

BUG-BYTES

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UNDERSTANDING FILE EXTENSIONS

THE STORY BEHIND DATA FILE EXTENSIONS

I am sure that new users are confused about the purpose of the many different types of file that reside on their computer. This confusion is compounded when they see an error message that says a particular file won't open and offering to search for a program that will do the job.

Simplistically, the files on a computer fall into two major categories. They are program related files and data files and program files. Program related files are required to open programs and to execute the instructions written in the program code. Data files contain the final product of the particular program saved in the proprietary format of the software writer.

Each vendor tries to distinguish their product by including features that are unique to their software—features that they hope you will prefer to those offered by their competitors. Using automotive comparisons, you would not expect to be able to install GM parts on a Ford or Chrysler automobile. So, too, you may not be able to directly open a particular sound file or movie clip unless you have a copy of the program that produced the file or a reader for it.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHICH PROGRAM PRODUCED A PARTICULAR FILE?

Don't despair. Over time you will begin to recognize certain file extensions--those three or four letters at the end of a filename followed by a period, i.e. filename.xxx or filename.xxxx where xxx or xxxx represents the file extension. When you come across a file extension that you don't know, use the following web site to tell you which program or programs are associated with that extension.

<http://filext.com/>
<http://www.learnthenet.com/english/html/34filext.htm>

The need for this information arises when someone sends you a file of a type you can't open. Look at the file extension of the file and then see which program or programs open that file type. In many instances, you can download a free copy of a program that will read that particular file. The files that users send you will tend to be audio, movies,

graphics, and word processing documents. Here is a short list of some of the more popular file extensions and the programs that will open them.

EXTENSION	NAME	PROGRAMS
AVI	Audio Video Interleave	Windows Media Player Apple Quick Time Real Player
MP3	MPEG Audio	Itunes, Windows Media Player WinAmp
MPEG	Moving Pictures Expert Group	Irfanview, Windows Media Player, RealPlayer
PPS	Powerpoint Slideshow	Microsoft Powerpoint
PDF	Portable Document Format	Adobe Reader
DOC	Document	MS Word
RTF	Rich Text Format	MS Word
WPD	WordPerfect Document	WordPerfect
XLS	Excel	MS Excel spreadsheet

Word processing programs such as MS Word and WordPerfect will attempt to open and translate documents written by their competitor's products. However, the translations are never quite as good as the original documents, because they lack the special features written into the document, or they only support very old versions of their competitors products.

DOCUMENT CONVERSION

Irfanview does a good job of converting many file formats from one format to another. It is free. You may be able to convert a file that you can't open into one that you can open.

<http://www.irfanview.com/>

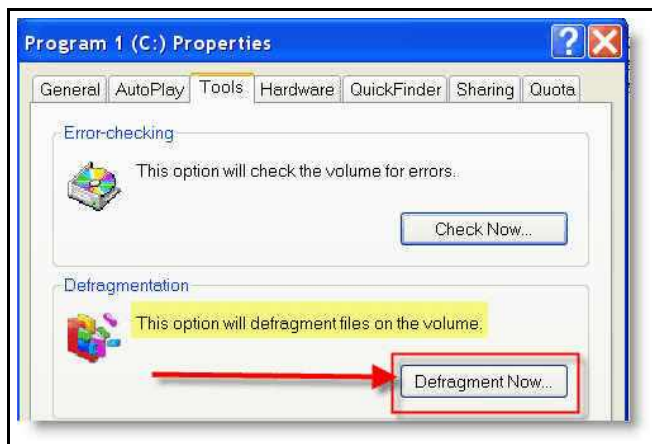
BENCHMARK YOUR COMPUTER



COMPARE FUTURE TESTS TO YOUR BENCHMARK

Test your computer to establish a reference point for future tests. That way, you will know whether or not steps you take to improve performance were effective.

Before you test your computer, delete your Internet cache (IE, Tools, Internet Options, Delete Files (Temporary internet files)). It is a good idea to also defragment your computer (Open My Computer, select your main drive, right-click on it, Properties, Tools, Defragmentation). These steps will help you start with a clean slate. You may also want to clean your computer of spyware and adware.



Go to www.pcpitstop.com, register, and run the *full test* on your computer. Follow the instructions on the screen.

