



# BUG-BYTES

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## COMPUTER FREEZING, OR SHUTTING DOWN PREMATURELY?

That could be a sure sign that your computer needs serious disk cleaning



Periodically I see computers that have just stopped working. For instance, the users tell me that everything was working just fine and then their computer just stopped working. He or she may be able to get their computer started, but then it shutdowns a short time later. In other cases, their computer fails to startup at all, or starts and then freezes. During a freeze, their mouse won't track across the screen.

There are many potential hardware and software reasons why such a sorry state may exist. However, in the cases that I have seen the reasons relate to a crying need for serious hard drive maintenance—getting rid of an accumulation of viruses, adware, and spyware that infect their machines.

These problems are made worse, much worse, if the user's computer has the absolute bare minimum of RAM (random access memory) that is needed for Windows operations, or the user had very little remaining free space on their hard disks for swap file space. Adware, spyware, and unnecessary programs running at startup, may reduce available electronic memory to less than what is needed to operate.

Most users are pretty good about keeping their anti-virus protection up-to-date. However, the same cannot be said for protecting themselves against the ravages of adware, and spyware

which are the cause of many computer freezes and other problems.

That may be because, generally, no single company offers a product that bundles a top-of-the-line anti-spyware product along with their highly recommended anti-virus product—one that automatically scans for spyware and adware pests as well as for viruses and trojans.

Trend Micro is an exception with PC-cillin Internet Security. It scans for viruses, adware, spyware, dialers, joke programs, hack tools, remote access tools, and password cracking applications. It also has an anti-spam tool. PC-Cillin anti-virus and firewall programs are rated as top notch. The anti-spyware module is not rated as highly as some single-solution offerings, but it is still very effective.

A multi-part approach is often needed to remove computer pests. I recommend Spywareblaster™ to inoculate computers against Spyware, SpyBot Search and Destroy™ (S&D) to remove spyware, and Ad-Aware™ Personal to remove adware. They are free tools and are very easy to use.

Viruses are unleashed that can prevent your computer from working. Adware and Spyware (so called Malware) may continuously transmit information about your computing practices, or compromise some of your personal data. In the process, they use memory resources that would otherwise be available for other computing tasks.

I've seen as many as 3,000 pests on a single computer. Once they were all removed, and some other cleanup chores were done, the computers began to work properly again.

If you have such a problem, don't put off fixing it. The longer you wait, the greater is the chance that you will have to reinstall Windows or repair it to get your computer to start at all.

### AUTOMATICALLY SEARCH FOR DRIVERS

LET WINDOWS UPDATE TAKE THE  
LEAD

Software "drivers" are small specialized programs that are written to enable hardware to work with your computer. Drivers interpret commands meant for your printer, disk drive, keyboard, mouse, digital camera and other peripheral equipment.

Each time you install a new piece of equipment, Windows needs to search to see if a driver is available. **Windows XP does an especially good job of searching for and finding drivers using Windows Update.** At other time you will find the driver on a CD provided by the manufacturer of your peripheral product.

You can facilitate Windows finding what it needs by allowing Windows

XP to automatically search Windows Update for the needed driver. To do so, right-click on My Computer, select Properties, Windows Update. Select the first option "If my device needs a driver, go to Windows Update without asking me. That is a good choice if you connect to the Internet via internet cable or DSL. If you have a dial-up connection, then select the second option.

See the September 2005 issue of Bug-Bytes for additional ways to find missing drivers.

Each new version of the operating

system includes a library of drivers that have been tested to work with the operating system. Windows XP includes far more driver support than previous versions of the operating system. This makes finding drivers much easier.

## HAVE FUN WITH YOUR COMPUTER

IT OPENS A NEW WORLD OF OPPORTUNITIES



I believe that new computer users tend to primarily confine their computer efforts to sending and receiving e-mail messages. There is nothing wrong with that. It's a good start as they become comfortable with their computers.

However, in terms of fun and education, there are opportunities galore awaiting them when they are ready to spread their wings and learn new skills.

Let me suggest some topics to explore:

### PLAY GAMES

Windows includes some games with the operating system. Solitaire or Spider Solitaire are two favorites.

