



134	General
136	Windows
141	Internet
144	Applications
144	Pass it on



↓ General

C I was using my computer when a classical tune started playing via the internal speaker. Could it be a virus? My virus checker is up to date.

A We think there used to be a DOS virus that played tunes on the speaker. But it's more likely that the CPU is overheating because the fan has failed. The first time we heard of this we thought it was a joke, but apparently some computers that have an Award Bios may play Beethoven's *Für Elise* or *It's a Small, Small World* if they detect that the CPU fan is failing or the power supply voltages are out of specification.

C I reformatted my hard disk and reinstalled Windows 95. This cured the trouble I was having, but now every time I switch on the computer it asks me for the time and the date before Windows starts.

A Check your autoexec.bat file using Notepad. You'll probably find that it contains two commands: Time and Date. Delete them from the file.

C I'm concerned about the privacy of personal files when my computer goes into the repair shop. My Microsoft Office and Lotus files are protected by a password, and I type my password when logging in to my ISP so it isn't saved by Windows. But how can I protect my emails from being read by a nosy repairman?

A There's a variety of methods you can use to keep data secure. There are products such as Cryptainer PE, shown below and available from www.cypherix.com/cryptainerpe or this month's cover disc, which create a virtual encrypted drive on which you can store

→ Cryptainer PE can create a virtual encrypted drive on which you can store your personal data

your personal data. Alternatively you could keep it on a removable disk or even one of those inexpensive USB memory devices which you can keep safely at home while your PC is away being repaired.

This would have the added benefit that you won't lose everything if the PC comes back from the repairers with the hard disk reformatted. That has happened to more than one *PC Advisor* reader, so it's a solution well worth considering.

C I have a desktop PC and a notebook which are networked using a pair of Actiontec USB wireless network adapters. At any time when the two PCs are talking to each other, the desktop may lock up completely and I am forced to reboot the computer.

There's no apparent pattern to this: it could happen as soon as I turn the notebook on, or after two hours of use. Neither machines give me any trouble when the wireless network isn't being used. Any ideas?

A We aren't aware of any such problems specific to your Actiontec networking hardware. It seems most likely that the trouble is caused by the USB controller in your desktop system. From the System Control Panel, open Device Manager and determine the type of USB controller that is being used.

If it's a Via controller then that's bad news, as we've seen many reports of problems with these controllers. All you can do if you have one of these controllers is make sure that you have installed the



latest drivers for it (try your system vendor, the motherboard maker's website or www.via.com.tw). There's a patch that claims to fix the problem 'when transferring large amounts of data, the system will hang', which sounds encouraging.

The controller chip is part of the motherboard, so if the latest patches don't solve the problem your only options may be to upgrade your system or install a new USB host card in a spare PCI slot. If you do this, be sure to check the chipset used. If choosing a motherboard, it's safest to stick with Intel. If you buy an add-in card that won't be an option, but Opti-based cards look like a safe bet.

C About two out of three times when my computer is powered up from cold, there is no response from the keyboard. The mouse works, allowing me to shut down, but it then hangs at the 'Windows is shutting down' screen. If I now press the reset button, the computer invariably boots up normally.

A There are two keyboard controllers – one on the motherboard and one in the keyboard – and one or other of them would seem to be a bit slow to wake up. As it's cheaper to get another keyboard – and cheaper still if you borrow one from a friend – we'd suggest trying a different keyboard to see what effect that has on the problem.

If the trouble persists, it must be the controller on the motherboard that's faulty. As it's a warm-up fault, it's most unlikely to be caused by software.

C I rebuilt my PC using a new motherboard and graphics card. It is running Windows 98. Everything is fine except when I want to back up my hard drive to CD-R using Nero 5.5. Every time Nero gets to the end of the burning process, messages appear in the burn log saying that Nero 'could not perform EndTrack' and claiming a 'Session fixation error', whatever that is.

A Check whether these errors happen during a simulated burn. According to Nero's support folks, if errors occur during a burn and not during a simulation, this usually indicates that other software is trying to access the CD.



Make sure that no other CD-writing software is installed which might conflict with Nero.

The copies of your autoexec.bat and config.sys files show that they are full of old DOS drivers which have no place on a system running Windows 98. Get rid of autoexec.bat and config.sys completely by the simple expedient of

← If you're having trouble burning CDs, try a lens cleaner. But first check with the drive's manufacturer whether doing so will invalidate your warranty

renaming the files and your computer will probably work a lot better.

If your burn errors aren't the result of a software conflict then either your CD writer doesn't like the discs you are using or the drive itself is failing. If the errors continue to occur using good-quality media, it may be time for a new burner.

Around three quarters of CD burning problems are caused by mechanical and optical faults in the drive. These are often repairable, but the cost of an engineer's time is more than the price of a new drive. You could try using a CD lens cleaning kit, but some manufacturers advise against this as they claim that the use of cleaning discs can harm the laser calibration.

Unfortunately, the process of disassembling and cleaning a CD-ROM drive will vary from model to model so we can't advise you to try it.

Looking for help with your PC problems, and want to speak to someone direct? YOU CAN, with PC Advisor's Expert Advice Hotline



Operating hours

Call the PC Advisor Expert Advice Hotline any time between 8am and 11 pm, seven days a week. Limited call duration. If you've got a major problem, and you think it will take more than 12 minutes to solve, then you can leave it with our engineers and call them back later for the solution.

Single problem vouchers

If your PC has a recurring problem and you think you'll need to use the Hotline on a more regular basis, try our problem vouchers. For £19.80, you can talk to our experts for as long as it takes to solve your query. Call 0870 739 7602 for more information.

Since this service began more than three years ago, thousands of PC Advisor readers have called our team of experts for instant solutions to their PC problems at work or at home. No question – whether it's software- or hardware-based – is too simple or too complex. Our experts are here to help whatever your dilemma, and they're just a phone call away.