When the test completes, click on the link for *how your system compares* with computers similar to yours. This will tell you how well your computer compares with those computers in PCPitstop's database. The score is expressed as a percentile. For instance, if you score 60%, that says 40% of all computers similar to yours scored better than your score and 60% had worse scores. 100% is normal. The number of computers included in their test database is shown for your reference.

HOW DOES THAT HELP YOU

Problems are identified by the free software, and steps are suggest on how to fix those problems.

If your percentile score is low, follow the steps shown to correct any problems shown by the test. Then retest to see what effect those suggestions had on your test score. As pointed out by PCPitstop, the absolute score is not impor-

tant. What is important is how peppy your computer seems and whether or not it is stable.

A low score compared to similar systems indicates that you are not getting the performance for which you paid. Fixing the indicated problems should enable you to maximize your computer's performance.

If your computer has too little memory, the vendor may suggest that you increase your memory. If you need additional memory, it is usually very inexpensive, unless your computer is very old and the memory is hard to find.

In many cases, tweaking a setting or two may be all you need to do to boast performance. PCPitstop includes some auto-fixes that will change the settings for you.

Give it a try. I think you will like what it can do for you.

Retest from time to time to ensure to keep your computer running at its best.

The following screen shot shows the tests and scans that are offered by the vendor.



First, I suggest that you run the Full Tests to see how thorough the tests are. The full tests cover your CPU, memory, disks, video, Internet, Windows, Security, and provide a link to comparisons.

The software identifies the programs that were running during the test and shows you which programs were optional, required, or for which they have no data. They also identify viruses, and spyware/adware in a the separate page of test details.

If you do not have Windows XP, you will note there is a link to an XP Readiness test. PCPitstop will have to update their menu soon to include a *Vista* update test. *Vista* is Microsoft's newest operating system. The consumer version is expected to ship in January 2007. However, that date could slip.

If you add or remove hardware from your system, retest. By retesting, you will know what if any effects those changes had on your computer.





PLAN YOUR NEXT VACATION

YOUR COMPUTER CAN HELP IN THE PLANNING

Your computer can be a great travel planning tool. Use it to explore alternative travel routes, to map your route of travel, to make hotel or motel reservations, and to find information on attractions at your destination or along the way. Rent a car.

If you plan to fly or to take a boat trip, compare schedules and prices.

You may find these links interesting and helpful.

MAPS

www.mapquest.com, or www.maps.google.com for detailed maps including directions on how to reach your destination. Use Google's satellite view to see details that may not show up in older maps.

<http://www.microsoft.com/streets/default.msp>, link to *Microsoft Streets and Trips* software with or without a GPS locator.

<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1759,1640419,00.asp>. Review the 2005 version of MS Streets and Trips

TRAVEL

<http://www.expedia.com>, travel deals

<http://farechase.yahoo.com>, travel deals

<http://www.orbitz.com>, travel deals

<http://travel.priceline.com/default.asp?rdr=2>, travel deals

BED AND BREAKFAST

<http://www.obbg.org>, Oregon Bed and Breakfast Guild

<http://www.bbexplorer.com>, Bed and Breakfast opportunities in US and Canada

NATIONAL FOREST RESERVATIONS

http://gorp.away.com/gorp/resource/us_national_forest/main.htm, US National Forests

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE LOCATOR

<http://www.chamberofcommerce.com/chamberofcommerce/index.cfm?>, Chamber of Commerce locator

RENTAL CARS

<http://www.avis.com/AvisWeb/home/AvisHome>, car rental

<http://www.hertz.com>, car rental

<http://www.nationalcar.com>, car rental

SIGHTSEEING BUS TOURS

<http://www.grayline.com>. Tour wherever you go

STEAMBOAT TOURS

http://rivers.affordabletours.com/American_West_Steamboat/ship.html, tour Alaska or Columbia, Willamette, or Snake River.

STAY AT HOME AND TAKE AN ARMCHAIR TOUR TO EXOTIC PLACES

<http://www.taj-mahal.net>, 360 degree virtual tour of the Taj Mahal

<http://www.ushistory.org/march/index.html>, virtual tour of American Revolution

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/whtour>, virtual tour of White House (Requires Real Player for viewing)

<http://www.californiamissions.com>, historical view of California missions

VIEW PHOTOS OF YOUR FAVORITE PLACES

Search for the images of your choice.



