

Save time, money by organizing software



John Deans

The world of IT (information technology) is a combination of hardware and software. Hardware is all the physical components like the memory, CPU (Central Processing Unit), and hard drives along with printers, routers and other external devices. Software is the logical instructions that tell the hardware what to do.

Think of it in a musical sense as the piano being the hardware and the sheet music being the software.

Back in the 1980s, I had to work with the hardware as much as the software entities during the business day. There were times when I actually had to crawl into mainframes to swap out huge two foot square memory card containing a whopping 256 KB of RAM (1/4 of a megabyte). To keep those big beasts running we spent about half our time manipulating the hardware and the rest of the time operating the software.

Software upgrades and updates were rare and new software packages were infrequent since PCs were just starting to find their way to desktops. This is because a good IBM AT personal computer costs upwards of \$5,000 back then.

As the years rolled by the hardware work decreased as the manufacturing of it moved overseas. Now, almost 90 percent is made somewhere in China and the most hardware work I do now is in a

more modular mode by swapping out hard drives and adding 1 GB SIMMs of memory to small PCs.

That 50/50 hardware to software activity ratio back in the 1980s has morphed to ninety percent software duties and only ten percent hardware chores.

I partially chose that route because I learned that the profit margin for hardware IT was dropping like a rock due to foreign outsourcing and that was if I could find that work to perform. Software authoring, troubleshooting, and management have been the way to go since the 1990s and even it has been changing with offshore competition.

For well over 10 years now United States IT software gurus have been competing against highly educated software professionals from India that work twice as long for a fraction of the salaries. With inter-continental high bandwidth communication links they do not even have to live in the USA to work.

Numerous software companies have outsourced software authoring, modifications, and support to Indian companies on the other side of the world.

So, following the great advice in one of my favorite books, *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Dr. Spencer Johnson, I have changed my IT focus and specialty numerous times to stay employed and com-

petitive. After 28 years in the IT world and guidance from the Lord above, I now have the best IT job in the world working here in Brenham instead of in a big city cubical or having to fly out every Monday like many of my peers still do.

Since the vast majority of my time now is spend fixing, monitoring, loading, debugging, updating, upgrading, and sometimes just staring at software, here is something you can do to help IT yahoos like me do our job.

For the love of Pete, keep your software organized!

I spend hours and hours hunting for client owned software CDROMs, documentation, and licensing information due to customers not managing their legally purchased software media and materials. Looking for Microsoft Office CDs wastes time and not finding them stops projects.

Years ago I learned that even before I quote and start an upgrade or system rebuild, the first job is to locate and verify we have all the software media which includes CDROMs, DVDs, flash drives, floppies and download URL links.

One good way to know you have all the software is to run a system audit on your computer by downloading and running Belarc Advisor from www.Belarc.com.

It is a free audit tool that inventories and lists all the hardware and software installed on that computer. Belarc Advi-

sor also displays the critical installation keys to major software applications like Microsoft Windows and Office. These keys are absolutely necessary to reload that software onto the rebuilt or a replacement computer.

Creating this software inventory from Belarc Advisor gives you a great check list of installed applications with version and licensing information. You will be surprised at the sheer number of programs, utilities and applications that will need to be reloaded after a full system rebuild.

The best way to keep your software organized is to start immediately when you first purchase and setup your computer. First thing is to dump into the trash the trial software that you will never use which is included in many new computers.

Make sure to keep all CDROMs and DVDs that have any computer vendor drivers, printer installation disks and financial application reload media like Quickbooks and Quicken.

The most important CDROMs and DVDs to keep are all the ones from Microsoft along with their packing selves and boxes that have the licensing information on them. NEVER throw away any Microsoft software media unless it is from computers that have been retired and the version is Windows 98 or before.

Keep all Windows Office 2000 and Windows 2000 and after since they

could be reused on older computers that have replaced the retired ones.

My favorite way to do this is to buy a box of large gallon-size Ziplock baggies with the plastic sliding lock and place every single DVD and CDROM along with their compact packages into the Ziplock baggie for that specific computer only. All the software for the single computer goes into that specific single bag.

Next use a Sharpie pen to write the computer's name and the purchase date onto the white writable place on the bag. The best time to do this is just when you first purchase the computer and have it all right there at your finger tips.

I have been using this software media management technique for years now at my client sites and many of them now have boxes of Ziplock baggies each with all the software to completely reload a single PC.

Bottom line: Save yourself time and money by keeping your valuable software safe and organized for quick retrieval and fast reload capability because it beats have a guy like me hunting for CDROMs through your file cabinets and desk drawers with the cash clock ticking.

Next week's column: Google's Chrome Web browser.

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