

5 Most Common Computer Problems Affecting Business Owners Today and What To Do about Them

**Prepared by
Computer Troubleshooters**

Local Service - Global Strength Guaranteed!

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Introduction

Computer Troubleshooters specializes in providing a full range of onsite computer services for small and home-based businesses. Just like your car, your computer should be getting proper, regular maintenance service to prevent it from crashing, locking up, catching a viruses and keep running smoothly.

The types of services and support that Computer Troubleshooters provides to small business includes (but is not limited to):

- Hardware troubleshooting
- Software troubleshooting
- Internet/Email Setup and Assistance
- Networking (cable & wireless)
- Server installation & upgrade
- Application Setup and Support
- Regular Computer Maintenance
- Website Design
- Virus Protection and Removal
- Internet Security Troubleshooting
- Remote Access and Diagnostics
- Service Plans
- Hardware and Software Purchase & Installation

Ranked by Entrepreneur magazine as the #1 Tech Support Franchise worldwide!

While a reliable up-to-date technology platform is essential to the success of businesses everywhere, most businesses tend to experience a number of common problems.

From our combined 20 years + experiences as computer technicians, we have identified 5 common problems that businesses experience with their computer systems and networks. Regardless of the size of your business and computer network, if you understand and avoid the following problems you will likely experience a reliable, risk-manged, trouble free technology platform that will support your overall business objectives.

So here goes....

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Common Problem

Computer Security... Computer Running Slow?

#1

It Was Great When I Bought It But Now...

Once upon a time, your computer was brand new. It started up perfectly, ran without errors and it had never even seen the internet. However, over time things started to slow down. As you visited websites and installed software, something had a negative effect on your computer's performance. These problems can be cleaned up but what happens when you get your computer back again? Is it just a matter of time before another service is needed?

Fortunately there are some things that you can do. Below are the top five Tips for speeding up your computer:

1. Use a 'firewall': A firewall allows you to prevent access from the internet to certain areas of your computer. This increases your level of security and makes it harder for 'hackers' to get to your information. Firewall protection is provided by special software on your computer, or your network hardware (e.g., your broadband internet modem may have a firewall built in). A firewall is essential for anyone with high speed internet access. If you have the Microsoft XP operating system then the firewall is included in the latest Service Pack (SP2). Since this comes at no extra cost it is recommended to use this firewall. Firewalls may also be included with bundled security software such as those available from Norton or Trend Micro
2. Use up-to-date anti-virus software that works: Anti-virus software is essential for any computer that reads information from another source (including emails, websites and files on USB sticks). To be effective, your anti-virus software must be working and it must be updated with the latest information from the manufacturer – they regularly send out updates telling your system what new viruses to look out for. Check with your anti-virus software maker, as you may need to pay a subscription fee to entitle you to the updates
3. Use anti-spyware/anti-adware software: Spyware and adware programs will slow down your computer, running 'in the background' without your knowledge and they will not be picked up by your anti-virus software. Anti-spyware/anti-adware software must also be kept up to date, but those scans do not examine each file as it is used on your computer. Run your anti-spyware and anti-adware scans on a regular basis, and see if you can schedule them to start automatically at a certain time each day.

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4. Apply new 'Windows Updates': As it becomes aware of them, Microsoft releases updates and patches to fix security problems. Find the 'Windows Update' icon or visit <http://update.microsoft.com> to check if there are any new updates that your computer needs. If you have Windows XP with Service Pack 2, this can be automated in 'Control Panel' – 'Security Center'. It is also strongly recommended to select the "automatic update" option if you have broadband access.

Common Problem

Computer Maintenance... additional reasons why your computer is running slow

#1b

Modern computers are nice and quiet when you first buy them, but over time, they may start to become noisy for no apparent reason. Often the problem is that computers collect dust through their fans, and over time those fans become clogged. This can make the fans very noisy, resulting in a decrease in performance and, in bad cases, cause the PC to just "turn itself off." To fix this problem, you would need to clean out the inside of your computer. It is recommended that a professional does this so that you do not run the risk of damaging your PC.

Over time, the startup of your PC will gradually decrease in speed. This is perfectly normal, but there are some measures you can take to try and keep your PC booting as fast as possible. When you install programs, quite often they will set themselves to start every time the computer is switched on, sometimes without you noticing. This can considerably slow your computer's start up, but there is special software which can be used to reduce the number of operations running when you power up your PC.

