

occurred and how much older or younger you are than other individuals. I can't decide if this site is entertaining and informative or simply depressing.

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COMPUTER MAINTENANCE

5 Things You Can Do to Improve Your Tech Support Experience

BY GREG L. RICHARDSON

The beauty of Microsoft Windows is that you can customize much of the look and feel of your computing environment. The problem with Windows is that you can customize most, if not all, of the look and feel of your computing environment.

Why is this a problem? Frequently, the settings that you can change make it difficult for a tech support person to walk you through what may be going on with your system because the environment is nonstandard or may be hiding important information.

When you call someone at tech support, you want to get on and off the phone quickly. Good communication, therefore, is an absolute must. Please be mindful that sustained stress and abruptness can degrade the conversation with even the best, most patient, and kindest tech support people. Poor communication will make it more difficult to get to the resolution you need. Help them help you!

From a computer standpoint, there are five things you can do on your Windows XP system to make your troubleshooting happen quickly. They are the following:

1. List the important info. This list enables you to have lots of important information at your fingertips. Open

Windows Explorer (You can open this program by holding down the Windows key found between the Control and Alt key to the left of your space bar and then typing "E"). Then click: View > Details.

2. Make full filenames available. This task makes it easy to identify the purpose of each file. With Windows Explorer still open, click: Tools > Folder Options > Apply to All Folders. Then click the View tab and un-check the box to the left of "Hide Extensions" for known file types.

3. In the unlikely event that you need to leave a message for the tech support team for your CAT software company, follow courtroom rule No. 1: speak slowly, loudly, and clearly. Also, be sure to leave your name, telephone number, and system number, and then repeat the information again. (It also helps if you don't call from a cell phone in a bad coverage area.) There are few things as frustrating as being unable to return a message because there's no way to piece together partial information from a broken message.

4. Turn off your power management and screen saver. This step will prevent Windows from turning off or deprioritizing your CAT software in relation to

your system's other functions. Right-click your mouse on your computer desktop, and select Properties > Screen Saver. Click the down-arrow on the right of the "Screen Saver" drop-down box, and select None. Now, click: Power. Click the down-arrow(s) on the right of "Turn off monitor" and select Never. Click the down-arrow(s) on the right of "Turn off hard disks" and select Never.

5. Run Windows Update. This program will keep your system up-to-date. Periodically (every couple of weeks), click on the Start Button > All Programs > Windows Update. Click on Express Install (recommended): High Priority Updates for Your Computer, and then follow the prompts to make sure you have the latest and greatest patches and security updates.

So, by following those steps which should take just a couple of minutes and minimal effort, you can greatly improve your tech support guy or gal's ability to help troubleshoot your computer.

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