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THE MACHINE

Winnnow those automatic startups



When you turn on the computer, programs automatically start up and continue running “in the background” - offstage and behind the scenes.

Some are essential or useful and need run. Antivirus and Internet security programs are good examples. Others are optional. Your digital camera or scanner, for instance, may have assumed that you want constant access to the device. So it told those programs to run constantly.

Others are snoops, such as spywear programs that send information about your computer to spammers over the Internet.

Non-essential background programs can be troublemakers.

They hog computing power that could be used elsewhere, making a computer run slowly and take forever to load programs. These delinquents can cause computer misbehavior such as lockups, crashes, refusal to run certain programs, difficulty connecting to the Internet and staying connected.

By some estimates, programs running in the background cause more than half of all the problems that occur on a typical computer. Few computer users know it, of course. They often blame viruses, faulty hard disk drives, or other hardware problems related to a computer's age.

The problems can be frustrating enough to make people trash a perfectly good computer and shell out hundreds of dollars for a new system.

So how can you tell what programs are running behind the scenes? How can you tell which are essential and which are optional? How can you target the troublemakers?

For a general idea of what programs are running, check the icons in the System Tray. It's the outlined area opposite the Start Button and near the system clock. Let your mouse pointer hover over each icon to see the program's name.

Right clicking on the icon can stop some of those programs. Then select stop or exit in the popup menu. Don't shut down security programs or your Internet connection. If you don't know what a program does, let it run.

However, others are optional, like those that keep a seldom-used digital camera or scanner ready for instant action.

For a more complete view of your computer's background programs – which computer people term “tasks” - use Windows Task Manager. Access it by holding down three keys at the same time: Ctrl-Alt-Delete. Do it just once or you may reboot the computer.

It would be great if Microsoft designed Task Manager so you could right click on each task and get a description of the program, what it does, and whether it is essential or optional. No such luck.

However, there are lists and explanations on the Internet. One of the oldest and best is at answersthatwork.com. Compare your list to theirs, highlight unneeded programs with a mouse click, and click the “End Process” button.

AnswersThatWork also sells The Ultimate Troubleshooter (TUT) the most popular program for automatically telling whether background programs should be stopped (answersthatwork.com).

THE ULTIMATE TROUBLESHOOTER (™)

A staggering **65%** of problems which a PC encounters, whether in business or at home, are not caused by hardware problems, they are not caused by viruses, they are not caused by spam; they are caused by **background tasks**.

From PC lock-ups to illegal operations, Internet Explorer crashes, slow-downs, and other frustrations, many problems purely and simply come down to what is running in the background on your PC and currently demanding attention by the computer. The trick to having a PC that runs smoothly is to know which background tasks are essential, which are not, and which only need to run sometimes. By managing these processes more intelligently your system can free up more memory, run more reliably and avoid crashes and lock ups. This is what The Ultimate Troubleshooter enables you to do.

If you are familiar with our [Task List](#) pages, then our product **The Ultimate Troubleshooter** will be what you've been waiting for : our entire Task List pages on your PC, **with 30% more tasks included**, together with the tools to configure your PC the way that professionals do for trouble-free computing.

Features Summary

- Written by Network Consultancy and Computer Support professionals who solve PC performance, and software and hardware problems every day of their life. This is the tool we use every single day to simplify our PC troubleshooting while at the same time making it accurate. This is top class expertise in a remarkably easy to use tool !
- Includes AnswersThatWork's famous [Task List](#) **(+30% additional entries)** which is featured in the industry leading "*Windows XP Management, Troubleshooting & Maintenance*" course (CNET) and Hewlett-Packard's "*Tune up your PC*" online course and referenced by a majority of mainstream newspaper IT columnists worldwide.
- By displaying detailed information on every Task, Service, and Windows Startup that is running on your PC, The Ultimate Troubleshooter enables you to configure your PC for speed, and above all, long term stability. Remember : 65% of all computer problems are down to the software that is running on your PC. Amazing but true. As many users say after using The Ultimate Troubleshooter : "*I finally have my PC back to the speed it had when I first bought it, and better !*".
- Most importantly, The Ultimate Troubleshooter avoids speaking to you in technical jargon in favour of explaining things in **plain language** understandable by all levels of users.
- The Ultimate Troubleshooter also detects **spyware** and **adware**, the scourge of so many PCs nowadays. TUT also detects many **viruses** (you should however also have a good antivirus program in addition to TUT – all PCs should have one).
- The Ultimate Troubleshooter includes an industry leading **Housekeeping** module which takes you through the rigorous checklist steps that knowledgeable IT experts normally follow to keep a PC lean, mean, and healthy.
- **Brilliantly useful to all home and business users.** And unbelievably useful to IT and Network support specialists and professionals as The Ultimate Troubleshooter caters for both the every day user and the Pro who will love its **WHOIS, TraceRoute, Ping, and Name Server Lookup** features.
- As a reviewer famously said : "*It's like having a \$100/hour computer consultant right there with you, every minute of the day, every day of the week, for a one-off fee of just \$35*". (1-year of product updates and write-ups updates included with the purchase; annual subscription renewals thereafter).