The speed of your PC can also decrease over time. This is usually due to your files becoming fragmented and also because of the way your computer creates temporary files. A solution to this is to regularly defrag your PC, which will sort your files into a structured order enabling the computer to load faster. Also, regularly, perhaps once a week, clean up your temporary files and adware to keep your computer running at optimum speed.

All of this may seem to be a lot for the average business or home user to do (which is why it often gets left undone). Computer Troubleshooters can create a regular maintenance plan for your business, or we can take all your worries away by scheduling a regular short maintenance visit to work on each of your PCs (and don't forget your printers) to ensure they are running as good as the day you bought them.

Here are an additional five tips for looking after your computer:

1. Cleanup your disk: As you perform tasks on your computer (like browsing the internet), a trail of 'temporary' files are left

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behind, so your computer can access your information faster the second time around. Unfortunately, these are often not cleaned up again and the pile of temporary files grows bigger, taking up valuable space on your hard disk. The easy way to delete these (without deleting something important by mistake) is with Microsoft's Disk Cleanup program. In Windows XP you can find it under Start > All Programs > Accessories > System Tools > Disk Cleanup. We recommend you run this once a month.

2. Defragment your disk: How does your paper filing cabinet look? Is everything logically stored and labeled, or it is messy, with documents stuffed in wherever you could find room? You'd agree that it's much quicker to retrieve documents from a tidy filing cabinet. The physical storage of files on your computer can get messy too, slowing down the time it takes to open them. Microsoft's Disk Defragmenter program literally tidies up the 'fragments' of your files, much like tidying your filing cabinet. In Windows XP you can find it under Start > All Programs > Accessories > System Tools > Disk Defragmenter. We recommend you run this once a month too, after your Disk Cleanup.
3. Remove & prevent dust: A serious, hidden danger lurks in the room with your computer – dust. Just like a blanket, even a thin layer of dust inside your computer causes heat to build up which can cause permanent damage to your computer's vital internal components.

Do not place your computer directly onto carpet - it will suck up carpet fibres and dust. Check the outside of your computer case and brush off any dust from the fan grills (with your computer turned off!). If they are looking particularly dirty, call your local Computer Troubleshooter – they can clean the dust from the components inside your case too.

4. Upgrade your hardware: As technology advances, new software programs require more computing power. Asking your old computer to perform new tricks could place too much strain on it. You may have an option to upgrade individual components rather than buy a whole new computer. Consider upgrading your computer's memory, hard disk or processor to speed things up and handle your new software. Your local Computer Troubleshooter can advise if this is a cost-effective option for you.
5. Address little problems before they become big ones: If you notice a minor problem with your computer, call your local Computer Troubleshooter. It can be significantly more cost-effective to fix a minor problem straight away, than waiting for it to compound and then require major work. Keep a log book

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to record the details of any problems, including what you were doing at the time and the exact wording of error messages. This can help speed-up our troubleshooting process, as we follow your trail of 'clues' to help us determine the source of the problem.

Call your local Computer Troubleshooter to discuss how these tips can help in your particular situation.

Common Problem

#2

Excessive email SPAM

Spam is an unwelcome e-mail message from a business or individual that seeks to sell you something. SPAM emails often come from non-existent email addresses and have made up user names. It is almost impossible to avoid SPAM altogether however if you follow the following tips then it can be minimized and managed.

1. One sure method of avoiding SPAM is not to have an email address, however this is not a practical option for most businesses. The next best thing is to avoid using your main business email address when responding to on line enquiries or surveys. Instead use a temporary web based email account such as hotmail for these activities. If SPAM has become a serious problem then one last resort is to change your email address, however this is not practical if your email address is used on widely distributed marketing materials, business cards and letter heads.
2. Another method is to host your email service with a reputable email provider. The reason for this is two fold. Most reputable email service providers often employ their own anti SPAM filters that will filter out 90% of known SPAM even before it reaches your email box. Secondly most providers will also offer an anti SPAM service at no additional or small additional charge that will further reduce the amount of SPAM you receive. Also reputable providers will also allow you to change your email setting to avoid certain kinds of SPAM or incorrectly addressed email from reaching your inbox.
3. There is also another anti SPAM service available through some providers called Box Trapper which only allows emails from legitimate users to reach you. Only emails from senders in your approved user list – the so called white list will be sent to your inbox. When a user that is not in your list sends an email they are automatically sent a reply email asking them to verify their identity and resend the message. They are then added to the "white list" and won't see that message again. This avoids SPAM but would inconvenience senders – particularly if you are trying to attract sales enquires.

