

## What Is Wrong With My Computer?

As your Technology Solutions provider, BlairIT is always here for you. Our clients can contact us for support through LogIT! or by phone. Before you do either, you may want to do a little trouble shooting on your own which could save you time and service hour charges.

It may seem like a daunting task at first, but by following the basic steps, you may be able to figure out what's wrong with your computer. If you feel you are over your head, or are afraid you will do more damage than good, please feel free to give us a call at 614.898.9925.

## Before You Start Troubleshooting...

### Look for the Obvious

Before you call for help, always check the cables to your computer. A loose network cable stops your Internet connection. An unplugged mouse may make the computer freeze. Double check the power cable to be sure there is power to your computer, printer and all accessories. It may sound silly, but you'd be surprised at how often cords and lines get disconnected.

### It's All Locked Up

There are dozens of reasons why a computer locks up. Problems with the programs, the order in which software packages or updates have been installed, even static electricity can cause havoc with your machine. Your computer may freeze or send an "Out of Memory" error message. Exit Windows if you can, power down the system and restart your computer. Restarting the computer clears the memory and often solves the problem.

### Diagnosis and Recovery

A good diagnosis is key to efficiently correcting your computer problems, so your experiences are important to us. For instance, if the browser crashes every time to go to a specific website, you'll want to give us that site address. If you consistently receive an error message, jot that down. (A nice way to grab error messages is by holding down the ALT key, then hit PRT SCRN - nothing will happen, but if the error message window is on top Windows will copy that message to the Clipboard, then you can go to Word and PASTE the image and not have to type anything). It's also a good idea to check with other system users to see if they are experiencing the same errors.

### What's New and Different

Sometimes newly installed software packages can trigger computer failures, so you'll want to check that out. If someone else has been working at your computer you'll want to make sure they haven't reset defaults or made other changes that effect your work.

### Try to Isolate the Problem

If possible, try to narrow down the type of problem or failure you are experiencing. Is it a hardware problem or is software not functioning correctly? Could it be a bad mouse? Maybe human error? Are others in your office having similar issues? Can you hear any strange noises coming from either the computer or the monitor?

*Some users might get offended when I ask what seems like stupid questions. Things like, "are you sure you didn't turn the computer off accidentally?" A good friend of mine has her computer on the floor. She had a habit of lightly tapping the computer case with her feet. Once in a while, her foot would tap the reset button. The seemingly random reboots were actually discovered by scuffmarks on the computer case.*

## Troubleshooting 101

### How will I know if it is hardware related?

Typically, when hardware does fail it is either within the first couple of months of installation or as it ages, 2 or 3 years after installation. In our experience, the power supply fails the most, then the motherboard, and then the hard drive.

To determine a hardware failure, and which piece of the system is failing, takes a little experimentation and testing. The best way to determine hardware related problems is to replace it with hardware known to be working. For example, if there is no image on your monitor, connect to another monitor. If the mouse is sticking, try another one. When that doesn't work, call us.

Other times there are indicator lights to help you diagnose the problem. If you suspect the network card is bad, look for lights on the computer where the network jack is. If they light up and go off, try replacing the cable. If the keyboard lights don't light up and you know the keyboard is plugged in, then the keyboard may be bad. If the computer seems to be extremely slow, look for a light that indicates the hard drive is working. If it is, then there likely is some program running that's using all your horsepower; shut down that program and see if you gain operating speed. If speed does not improve, it might be a problem with the hard drive. If you hear odd noises coming out of your computer, you should contact us immediately, before it dies!

### How will I know if it is Software related?

If your computer suddenly became very slow, and you know you have plenty of memory, then you may have a spyware or a virus on your computer. Besides viruses and spyware, there are often compatibility problems between the software and hardware companies. This usually occurs right after you installed a new application, update, patch or new peripheral. Updating the latest service packs, patches, and new drivers usually will fix the compatibility problems. Go to the manufacturer's website to determine if your hardware drivers need an update and follow their instructions.

*Windows XP and Vista come with a "light" firewall, only protecting incoming traffic. If you are the patient type, there are several stronger firewalls available that provide serious protection for the traffic going into and out of your network card. The patience will come in handy when it asks over and over if this or that network task is "OK" or not.*

### So, how can I protect myself from Virus, Worms, Spyware, and Phishing?

For starters, install antivirus software and a "firewall." Typically these run all the time to actively protect your system. Next, install a couple of anti-spyware programs (we like AdAware and Spybot), which run only on demand. How often you run these programs depends on how you use the computer. For example, if you need to download information and files on a regular, frequent basis, then you probably need to run them weekly. (If you have teenagers using your home computer, seriously consider running anti-spyware programs often!) Regular maintenance is very important; install patches and anti-virus updates consistently to help protect against viruses. And lastly, when purchasing products or services online, be sure they are from reputable companies. Be cautious about clicking the pop-up offers, e-mail links, or installing software or add-ons from unknown sources. A common tactic for infecting computer systems is to offer a free video. To view it you need to install another gift, the free viewer. Unfortunately, the "viewer" includes spyware that opens the door to other spyware, and your computer has been infected.

### How will I know if my computer has been infected?

There are definite symptoms that will help you diagnose a computer virus.

