

Living with Your Computer

This new feature will look at the day to day problems in making the most of your computer. For this first article we asked Nigel Bufton of PC Buff for his input.

The two main categories of computer issues that I encounter are “something isn’t working” and “something happened and I lost my data.”

It Won't Do Anything

If your computer won't even start, and you cannot hear any noises at all, not even a fan, the first thing to check is the fuse in the plug; yes, it really can be that simple! If the fuse is not the problem, the power supply may have died and need replacing. There's no need for a new computer; a power supply costs less than £25.

Another common cause of power supply failure is a power surge from a thunderstorm. A power surge can travel through the power supply as it destroys it and damage more expensive electronic components as well. Again, these are replaceable and much less expensive than a new computer, but now we can be talking of anything up to £200. The good news is that, in most cases, your data is perfectly safe and everything will be in place and work exactly as it did before. There is a very simple method of protection against power-surge damage. Most electrical stores will sell you a surge-suppressor power extension cable for under £20; just use this to plug your computer in.

Protecting your computer and your data should be your top priority, after all this is how you use the thing!

And this brings us to the subject of backups. The biggest risk is if the hard disk fails. It is usually possible to recover 90% of the data using specialist firms but at a price! But also remember the other reason your data may be lost; the computer falls off the table, or it is a laptop and is stolen? There probably won't be much hope of you ever seeing your data again.

Help! - I Didn't Take a Backup

A backup is quite simply a copy of all your important data. These are usually your documents, your emails, calendar and contacts and then your main computer settings. Usually this copy is made to a CD or DVD, or to a USB flash drive, or even a second hard disk which is external to the computer.

There are many different ways of performing the backup, and many different files that may need to be backed up. A good backup program will help you here. But if your computer has a CD-Writer or DVD-Writer, and most of your data is within the 'My Documents' folders, and you are using Windows XP, then you should be able to simply copy the contents of 'My Documents' to the CD or DVD quite easily.

Today might be a good day to think about doing this! If you are not making backup copies of your files and pictures, you could lose them all.

Nigel Bufton

Give us your feedback on both this article and any other features you would like about making the most of your computer. Visit our 'On-line' club at www.thewychwood.co.uk/club to see other features that can help you and to give us your feedback.