White Paper: Computer DO's and DON'Ts

We're all creatures of (sometimes bad) habits!

Introduction

Last month our hugely popular PC Maintenance guide talked about general activities to keep your computer running well. The article is freely available on our Knowledgebase so do feel free to grab a copy and share it round; the less time we collectively spend in front of sluggish computers the better!

But what about actually using your PC? Well, the good news is that Windows 10 is lots better at keeping itself running, but it's still only as good as the person using it.

This guide provides a few simple, practical good habits to get into when using your machine day to day, which should help lower your exposure to risks like viruses, crashes and poor performance.

DO: Remove your Admin Rights!

There are two main types of user account on your system – "Standard" users and "Administrators". Administrators can make changes such as install new programs, delete important data, uninstall programs and so on. Standard users cannot do this. By default, when you first set up your computer, you will set up a user account and it will be Administrator level.

This is all well and good, but what if you're browsing the web and click on something you should not have done? A malicious web page could automatically install itself, because your Administrator level account has the permission to do so. What is your kids were using the same account?
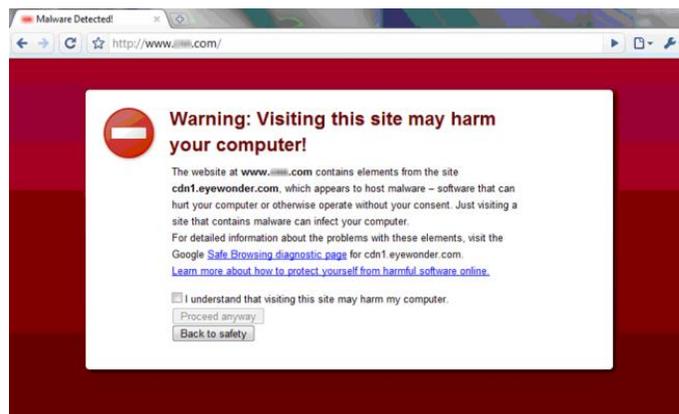
So setting up two accounts from the start is a quick and easy way to help protect your PC. Just go to Start > Control Panel, or search for User Accounts, to bring up the User Accounts controls. Select your regular account and click "Change Account Type". Set it to Standard or Normal User. Then set up a second account called something like "Admin" and give that Administrator rights and a password
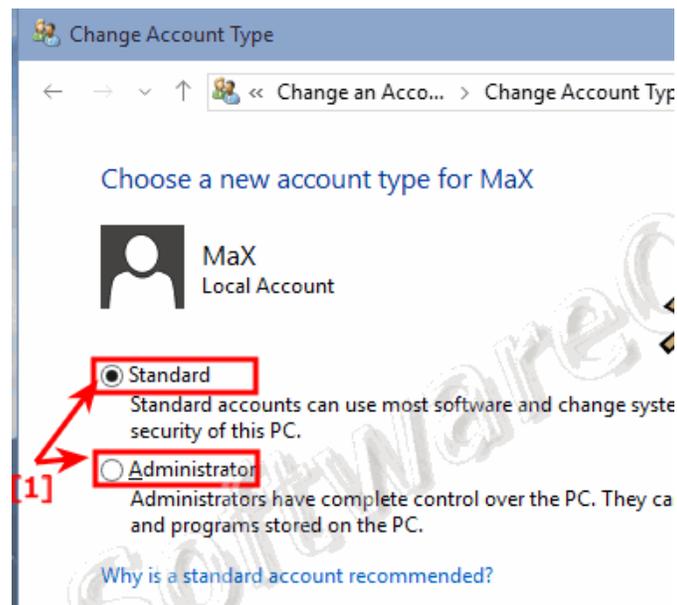

Use your Standard account for day to day browsing, and if you do need to make a change or install a new app or program, Windows will prompt you to pop in the password of the Admin account, and it's all done in a controlled way with no nasty surprises! A step by step guide to this can be found **here**

DO: Embrace the Cloud!

It's almost unavoidable nowadays, but only a few years ago we were shouting from the rooftops asking our clients to back up their files using online backups instead of plugging in – and carting around – old USB drives.