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4. Microsoft have also built in anti SPAM measures into their version of Outlook 2003. Outlook 2003 has its own anti SPAM filter which is effective in identifying and trapping potential SPAM messages in a special junk folder. Outlook 2003 can also be set up to redirect messages from particular users to specific folders. For example if you have a list of existing customers or suppliers and you know their email address it is possible to redirect those message to a specific folder called "Customers and Suppliers" for example. That way you won't miss any critical emails. If you send a message to a new client that email address is automatically added to the list and return emails from that customer will then automatically be sent to the correct folder. The advantage of this system is that it doesn't cost any extra – only time and expertise to set up.
5. Microsoft Outlook 2003 can also work effectively with the anti SPAM services provided via your Internet Service Provider. Many anti SPAM services mark suspected SPAM messages by adding the words ***SPAM** in the message header. Outlook 2003 can be set up to redirect these messages from your inbox to a special junk mail folder so that your inbox remains free of clutter from SPAM emails.

If you would like further information on any of the anti SPAM methods mentioned above then please call Computer Troubleshooters for more advice.

Common Problem

#3

Wireless Security

Now that high speed internet access is common in homes and businesses, many people are now investigating 'Wireless'. Wireless internet access is the ability to connect to the internet without needing to be plugged in with a cable to a physical computer network. This gives you the convenience of using the internet on your laptop from multiple offices & meeting rooms, or even at home, outside by the pool. To date, wireless networks are not as fast as physical cable networks, though their speed is increasing as the technology advances.

A 'wireless access point' creates the wireless network for your computers to connect to and use the broadband internet that comes into your premises. Once you have the right wireless equipment, there is no additional charge for using your own internet connection wirelessly.

Does my computer have wireless?

Many of today's new laptops and some new desktop computers have a wireless capability 'built in'. This means you don't need to buy an extra piece of equipment for your computer to connect to a wireless network.

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If there is a network, your computer will technically be able to access it (with the right configuration settings). You do still need a wireless network to be in place first – i.e. a wireless access point that is going to send the internet traffic wirelessly to and from your computer. If your computer doesn't have built-in wireless, you can get a card or USB device that will send and receive the signals from the wireless network.

Is it secure?

Like any computer system, wireless network security is dependant on how well the network has been configured and how good the 'hackers' are. Wireless equipment can create an un-secure network if the security settings are not enabled. The default factory setting on most wireless routers will leave you without any security measures. They also contain well-known default settings and passwords, which should be changed upon installation. There are many security settings like encryption and pass phrases that will 'lock down' your network, like locking your car doors. But remember, you are still accessing the internet, so protection tools like anti-virus software and anti-spyware software are vital.

How Wireless Security Settings are Configured.

Wireless security settings need to be made on the wireless router device and on each wireless equipped computer or device on the network. The security is achieved by a method called encryption – which is basically a secret code that is shared between the wireless router and the computers and preferably not by any-one else. The code prevents everybody other than your own computers from eaves-dropping your connection, accessing your files or stealing your internet connection. The encryption information (or secret code) needs to be created on one of the computers or the wireless router on the network and copied (either on a USB device) or manually copied down on paper and then typed into the configuration settings on the other devices

For networks at home or in small businesses the only type of encryption we recommend is called WPA. An older type of encryption called WEP is also available but is not recommended, because the encryption can be easily broken and your security compromised. Most computers that are less than two or three years old will be WPA equipped. If your computer is older then we recommend that you purchase another wireless card (either USB or PCMCIA) that is WPA capable and replace your existing card or disable the inbuilt wireless card. If you use WPA security then all computers on the network need to be configured with, and capable of supporting WPA

If you are confident to attempt to configure the devices on the network then the most convenient way to set up a wireless network is to use the built in wizard in Microsoft XP. This can be found under Control Panel – Network Connections – then Create a new connection. Then select

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set up a new wireless network. Follow the prompts. This wizard will allow you to save the settings onto a portable USB flash drive that can be used to configure other wireless equipped computers on the network. You can also use the wizard to produce a printed copy of the settings which are required to configure the wireless router.

