

Radio Days – 2013-06-22

Tip of the Week – Hard Disc Maintenance

During the week I had a panic call from a new client who had discovered that his computer would not work properly. It was all too much for him! My first reaction was that it was a power problem so I did the standard thing: switch the computer off, remove the power cord for a minute then replace the power cord and try to start the computer again.

This did not work so on to the next step.

Chkdsk

It appeared to be a problem with his hard disc so I used the Windows' inbuilt error-checking program *Chkdsk*. This program is part of Windows and is easy to run. One way to run this program is to click on the *Start* button then select *Computer* then select your hard disc drive. Once you have selected your hard disc you then right-click on the drive and select *Properties*. This will bring up a dialogue box with a number of tabs: click on *Tools* then on *Check Now*.

Another, easier, way is to run *Chkdsk* is to first run *Defraggler*. This program has a number of functions: one of them is to act as a front-end for *Chkdsk*. From the *Defraggler* menu bar select *Action » Advanced » Check Drive for Errors*. This will run *Chkdsk* and let you know if there are errors on your hard disc. If there are it will give you the chance to repair them at your next restart.

If you do find errors then the best thing is to run a restart repair immediately. You will be asked if you want to run a repair at the next restart: select *Yes*. Then close all programs and restart your computer. You will see an unusual screen: just allow the restart repair to complete normally without pressing a key. Once your computer has restarted run *Defraggler* immediately then *Check Drive for Errors* again. I hope that your drive will now be clear of errors: if not please repeat this error-clearing process up to six times.

If, after the sixth repeat, your drive still has errors then it is imperative that you take your computer to a competent repair shop and get the people there to check your drive with better tools.

You may need to replace your hard disc.

Backup!

Standard practice is to ensure that you have a complete backup of all your important data before you take your computer to a repair shop. There are too many horror stories of repair shops removing all the data from a hard disc while they have a computer to work on.

The best story that I heard was that of an owner who took her computer to a technician to replace a dead CD drive then, when her computer was returned, found that Windows and her data had been removed. There was nothing on the hard disc so I wondered if the hard disc had been replaced as well as the CD drive.

I will never know!

Take The Easier Path

For some people, learning a new skill is more than they can bear to contemplate. If you are one of these people please turn off now because I am talking about the benefits of doing just that! I have found, over the years that I have been teaching people how to use computers more effectively, that the best way to get more done in the same length of time is to learn new skills. This whole section is about the things that you can achieve.

Saving Time

My first example is of a friend who was up against a deadline late one Friday night. She had to send out a number of letters to all the members of each of four groups, inviting them to a meeting in two weeks' time. For each of these groups there was a separate letter, and all the members of each group were invited to meetings at regular intervals. For example, members of the Board were invited to many meetings: there were Board meetings each month as well as social meetings each quarter.

This was in the olden days (the mid-1980s) when DOS was king and MultiMate was the preferred word processor. Microsoft was only making DOS, Windows may have been in somebody's dream world and Word had not even been thought of. This, of course, makes it long before many people were even born!

Even in those long-ago days MultiMate could do mail merges. This was an obvious time to use mail merge: there were four letters to be sent, and each letter had a number of people who had to receive that letter. I could have done the job in just a few minutes, and my friend, who was by now just about at the edge of going insane, could have used the break.

Perhaps this sort of time is not the best time to try to teach somebody but I could see that she was making lots of mistakes. As she was not receptive to the idea of a new skill at that time I left her to her own devices and waited until we could go to dinner and unwind.

Some days later, when her stress levels were lower, I again suggested that I show her how to do mail merge so that next time she had to write all these letters she could let the computer do the typing. Unfortunately she decided that it was better to be stressed out of her mind every time that she had to write these letters.

Keep In Style

A recent client was writing the Great Australian Novel. Like so many writers she was using Word as her word processor. She had discovered websites which would print a short run of her book and she had had five copies printed this way. While she liked seeing her work in print she was in despair because her pages did not have the required neat look that a professionally-produced book had.

However, her pages left much to be desired because the layout was not consistent across pages. I asked her if she was using styles, and she asked me what I meant. I explained that Word had a feature called *Styles* which made keeping a consistent look throughout the whole document very easy. She asked me to show her how this worked.

We went to her original document and I showed her that she had pressed *Enter* twice between paragraphs then made the second, invisible, paragraph smaller to give a neat touch to the page. Sometimes resizing this second paragraph had been done differently or not at all, and the look was not consistent across her pages. I showed her how to add some spacing at the end of her paragraphs automatically. I was then able to show her how to change all double paragraphs to a single paragraph. She was delighted with the result.

I was also able to show her how to use styles to make her chapter headings all the same. Her book had differences in the way each chapter's heading looked: the space down the page was different, the font was slightly different and some were aligned to the right and some aligned to the left. Using styles I was able to show her how to get them all the same. One feature of Word styles is the ability to make a new page before all text of a certain style: chapter headings for example.

Then, as the finishing touch, I was able to show her how her table of contents was able to be created from the styles without any errors, and that all she had to do was press one function key for the table of contents to be recreated after she had made a change. I left behind a happy client who still had some work to do getting her styles correct.

When I saw her next printing she had a massive smile on her face as the book appeared to be up to professional standards.

Are you using styles to their fullest extent possible?

Learn The Concepts Behind The Skill

I have spent time over the last few months helping a client use QuickBooks more effectively. Because the skills needed for QuickBooks are so different from his earlier skills he is having great difficulty in coming to grips with the concepts needed to be a good bookkeeper. For this reason I have suggested that he go to TAFE to learn the basics of bookkeeping to form a solid foundation for learning how to use QuickBooks rather than attempting to learn from a base built on sand. The old proverb states that you need a solid foundation if your work is to be lasting.

There are many good courses on bookkeeping, and I suggested to him that he do one of them so that he understands what is behind why I ask him to do each of them.

There were a number of problems which I had to fix. One was that he entered a transaction again if it appeared on the bank statement but he could not see it on the screen. This meant that, according to QuickBooks, many customers had paid their invoices twice. Another problem was that he checked off a transaction with the amount shown on the bank statement even if it was the wrong transaction. Also, sometimes the bank account was in credit and sometimes it was overdrawn: because he did not put a minus sign in the closing balance when his employer's bank account was in overdraft the reconciliation did not balance so he used QuickBooks' ability to enter a balancing transaction to make the reconciliation balance.

All of these errors meant that all his reconciliations had to be reversed and re-done to get correct results. This was not helped by a missing bank statement. All in all, this was a recipe for disaster.

Please ensure that you know what to do if you are a bookkeeper, or that your bookkeeper knows what to do if you are a business owner.

Further Information

Defraggler www.piriform.com