, CPU speed, hard drive space, memory, etc.
- 16. Make sure the hardware works.** Many computers haven't seen a floppy or CD inserted in years as most upgrades and new installations are done from the server. Clean or replace floppy disk and CD drives as needed.
- 17. Clean the screens.** Do your users a favor and bring the appropriate screen-cleaning cloth or solution with you on the preventive maintenance visit.
- 18. Change passwords.** Unless you can enforce a "change your password every X days" policy via your network software, use the preventive maintenance visit to remind your users to change their system passwords.
- 19. Check the printers.** Print a test page on your users' printers. Make sure the printers are producing clean copies, and that the toner cartridges aren't about to run out.
- 20. Update the anti-virus software.** Make sure your users know how to update their anti-virus software. While you're there, update it for them.
- 21. Reboot the system.** In some shops, the workstations are left on all the time. While you're there, reboot the system to force a memory reset and to make sure the machine will boot when you're not there in person.

- 22. Bring that can of air!** It's still a good idea to blow the dust and debris out of keyboards every now and then. And make sure there isn't dust accumulating on the back of the machine or wherever the air fan is located. It's amazing how much dust can collect in a computer over time. Blowing out the inside of the computer has a couple of pitfalls that must be addressed. First, since the pressure is much higher with canned air, don't direct the air at an unsecured fan. Try using a pencil eraser to keep the fan from turning while you clean out the power supply and CPU. Blow out the power supply from the inside out first, or you'll get tons of dust blown into the computer. Take each computer to a place that doesn't mind the dust, outdoors preferably.
- 23. Clean the keyboard.** With the power off, tip or turn the keyboard upside down and carefully use the palm of your hand to strike the keyboard several times. You'll be surprised how much junk will fall out.
- 24. Clean the CD-ROM drive.** Clean the laser. Many programs are installed corrupted from a dirty CD reader.
- 25. Clean the floppy drive.** In addition to using canned air for the floppy drive, use a 3.5" floppy drive cleaning kit. It consists of a cleaning disk and a bottle of solution that you apply to the disk. First, apply the solution to the cleaning disk. Second, insert the cleaning disk into the floppy drive. Third, type: DIR A: (or DIR B:), which will spin the disk (repeat this three times). In some locations PCs are located in areas where the floppy drive, a.k.a. air intake manifold, collects quite a lot of dust and grime, so canned air alone does not remedy this problem.
- 26. Clean the mouse.** It never hurts to make sure the mouse is free of dust and grime.
- 27. Check the power sources.** Make sure systems are plugged into protected outlets or power strips, if not uninterruptible power supplies.
- 28. Check the fan.** Remember to check that the CPU's cooling fan is working and that the airflow isn't impeded by dust.
- 29. Check the network hardware.** It is also necessary to check and reboot hubs, routers, switches, and print servers from time to time. They contain memory that needs to be flushed and have connections that can work loose. Most networks have a server reboot schedule but forget about the other, just as vital, network kit.