Access to the settings on your router is made via your web browser (Internet Explorer) to a local address such as <http://192.168.0.1>, or <http://10.0.0.1>. You will need the user name and password to access these settings on the router. In many cases the default settings from the manufacturer will be in place. These default settings will be outlined in your Wireless Router user guide.

If you are not confident of making these changes then call your local Computer Troubleshooter for support.

It is often recommended that broadcast of the Wireless network identifier (also known as the SSID) be turned off as an additional security measure. The SSID broadcast enables wireless equipped devices to identify and locate available wireless networks within range. We do not recommend that you turn off the SSID broadcast as it makes it difficult to locate and diagnose wireless networks. Also turning off the SSID broadcast provides little additional security when WPA encryption is used.

Another security measure that is some-times recommended is to restrict the access to the wireless network to specific computers. This is achieved by limiting access to specific "MAC" addresses. A MAC address is a unique number which identifies each computer. We do not recommend this because, again it adds little additional security to WPA encryption and has the disadvantage of making it difficult to add new wireless devices to the network.

What if I have a wireless equipped network at home and at work?

If you use your laptop on wireless networks in more than one location then the computer can be configured to securely access both networks. Your computer can also be configured to automatically select the home network when at home and the work network when at work. Once set up correctly the use of wireless networks requires minimal intervention to connect to the Internet.

When you have your computer in a new location Windows XP will automatically detect that you are in range of a new network and may show a small balloon type message offering to display a list of available networks. If this message doesn't display you will need to click on the small wireless network icon in the bottom right of the screen. Once the available networks are displayed then click on the network you wish to use. Windows will detect the type of security used and prompt you to enter the network key. Enter the key that was originally used to set up

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the network and the connection will be made. This set up only needs to be undertaken once for each new network.

Conclusion

Your local Computer Troubleshooter can advise how wireless access will benefit your particular situation. If you already have a wireless network, consider a security check where your local CT consultant can ensure that all practical steps have been taken to protect the security of your computers and your important information.

Common Problem

#4

Backup - Live every day like it's your computer's last!

Once upon a time, computers were only used by big companies. To protect their information, they used their big budgets to buy expensive backup machines and employed people to maintain them.

Fast forward to today, and think about the amount of information on your own computer. Most of us don't have a backup machine, yet we'd be devastated if we lost the digital photos of our daughter's first Christmas. Small business owners are impacted even more – imagine losing all of your financial records and your outstanding customer invoices. So how can you prevent losing your precious information without spending the earth?

Here are our top tips for backing up your important information

Get that data off your Hard Drive!!

The most important thing to do is to get a copy of your data off your hard drive. It is critical to save your data from your hard drive onto something else. This data includes your letters, projects, sent e-mail messages, your e-mail address book, and any other information that is essential to running your business. It is not necessary to copy programs like Microsoft Word or Outlook—they can be reinstalled from the original CDs you purchased.

Data Storage Options

Options for saving your data include recordable CD's, DVD's, Tape cartridges and external large capacity hard disk drives. Don't save your data onto standard floppy disks for long-term backups of important information. Floppies are less reliable than hard disks and are best for short-term storage of small files and in most cases are too small to hold all your data. You can even upload your data to an Internet-based file storage service.

Nearly all computers today come with built in DVD burners and these are excellent if your critical business data is 4.7 Gbytes as this can be

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stored simply on one DVD. Use a quality rewritable DVD for reliability of longer term storage. Also consider locating a copy off site in case of fire or flood at your business premises.

For large amounts of data an external hard Disk drive with built in back –up software is a good choice. Some models offer a one touch button to provide for back-up of your critical data.

Tape has been the medium of choice for a number of years. Tape backups are relatively slow, but the process can be automated. You can schedule the backup for when you're sleeping. Tape drives have a capacity of 10 to 40 gigabytes, with the data uncompressed. Most advertise that they'll hold twice as much if the data is compressed. It's true that they can hold more compressed data, but you're unlikely to get double the storage. Some file types just don't compress.

Most tape drives cost several hundred dollars. Tapes are relatively expensive, too. And the software can be difficult. Tape is a great backup medium, once you understand it. It has its drawbacks in terms of the time and work involved. But once you get a system down, it can go smoothly.

On Line back -up

One answer has emerged as technology has grown. High speed broadband internet connections are now available to most homes and are more affordable than ever. Computer hard disks continue to increase in size and reduce in price. Enter 'online' or 'remote' backups to the scene.

