

Getting to know your computer mouse

Back when I was a computer operator in 1981 we interfaced with the computers by punching holes in cards, feeding them into a mainframe and scouring the results by reading long printouts.

When I became a programmer they let me use a computer terminal with green letters and no graphics. I was pumped being able to see the characters I typed appear on the phosphorus screen.

Just before I bailed control data back in 1984, we set up a Techtronix graphics system with a small device with a couple of buttons on it connected with a thin cable. The vendor told us it was a "mouse." It controlled what we learned was the "cursor" that moved this little plus sign on the Techtronix computer screen.

Wow. Now I was really dangerous.

Twenty-five years later and I must have jockeyed computer mice hundreds of miles across even more mouse pads just inches at a time. That first mouse used a special magnetic sensor tracked by grid embedded within an expensive pad.

Later computer mice utilized a rolling ball and today most are optical with an LED red light tracking the movement



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against most any surface.

Five years ago those two decades of mouse pushing gave me a harsh case of carpal tunnel syndrome which led my sports doctor, who had operated on my horse-torn shoulder and racket ball ripped elbow, to target cutting on my mouse-mangled wrist.

Luckily Dr. Thai at the Acupuncture Center here fixed me up simply by popping a couple knuckles and twisting a few fingers and then presto. The severe pain from my carpal tunnel condition was gone! I told the butcher sports surgeon to take a hike and I have been fine ever since.

Most people reading this article will use a computer mouse today. If you use other people's computers and therefore touch their mice, make sure you wash your hands afterwards. Since I am on dozens of different computers all day long I strive to wash my hands often to keep from getting a cold or worse yet a virus.

I am not saying you have to be an obsessive compulsive nut that has to wash their hands every five minutes, but computer keyboards and mice are great breeding surfaces for germs and other negative bacteria.

If you still have a mechanical mouse with the little ball in it and it has not been moving the cursor in a smooth motion lately, it may be time to clean the internals out.

Flip it over, untwist the ball lock, remove the ball, and start scraping out all that gunk caked on the rollers. This stuff is mainly mouse pad material, dust, hair and even skin. Odds are you will have a much better working mouse after cleaning out the ball contact surfaces.

Most people now use optical mice which last forever since they are no moving parts. The main thing with optical mice is to make sure you use them over non-reflective surfaces. Stay away from using them on top of glass, marble or steel desktops.

There are cord and cordless mice with more people opting for cordless mice. If you still have a mouse physically connected to the PS2 or USB port, then make sure you have routed the cable properly to give yourself enough slack so to not yank on the cable.

That freedom of movement is not only helpful for cursor navigation but will help the mouse last longer and prevent bent pins on PS2 connectors or damaged USB slots.

Your best bet is a cordless mouse from Logitech since they have been

the leading vendor in cordless peripherals for over a decade now. I used to despise cordless mice and keyboards since they seem to continuously need batteries replaced. Over the years though manufactures like Logitech have vastly improved the battery life by greatly reducing the power consumption.

The technique with wireless mice and keyboards is to keep the transmitter as close as possible. Do not put it behind the computer or way under the desk.

My trick is to tuck it just under the computer monitor or even mount it just behind it with Velcro tape. This way the transmitter is less than two feet from their cordless mates.

Remember that there are at least two buttons on computer mice utilized on Windows PCs. Many people fail to utilize or even know about the right click button since most only use the left click to perform most tasks. Let's go over a few uses of right clicking a mouse.

Next time you are in the Internet Explorer (IE) and you have become tired of all the space wasted on those informational bars, put the cursor on any blank area of those bars and right click the mouse.

A small window will pop up with checked status bars and tool bars that are enabled under IE. Left click and

uncheck those bars to temporarily remove them from appearing in your IE browser session.

Now right click on the Start button and then left click on Explore starting up the Windows Explorer utility. Right click on any file and you will see the same menu pop up as if you had left clicked the File drop down menu at the top of the Explore application.

When moving files around within the Windows Explore I prefer to use the right-click-drag method which is safer since it provides a small pop up window prompting me to Copy, Move or just Create a Shortcut. This way I can make sure I migrate the file in the method I had intended rather than having it get moved when I only wanted it copied due to a mis-click which can easily happen with the left-click-drag method.

Bottom line: Since most computer navigation is done with a GUI (Graphical User Interface) for almost 20 years now, get to know your computer mouse and tweak it for optimum comfort, efficiently and productivity.

Next week's column: Blocked e-mail. *John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233 or John@DeansConsulting.com for questions and comments.*