

Take the time to conduct computer audit

Twenty years ago few of us had a single computer at home. Ten years back most of us had at least one PC at the house.

Today, many households have multiple desktops and laptops around for family use. The office is no exception with some workers with a computer tower at their desk and a laptop in their briefcase.

Knowing what you have on your computer can be very helpful if there is a loss from theft, fire, or hardware failure. You would be surprised at the number of programs computers can accumulate over the years. Today we're going to discuss some ways to inventory your computer hardware and software assets.

At home it is a good idea to perform an audit of the installed hardware components and software applications on your computer. The more computers you have, the more important it is to take a good inventory of your computing infrastructure.



John Deans

A good way to do this is with the free auditing tool from Belarc.com called Belarc Advisor. Click on the Free Download tab and then choose the download option to get the Belarc Advisor. Start the installation and take all the defaults. After the

install runs, it will conduct the inventory of the hardware and software components.

When audit completes a browser window will start up displaying the findings of the inventory.

You will be impressed by the level of detail Belarc Advisor delivers by showing all the specifics of hardware components like the CPU speed, motherboard type, hard drive information, memory population and much more.

One of the big uses I get from the Belarc Advisor is the ability to see how the SIMM slots are used for memory. If I audit a computer that just has 1GB of RAM and there are still two free RAM slots available, I can

go buy more RAM SIMMs and add memory. This eliminates the need to shutdown the computer and open the case.

Another handy feature Belarc Advisor it has is the listing of all the licensed software installed on the computer. This has helped me numerous times when I have to reformat a hard drive and completely reload Windows along with all the installed software. I always make darn sure I take an audit listing of the computer's hardware and software before I start the re-built processes.

The way I save the inventory snapshot is after the inventory is complete and displayed on Internet Explorer, I then just click File and then Save As to an external hard drive. This enables me to re-installed Office 2003 or Windows Vista with the original and legal installation license key that is displayed by Belarc Advisor.

You can also just printout the multi-page audit and put it in a safe place for future needs. Sometimes nothing beats a hardcopy during computer problems.

Since the free Belarc Advisor is just for home and personal use, at the office there are other commercial tools to perform these computer inventory tasks. Recently I had to conduct a large 135 computer audit for a client of mine.

We purchased a 150-node license of Total Network Inventory (TNI) to accomplish the network wide computer inventory to get a handle on what they had installed. We bought the software from SoftInventive.com for \$395 and after the download was complete we were ready to start the inventory process.

Though there were options for the TNI application to run over the network and discover all the network connected computers, we opted to manually run the audit client tool while we were also upgrading the antivirus on all the workstations.

The TNI program ran in about two minutes and produced a small XLM file used as a database component.

To view the inventory we ran the primary TNI application which was the database management tool. This showed a list of

the computers that have already been audited and an exhaustive list of hardware and software details about each computer.

After all 135 computers were audited my client was able to see all that information quickly and easily through the database management tool.

From there we are now able to run reports that are highly configurable enabling us to add and remove the level of detail for the reports to display. If we wanted we could create a huge report that would list every piece of hardware detail and specifics on all software installed on each of those 135 computers. The company bean counters live for stuff like this.

TNI also tells you which computers need updates, have antivirus problems, and are operating without software firewalls. It can help in planning hardware and software upgrades. Sorting can be done in the list mode which can float computers to the top of the list that are in need of more memory or later versions of MS Office.

Licensing can be kept up with better to ensure all company

computers are running legal software. If anyone finds two computers with the same MS Office installation key then that is a red flag indicating software got duplicated and needs to be remedied pronto.

The last thing a company needs in these rough financial times is the software cops showing up at the front door with a search warrant for bogus software or duplicated licenses.

Since TNI is a networked application it should be run every few months to keep up with system changes, hardware additions and new software versions. That way companies always know what condition their computing infrastructure is currently in.

Bottom line: At home or work take a good inventory of your computers to keep a handle on those ever growing digital tools.

Next week's column: Digital movie DVDs.

John Deans of Deans Consulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233 or John@DeansConsulting.com for questions and comments.