You will find them in a game folder if games have been installed (Start, All Programs, Games, Details). In XP, to install games, or to review what is installed, click on Start,

Control Panel, Add/Remove Software, Add Windows Components, Accessories and Utilities. Then click on Games and Details.

Windows XP ships with Freecell, Hearts, Internet Games (Multi-player spades, Backgammon, Checkers, and Reversi), Minesweeper, Solitaire, and Spider Solitaire.

Create a shortcut to the game or games of your choice and put the shortcut on your desktop. That way, your favorite game is just a click away.

An easy way to create a specific shortcut is to locate the game you want to play, right click on the file and select Send To, Desktop. That will put a shortcut on your desktop.

If you have more than one game you want to play, create a folder and put it on your desktop. Then drag the shortcuts into that folder.

To create a folder, right click on an empty space on your desktop. Select New, Folder and give the folder a name. That's all there is to it.

If you don't see a game you like, explore the software shelves of local merchants to see what strikes your fancy.

The game genre also includes many simulation products. Note that these latter programs may require very powerful computers to get the most out of the games. That is because they push the state-of-the-art in graphics to create realistic scenarios. When considering those products, be sure to check the box for the minimum hardware, memory, and software requirements.

### SHARE PHOTOS

Whether you scan photos taken with a film camera or work from photos taken with a digital camera, it is fun to create slideshows and albums of photos that you can share.

Windows XP and ME make sharing especially easy. Right-click on a photo, select Send To, Mail Recipient,

and Windows places the photo or photos in a blank e-mail message. Just add text, a subject, and the recipients e-mail address, and send the message. XP lets you pick a small version of the photo suitable for e-mail use. If the recipient has a dial-up connection the small version loads quickly, and the photo is easily viewed on their monitor.

If you send a full-sized photo, it may be much too large to view easily in e-mail, and it will take 'forever' to download for dial-up users.

### CREATE SPECIAL PROJECTS

You'll find that it is a lot of fun to create your own personal greeting cards, calendars, Thank You cards, guest table-seating cards, posters, photo albums, address labels, and much more.

Check your word processor and photo software to see which projects those products support. Often the projects are listed under File, New.

See the Adobe Photoshop Elements menu (Create tab) to see the kinds of projects it offers.



### CREATE INVENTORIES

Inventory your movies on DVDs or on VHS tapes. This will assist you in

finding the movies you want at a later date.

### DOCUMENT HOME IMPROVEMENTS

Keep records of when and how much you spent for home improvements. Keep your receipts. Such records help establish the adjusted cost-basis for your home, for capital gains purposes, when you sell it.

### DO RESEARCH

Look up facts on the Internet to expand your knowledge about subjects of interest to you. Search via Google or Copernic's One-Click Answers ([www.Answers.com](http://www.Answers.com)), or another search engine of your choice.

Looking for a recipe? You'll find it on the Internet. Looking for a recipe broadcast on the cooking channel? See [www.foodtv.com](http://www.foodtv.com).

How do things work? See <http://www.howstuffworks.com/>

Verify zip codes using the five-number zip code, plus additional four numbers.

See <http://zip4.usps.com/zip4/>. The

you prefer.

For example, in Yahoo, click on the links on the personalization bar show in this screenshot.

How to treat spots and stains? See <http://www.housekeepingchannel.com/showarticle.php?id=182>

## DISPLAY COLUMNS YOUR WAY

TIPS FOR WINDOWS EXPLORER

Customize the way columns display for folders of data based on the contents of the folder or folders.

For instance, in Windows XP, select the column headings that provide information about your photos, or your music files.

Click on View, Choose Details, and check the columns you want displayed for the files in that particular folder. Move the files up or down in the list so they display in the order that works best for you.

