

You depend on the life of your batteries



John Deans

My day starts, runs, and ends on the life of batteries. If the power goes out in the middle of the night the 9-volt battery in our alarm clock preserves the right time so the alarm goes off at six so my wife can get the day started by fixing lunches and rustling up the girls.

My clock goes off an hour later since all I have to do is get my lazy tail out of bed.

Just before I leave for work I take my iPhone off the charger that it sat in all night to prep it for a hopefully profitable day of communications. Knowing the limited battery life that is notorious for iPhones, this is a critical and must-do nightly operation.

At least one day a week I'll have to nurse my iPhone's battery life by plugging it into

the car's DC power adapter or even tuck on the emergency power supply to get me through a heavy talking day.

Once I hop in my Jetta TDI, the next battery I rely on is the one to start the car so I can get to my first client by 8 a.m. Strong

car and truck batteries are a must and I have been buying the best ones at O'Reilly Auto Part with a lifetime warranty.

During my day I handle UPS (Uninterruptable Power Supplies) problems which are usually bad batteries that result in annoying beeping noises. Since the batteries in those UPS's only last 18 months to two years, they can become dysfunctional before you know it.

The larger batteries in the 500Va and above can product lines sometimes be purchased

at a good price at Ace Hardware by just asking for the deer feeder batteries. They go for half the price as the official UPS batteries that are shipped to you from online vendors.

In the evening it's time for Quickbooks accounting on my laptop but usually with it plugged into the AC power adapter. Occasionally I take the laptop to a table to do bills and then it is running off battery. That is when I see how the charge does not hold as good as it once did.

This is because since my laptop is plugged into the AC power supply 95 percent of the time, the battery's charge is not exercised well, and the overall battery life decreases. My older laptops are even worse with two only delivering a 10-20 minute battery runtime and a third with no functioning battery life at all.

After three or more years,

laptop batteries seem to die out and they become totally dependent on being plugged into the AC power adapter to keep running. For those of you that need good battery life on your laptops there are several things you can do to assure maximum utilization of the portable power capabilities.

Basically we want to minimize the physical labor the laptop has to perform which will decrease the rate of exhaustion of the battery. This means you need to reduce hard drive operations, minimize CDROM/DVD activity, and cutback on USB attached devices.

For numerous reasons it is always good the have ample computer memory installed so your programs will load and run faster. An added bonus to having sufficient RAM on your laptop is that the battery will work less due to having to page in and out data from memory to

the hard drive which is called 'page faulting' the virtual memory.

The more you rely on virtual memory the more power will be required to move the read/write head across the platters of the disk drive. Same goes for file fragmentation. If a large 20 MB file is broken up into 10 pieces on your disk, the hard drive works even harder therefore consuming more power.

The way to avoid this extra digital manual labor is to keep your hard drive defragmented on a regular basis like every three months. Of course you will want to run the defragmentation program via Start-All Programs-Accessories-System Tools and clicking then Disk Defragmenter while plugged into the AC power supply.

Something that really drains the juice is watching a movie with the DVD player. For those long plane trips it may be necessary but I suggest requesting a seat on the plane by an AC outlet. Newer jetliners now have AC outlets on every seat, so look for one. But watch out for the flight attendant as she tells you to turn off your laptop an hour before the plane lands or be thrown in federal prison.

The laptop battery will deliver longer charge if the laptop itself is kept cooler. This can be done by verifying the laptop intake and output vents are clear from any obstructions. My Acer Aspire has an overheating problem when I have the bottom completely covered while rest-

ing on my thighs at night when I am wearing sweatpants.

The output exhaust vent gets blocked by my left thigh and it sometimes even shuts down while plugged into the AC power adapter due to overheating. The cooler you can keep your laptop the longer it will run on a good battery charge.

Another good way to extend your battery life is to run with the LCD screen brightness turned down. If you are sitting in a darkened room in the evening or even a lighter room with no direct sunlight, try dimming your screen to save energy.

This usually can be done by holding the Fn or Function key down at the same time hitting a key on the upper or lower right hand side of the keyboard that has the little light bulb or sunshine symbol.

Finally, try not to over multitask with numerous applications and windows active since they induces page faulting, which works the hard drive, thereby burning extra power. When you have to make your battery last, use it wisely and efficiently.

Bottom line: Though I'm not a green spewing tree hugger, there are times when we need to conserve energy to get through our busy days.

Next week's column: Office versions.

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