In essence, an online backup copies files from your computer, across your internet connection, to a backup computer at another location. You may need to run some software on your PC so you can select which files are backed up and how often your backup happens.

Security features may also be available to 'encrypt' or code your information so it cannot be easily stolen and read by someone else during the copy process.

Some benefits of an online backup solution are:

- There's nothing for you to remember – Once your backup is configured, it can run automatically on a regular basis. You don't need to start a program or insert a blank tape.
- There's nothing else for you to buy – As the file copy happens across the internet, you don't need to buy a tape backup machine or blank tapes.
- Your files are somewhere else – If anything happens to your computer or premises, you'll still have access to your files which

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now also exist at another physical location.

Schedule regular backups

How often should you back-up. Consider the cost of say loosing 1 month worth of customer data and invoices – what impact in \$ terms would this have on your business. If this is high ten consider weekly or even daily back-up

Check that it works.

Finally, whatever backup option you choose, be sure to check that it works. Duplicate a single folder or group of files, and then try to recover those backup files to a another computer to verify that everything has been saved correctly

Common Problem

#5

Printing with ease...

Printing is one of the most expensive parts of owning and operating a computer today when the costs of toner, paper and maintenance is considered. One of the best ways to overcome the high costs of toner is to have a single high volume, reliable printer that can be shared amongst many employees. This way business owners can avoid the high cost of owning and operating individual printers.

The good news is that the software for computers and printers today allows printers to be easily shared amongst employees provided they are set up correctly . Unfortunately many businesses are missing out on the benefits of sharing by not knowing how to properly set up a shared computer. Sometimes even after the system is set up it only works some of the time or it works differently with different computers.

To share a printer with other users you will need to have a network which allows computers to be connected together to share files, internet connections and printers. Networks require a special device such as a switch or router to connect all the devices together.

There are two main ways of sharing a printer. The first method involves connecting a printer to a specific computer and then configuring the printer to be shared amongst all users on the network. The second method is to have a “network printer” which is not connected to a specific computer but is connected instead to the switch or router.

If the printer is connected to a specific computer then it is important to ensure that that computer that the printer is connected to is switched on – and does not power down automatically. If the computer is switched off then you won't be able to print. Also many computers are set up to power down when not in use and this can prevent printing as well. This can be fixed by changing the power setting under the

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Windows control panel.

Setting up a shared printer is relatively easy. If your business network has a central Server then this should be set up by your trained system administrator using the printer configuration tools on the server. Once a printer has been set up on the network then it will automatically be available to all users on the networks who have been permitted by the administrator to use that printer.

If your business has a network but no central server , then printer sharing can be achieved by configuring the printer sharing capability on the computer that it is connected to. Go to Control Panel and select Printers and faxes. Then select –the add printer button and then follow the prompts. It is that easy.

Summary

By understanding each of the 5 common problems affecting your computer/networks, you will avoid the pitfalls often made by businesses with their technology platform. By implementing strategies to address the following 5 common problems you will:

- Have a secure computer protected from viruses
- Have a well maintained computer ensuring your computer runs faster for longer
- Be guarded against excessive email SPAM
- Have implemented appropriate security to protect your wireless network
- Have an appropriately configured wireless network to maximise its effectiveness
- Have a back up strategy that ensures regular system back ups and have tested back ups for easy data recovery
- Have a trouble free printing capability accessible by all staff and computers.

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About Computer Troubleshooters

Computer Troubleshooters is an Australian owned international network of computer service franchises, specifically created to meet the technical needs of small businesses. We are NOT a computer store, dealer or manufacturer. We provide friendly, personal on-site service, offering services to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of your computer systems. If you are serious about getting the right computer support for your business, then do the right thing and call us NOW.

With an established franchise network and access to proven and experienced computer technicians talent, you can use our expertise in small business computer troubleshooting across a full range of services. There is no problem that a Computer Troubleshooter or his/her colleagues has not seen before. This ensures we will provide you with the highest level of IT support to get your technology working for you so you can concentrate on your important business initiatives. Solving your IT issues is in your hands!!!

Contact Computer Troubleshooters to arrange a visit:

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We will be happy to discuss and implement a no-cost-to-you strategy to provide ongoing computer service and support to your business. Don't waste another second of your valuable time on computer service and support issues!!!