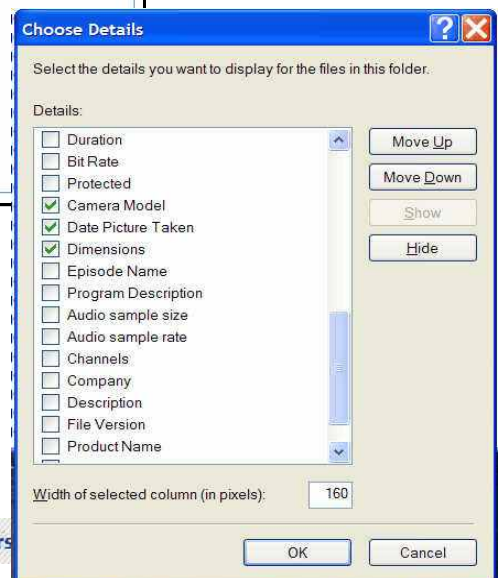
As the type of files in a folder change, you can match what is displayed with the particular data in the folder. You are not stuck with just name, file type, and file size.



following screenshot shows you the Post Office's lookup dialog box. Zip-plus 4 helps your mail get there in a timely fashion.

### CUSTOMIZE YOUR HOME PAGE

See only the headlines and services that interest you, and in the layout that



+ Add Content   Change Layout   Change Colors

## TIME OUT!

### FILE EXTENSIONS EXPLAINED

Are you confused by number and types of file extensions? Then, this information will help you.

File extensions are the three (or sometimes four) letters the follow a filename right after the period. For instance, Wordpad.exe, and photo.jpg are examples of filenames with two different extensions.

Generally, all computer files can be categorized in one of three ways. They are either executable files, helper files, or data files.

**EXECUTABLE FILES** are application files that when you double-click on them cause an application to open. Wordpad.exe is an example of an executable file. Double-clicking on it causes Wordpad to open.

**HELPER FILES** are files that are required by application to make them work, but double-clicking does not cause the associated application to open. Dynamic Link Library (DLL) files are just one example of a helper-type file. Helper files are required by an application to run, or are used by the application once it opens.

**DATA FILES** are the files that contained user or application generated data. For instance, Microsoft Word document files are indicated by the DOC extension. The TXT extension is used for plain text documents.

Windows tells you what kind of file you have selected in Explorer. The

Name	Size	Type
arp.exe	19 KB	Application
asctrls.ocx	112 KB	ActiveX Control
asferorr.dll	8 KB	Application Extension
asfsipc.dll	15 KB	Application Extension
asinst.cfg	1 KB	Microsoft Office Outlook Configuration File
aspperf.dll	10 KB	Application Extension
asr_fmt.exe	30 KB	Application
asr_ldm.exe	32 KB	Application
asr_pfu.exe	32 KB	Application
asycfilt.dll	64 KB	Application Extension
at.exe	25 KB	Application

file type is listed under Type.

In the screenshot above, EXE files are listed as applications, and three helper file are shown— a DLL file is listed as an application extension, an OCX file is listed as an ActiveX control, and a CFG file is listed as an Microsoft Office Configuration file.

For those that are curious, Windows shows an icon before executable files that looks like a white box with a blue banner across the top. Look again at the screenshot.

Take heart. All you really need to know is that executable and helper files are written in machine language. They are not files that you can view. You can't understand them, but the computer can.

That leaves us with data files. One way of thinking about data files is that they are containers for specific kinds of data. For instance, word processors such as Microsoft Word and WordPerfect created heavily formatted documents. Each of those applications have sets of features that are not found in the competing product. Word stores its data in DOC files and WordPerfect stores its data in WPD files.

Usually, but not always, Windows associates the program that created the data file with the application that created it. Therefore, when you double-click on the file, it opens that application that can read the file.

For instance bitmap files (BMP) are opened by Windows Paint application, and GIF files (graphic file), JPG, (photo), MP3, WAV, and MIDI (sound), MOV and ANI files (movie) are opened by applications that can create and edit those types of files.

There are so many different data files because there many dif-

ferent proprietary applications, each competing to add features and options not provided their rivals.

Some applications can open or convert the files of their rivals. However, such conversions are usually imperfect.

### GET INFORMATION ABOUT SPECIFIC FILE EXTENSIONS

From time to time someone may send you a data file that you can't open. Consult <http://filext.com/> to learn which application opens that extension, and what it does.

### TO DISPLAY EXTENSIONS

By default, Windows suppresses the display of extensions. That is because it confuses some users. If you want to display extensions as part of the filename, do the following.

Click on My Computer

Click on Tools

Select Folder Options

Remove the checkmark for "Hide extensions for known file types."

Click OK

See the screenshot below.