- Is your computer running more slowly than usual?
- When you use a search engine, do the results seem to be from an unknown site, rather than Google or Yahoo? Often they seem to be just advertisers and not search results.
- Does your computer freeze or restart frequently, even during simple operations, like trying to open a Word document?
- Are there new program icons on your screen which you don't remember downloading them?

Answering "YES" to one or more of these statements means chances are good your computer has been infected.

## Troubleshooting 101 (continued)

### How Can I Clean Up My Computer Once I'm Infected?

Well, it depends. In most cases, you can run your favorite antivirus software and anti-spyware to clean up your computer. You may need to do this from Safe Mode (if you don't know what that is, you may want to call BlairIT for help). But in more serious cases, you may need to reformat your hard drive and reinstall your operating system. If you do need to reformat, your data will most likely be lost; regularly back up all critical files to protect your data.

### What Is A Computer Virus?

A computer virus is a malicious program that, when triggered, can erase files on your computer, insert its own text in your documents, and can replicate itself to other computers in your e-mail list. Both viruses and worms can open your computer to additional viruses and worms, potentially resulting in dozens, even hundreds of infections.

### What Is A Computer Worm?

A computer worm is a malicious program that replicates itself to all the computers on the network. Unlike viruses, worms do not need a host program to infect a network. They can launch an automated attack on a company's web site and spread throughout the company network.

### What Is A Spyware?

A spyware program disguises itself as useful software, but in reality, collects and sells the usage statistics to advertisers or hackers. Spyware programs can actually take control of a computer by downloading additional unwanted programs and interfering with browser activity.

### What Is Phishing?

Phishing is a method of scamming via e-mail or web sites. Phishers impersonate well-known organizations to lure people into buying phony products or donating money to "worthy" causes. The Internet is filled with phishing...buyer beware!

## Common Printer Problems

### Printer Does Not Print

Double-check all cords and cables to be sure the printer is getting power. Press the on or power button and check for error messages, like "insert paper."

### The Power Light Is On But Nothing Prints

The printer driver may still be preparing the data for the printer. Wait a few minutes for the printer to respond. Some printers have no CPU or memory of their own, so it can take longer for the data to be received. It is possible that the printer is not properly connected to the computer. Check to see if the printer cable is fully plugged into the back of the computer and fully connected to the printer.

The printer driver may have been corrupted or is not installed. Try restarting Windows, deleting any pending print jobs, and send the document again. If no printer is listed in the Printers folder (found by clicking Start, Printers and Faxes), the print software needs to be reinstalled.

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## Common Printer Problems (continued)

### Printer Output Has Lines Or Dots Missing

The most common cause for lines or "dots" missing from text is a clogged print cartridge. For ink jet printers, the copper contacts on the back of the print cartridge may be dirty. Remove the cartridge from the printer. With a damp cloth, clean the contacts on the back of the cartridge and on the print cartridge "cradle" in the printer. Reinstall the cartridge, close the top cover, and reprint the document.

If the printer has been sitting for a while unused, the ink may have dried up in the cartridge. Often times you can put some water in the sink, then put the bottom of the ink cartridge in the water and swish it back and forth, this should loosen up the ink. Then take a paper towel and dab the printer head dry. Also check the bottom for a piece of packing tape, as this happens quite a bit when installing a new printer cartridge.

### The Printer Will Not Load Paper

This problem is usually the result of too much paper in the paper in tray. Remove a few sheets of paper and try again.

The paper may not be pressed against the paper feeder. Push the paper towards the printer until it presses against the paper feeder, then adjust the printers "guides" so that everything is tight.

The printer is "smart" and is expecting a different paper size (like 8.5x14) but it has 8.5x11. There should be a message displayed on the front of the printer or through the software telling you this.

## Other Miscellaneous Problems

### No Sound Comes Out Of The Speakers

There are several reasons why you may not hear sound from your computer speakers. Fortunately, they are easy to fix.

First, make sure the speakers are not turned off and check all cables and connections to be sure the speakers are plugged in properly. If they are, replace any batteries and check the volume on the speakers themselves.

Next, double-click on the speaker button on the right-hand side of the computer task bar to check the Volume Control; if them mute icon has been highlight, click to unmute. You may also want to check that all the sources of sound (MIDI, WAV, Etc.) are not turned way down or muted.

If you still have no sound, plug headphones into the green jack on the back of the computer. If you have sound the problem is definitely the speakers; no sound would indicate the problems is not the speakers.

### Computer Won't Turn On

Some computers have an extra power switch on the top rear side of the case. If you have one, make sure the top side (with a small circle drawn on it) is flipped outward.

Pay attention to any odd smells. A burnt electricity smell can indicate a burned out Power Supply. Try not to panic! Often people think they have lost all their data since the computer is unresponsive. Replacing a Power Supply is an easy fix, and everything works fine afterward.

### Mouse Problems

If the mouse will not work at all, check and be certain that the mouse and keyboard are plugged into their own ports (Green=Mouse, Purple=Keyboard). A mouse that sticks or is jerky can be caused by a number of things. Remove the trackball from the bottom of the mouse and clean the small metal contacts in the chamber; wash the ball with normal soap and water. If you have an optical mouse, make sure you are using it on a smooth surface - rough tables or desktops may not work, and glass surfaces don't reflect the laser beam well. If you have a wireless mouse, replace the batteries and re-connect to the base station.