Contact Info

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Spyware, Adware, Does it Really Matter ? Spyware? Adware? Does it really matter?...

NO! – It's what you do not want on your PC that matters.

The spyware/adware controversy currently taking up most of the world's IT columns is looking more and more like a Marx Brothers movie or a Christmas pantomime with the anti-spyware crowd shouting "Oh yes it is!", while the adware/spyware producers attempt to drown them out with their own chant of "Oh no it isn't!". Meanwhile the lawyers fire off injunctions as the legislators attempt to define the rules of engagement and, every now and again, someone crosses the no-man's land to join the 'enemy'.

Confused ? You will be. It's why they invented small print and end-user license agreements.

Any legal definition of spyware will be good for about a week. By then the producers will have made enough changes to allow their lawyers to argue that they're now making something else. It's already happening. Only the very worst programs will get caught in that net.

But wait a minute; let's just step back a bit and ask ourselves a simple question... Does it really matter what you call it ?

Seriously ? I mean I know there's a whole industry growing up around the argument and I'm sure all the people involved have families to feed and mortgages to pay. But the truth is, your PC – anybody's PC – has a whole bunch of stuff running on it that you don't know about and it's not just the adware or spyware that can cause you problems.

Take right now. I'm writing this on a PC running Windows 2000; I'm using Microsoft Word to write the article and Novell GroupWise in case anyone wants to email me. So I'm using two applications and an operating system. So how many actual programs do I have running ? Answer: Thirty. That's right, 30, as in three-zero. And that's with a carefully cleaned system !

I've got antivirus update and support background tasks, a PDF print manager, device managers, service managers and, quite possibly, manager managers. They're all using up memory and resources and, if not properly configured, could get in each other's way and cause problems. Some even report back to the company that made them.

What any PC user really needs to know is :

What programs are running on my machine ?

What do those programs do ?

Which programs I do NOT want on my PC, any day, any time ?

Which programs I do not need running for my type of PC utilization ?

And they need all those answers in plain, easy to understand, language. "Smoothing my web access while enhancing my Internet browsing experience" doesn't tell me anything. Telling me that a program will send information about my browsing habits to a company that will then send me related adverts in return, does. It doesn't need to be labeled spyware, adware, malware, scumware, or any other ware as long as I know what it does and have an easy way to stop it doing it.

Ideally all this would either be on the packaging or the download page so that we could make a choice before we parted with our money or hit the download button. Sadly that isn't the world we live in and, as ever, it will be the programs we most need to know about that will give us the least amount of information in the most confusing form.

With the legal arguments already flying thick and fast, the likelihood is that anyone producing an anti-anything program will find themselves spending most of their time in court defending a dwindling data-

base.

Another problem with most 'anti' programs is that they only tell you when they've found something that fits the definitions they are using – which can sometimes pick up legitimate programs as well. They never give you a list of all the stuff they ignored and yet your problem could be with one of those tasks.

There will probably never be a way in which you can be totally safe and still be connected to the Internet. But you have a much better chance of avoiding malicious programs and keeping your PC running at it's best if you know everything that's running on it. Dentists have always recommended brushing after every meal. How about "brushing" after every Internet session especially if your children have been on it ?

Making certain types of programs illegal will certainly help as long as the laws are enforced, but deciding what's best for your own PC and your own needs is always going to be the smart choice in the long run.

What we really want is for software vendors to supply the information we need in a language we can understand.

Maurice McElroy

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