Nowadays, services like OneDrive come integrated with Windows 10, and are free for other versions, including some free storage. There are also other services available, the most popular of which are DropBox and Google Drive; a good comparison of all three can be found here.
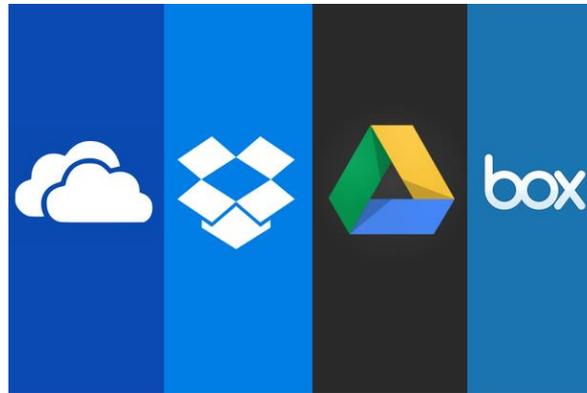
All of these services install on your PC and give you a location on which to save your files, which back them up to the cloud. Not only is this convenient – if you don't have your laptop with you, you can get onto any computer to get your files – it also ensures you have an automatic backup of everything.

Take it a step further, and a service like Office 365 will give you complete email, 1,000 GB of cloud file storage, backups, spam filtering, and even the Microsoft Office products and apps, for £6 a month, fully cloud based. There is no better time to embrace this technology and banish the dark days of accidentally losing or deleting all your family pictures!

We have rolled out cloud services for hundreds of customers here at Ethical IT so please ask us for more advice, we are always happy to help ☺

DON'T: Leave your computer on or in "sleep" mode all the time

This might seem trivial, but we see it all the time. People leave their computers on overnight, or just shut the lid of their laptops when they are finished. This not only wastes energy and decreases the life of your computer through standby power usage, it also will slow your machine down over time – system files are kept in constant use and not allowed to refresh, meaning memory usage creeps up and up over time. Shut down your computer properly just like you do your car!

DO: Regularly run Windows Updates

Keeping up with relentless "updates" might seem like a bore – a never ending treadmill of annoying pop-up messages to update, but they are very worth doing. Software is constantly being improved and enhanced, made more efficient, and secure. For Windows, the updates that Microsoft release provide three things:

1. Security holes are plugged (patched) – important for obvious reasons
2. Windows itself is improved – made leaner and meaner so it runs faster and crash less
3. Features are added – to help productivity and make life that tiny bit simpler

If you use Windows 10 (which we would thoroughly recommend you do – a guide to Windows 10 is available free on our Knowledgebase) these updates are automatic, but they don't always happen because the system waits until your PC is completely idle, which it rarely is.

Whatever operating system you use, running a manual check for updates should be done as part of your maintenance tasks, to catch any that haven't had a chance to install yet. To do this, just click the Start button and type Windows Update. Select the Update program and click "Check for Updates"; leave it about 20 minutes and it will gather them all and then give you the option to install. Let them install and restart your PC to update it with the latest security patches and improvements
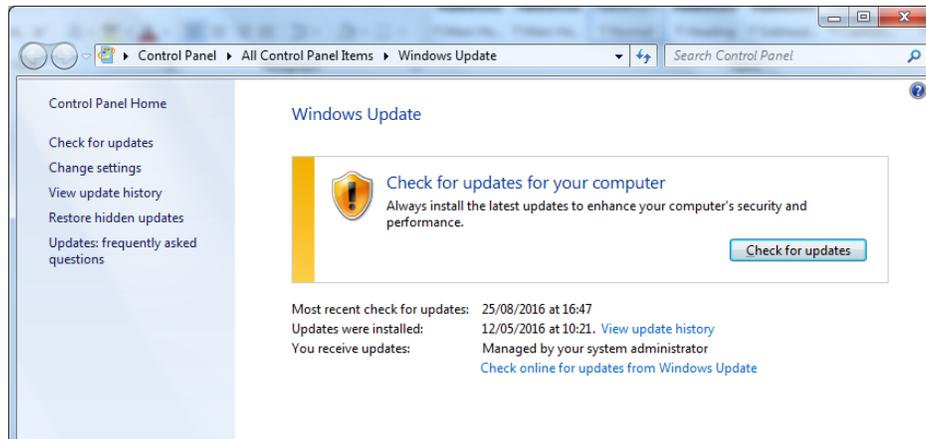
Our Conclusions

Using your computer in the right way will ultimately make it last longer and keep your data secure.

Cloud technology also takes the onus away from the physical devices, but you still need something to run them on, and so taking a few steps to set yourself up in the right way at the start, will ensure your computers run well and avoid disaster for many years to come.

At Ethical IT we are always here to help with these sorts of subjects too, so don't hesitate to get in touch with us to discuss this – on a personal level or for your organisation – we're all ears. Our Twitter feed also contains regular tips and tricks about these sorts of things, so please follow us @ethicalituk

Further Reading

We mentioned in our last White Paper but it's worth sharing again this series of articles aimed to take you from beginner, to intermediate, to pro levels of looking after and taking command of your PC. They are worth reading; not only to keep your PC running well, but to empower you with the skills and confidence to run your computer – not let it run you!