COVERED BRIDGES OF OREGON



HECETA HEAD LIGHTHOUSE, OREGON



OREGON ROAD CAMS

<http://www.tripcheck.com>

Travel safely! We need all of our Computerbugs.

SOFTWARE REVIEW - STARTUP INSPECTOR



Minimize startup programs

Only a small fraction of programs need to automatically load during your computers startup. Nevertheless, software vendors routinely add their programs to the startup list without your concurrence. The result is slower than normal startup and a serious drain on your available memory. Compounding the problem, different methods are used to start the programs. How can you make heads or tails out of that mess?

The free program, *Startup Inspector for Windows* can help you decide which programs are necessary, which are optional, and which are not recommended.

www.windowstartup.com

This screen shot shows you the kinds of data you see when you open the program. It looks in all of the places such data is stored and shows you what is loaded at startup, and what programs are included in the list of programs that could be loaded at startup.

Name	Filename	Startup Location	Rating
<input type="checkbox"/> Express Assist Ch	"C:\Program Files\Express Assist\EA2Check.exe"	CU Startup Folder	?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Logitech Hardware	KHALMNP.R.EXE	LM Run	!
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Matador	"C:\PROGRAM~1\MAILFR~1\mantisp.m.exe" -quiet	CU Run	?
<input type="checkbox"/> BluetoothAuthentic	rundll32.exe bthprops.cpl,BluetoothAuthenticationAgent	LM Run	?
<input type="checkbox"/> MSConfig	C:\WINDOWS\PCHealth\HelpCtr\Binaries\MSConfig.ex	LM Run	!
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ashampoo PopUp	C:\PROGRAM~1\Ashampoo\ASHAMP~1\PopUpKiller.ex	CU Run	✓
<input type="checkbox"/> Logitech BT Wizar	LBTWiz.exe -silent	LM Run	!
<input type="checkbox"/> NvCplDaemon	RUNDLL32.EXE C:\WINDOWS\system32\NvCpl.dll,NvS	LM Run	?
<input type="checkbox"/> SunJavaUpdateS	C:\Program Files\Java\jre1.5.0_06\bin\jusched.exe	LM Run	✓
<input type="checkbox"/> SoundMan	SOUNDMAN.EXE	LM Run	?
<input type="checkbox"/> Easy Synchroniza	C:\Program Files\Logitech\Easy Synchronization\Logite	LM Run Once	?

Rating Legend

- Unknown
- Not Recommended
- Not Required
- User's Choice
- System Required

While connected to the Internet, click on the Consult tab. The program checks its database and rates each item in the list. The program uses a series of symbols to show whether or not each program is needed, and where avail-

able, they provide additional information to the right of the rating symbols. Based upon that information, you check or uncheck each line based on their recommendations.

You then click the Apply button and exit the program. Restart your computer for the changes to take place. Then, use your computer for a while. If something doesn't work the way you want it to, reopen Startup Inspector and reenable the program that relates to service.

In this example, I allow only three programs to open at startup. KHALMNP.R.EXE relates to my bluetooth wireless keyboard and mouse and ensures that those devices startup properly as the computer starts. Matador is the program name for the file that opens my MailFrontier spam filter, and Ashampoo is my pop-up blocker. My antivirus program starts automatically through another mechanism.

What you should notice here is that the potential startup list is huge, and also unnecessary, and you are seeing only part of the list. The full list extends beyond the screen shot. The program does not have some information.

I recommend that Windows XP Press Ctrl-Alt-Delete. Note how much memory is available before you use the program. Compare the numbers after you uncheck unneeded and not recommended items. I believe you will find that the change is significant. Also, time how long it takes for your computer to start. Compare the number after

pruning unnecessary programs from the startup routine.

Click the More Tasks buttons for a link to the online database, and to reach the vendor's website.

Advanced users can use the *Mscconfig* program bundled with Windows. While you can make changes there, you don't get any feedback on which programs are required by the system,

etc.

Remember, you can easily reverse any decision you make. For instance, if your third-party spam blocking program, or third party popup blocker stopped working, just reenable those programs. (Highlight the applicable lines with your cursor, and press the spacebar to make the checkmarks show up or go away. Click Apply.

Notice on the left of the screen. It shows the many different places where programs might load, including the startup folder, and that both the current user, and other users may be affected. Happy hunting!