If you have a PC problem, call us now on

0906 906 0272

If you have an internet problem, call us now on

0906 906 0274

Hassle-free service

The PC Advisor Expert Advice Hotline costs £1.50 per minute, and you will be charged for the service on your standard telephone bill.

Full money-back guarantee


We aim to give you a value-for-money service so, if you are not completely satisfied with the solution, we'll refund the cost of your call. Simply fax us your complaint on 0870 739 7601.

Help for small businesses

When you subscribe to our special Full System Cover service, you can have as many calls as you like of unlimited length. For an annual fee of £169 per system, this service is the perfect solution for home or small business users. Call 0870 739 7602 for details.

PC ADVISOR EXPERT ADVICE HOTLINE

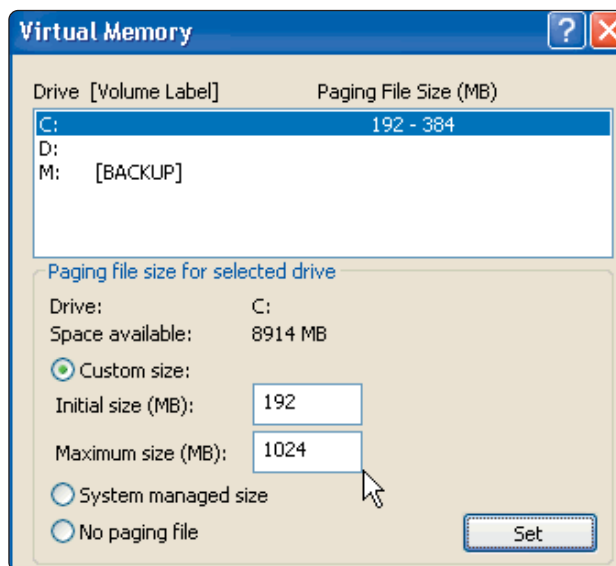
↓ Windows

 My PC runs Windows 98 SE. After following the instructions for speeding the swap file (*PC Advisor*, May 03, page 96) by disabling virtual memory and restarting, my computer started in Safe Mode. Upon examination, the virtual memory box was still checked, so I tried again. The same thing happened. The only way out was to return to the earlier Windows-managed setting.

A From reports we've had, it seems that Windows 98 often won't start when virtual memory is disabled. It may be that your system has insufficient memory. Windows 95 wouldn't start without virtual memory on systems with less than 8MB of RAM. Microsoft probably increased the limit for later, more memory-hungry versions of Windows but to the best of our knowledge it didn't document what the limit is.

That's purely academic, though, as in the opinion of our Helpline expert, and indeed many others, there's no benefit

→ Setting the minimum virtual memory size can help performance, but to minimise problems make the maximum very large



whatever to be gained from defragmenting the swap file. The reason is that Windows reads from and writes to the swap file in 4KB chunks, each of which is exactly the same size as a 'page' of memory.

There is no relationship between one 4KB chunk in the swap file and the ones before and after it. Therefore the organisation of these chunks will be no more optimal after defragmentation of the swap file than it was before.

There may be advantages in trying to ensure the swap file or paging file occupies a contiguous area of disk space, though they are probably unmeasurable. You can achieve this by setting a minimum size for the swap file after defragmenting the drive on which it has been placed.

However, user-managed swap files with inappropriate size values can cause problems that are hard to solve months later when everyone has forgotten about tinkering with the swap file settings. This is why Helpline generally advises readers to let Windows manage its own swap file.

As regards to other tips on optimising the swap file, there can be benefits in placing it on a separate drive if you have one, as this will allow swap file accesses to occur at the same time as accesses to files on the C drive. But most experts agree placing the swap file on a separate partition on the same drive will actually decrease performance.

This advice is incorrect, but still commonly seen. It's valid for Unix or Linux systems that are set up with separate system and user partitions, and the swap file in between them. But most Windows systems aren't set up that way. Once the drive has been defragmented the heads won't move beyond the part of the C partition that is occupied by data.

If you force the drive heads to seek all the way to the D partition whenever Windows needs to access the swap file, you'll cause extra head movement that will slow performance down and prematurely wear out your hard drive.

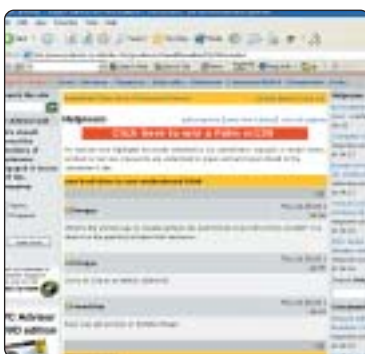
Search *PC Advisor's* free online Helproom

The *PC Advisor* online Helproom contains an indispensable database of answers to common questions, regarding all aspects of PC software. This ranges from general Windows issues to problems with specific applications and covers all types of PC hardware and software, including system components and peripherals.

Alternatively, you can ask for help from one of the visitors in our online forums. Sign up as a registered user (which is free) and then browse to one of the discussion

forums. In the Helproom your first stop should be the searchable database of frequently asked and previously answered queries. With almost half a million postings, you'll almost certainly find the answer you need in this archive of queries, simply by entering a couple of keywords.

If our online database can't solve your problem, try posting a question in the Helproom forum, where more than 200 queries are answered every day. The forum is manned by our team of Helproom angels who are ready and willing to lend a hand on anything from system crashes to virus alerts.



www.pcadvisor.co.uk/helproom

I recently installed Windows XP on my PC. After doing so I was unable to use my printer or my Epson 2400 Photo scanner. So I uninstalled the new operating system, leaving Windows 98 and Me on my computer instead. The printer began working again but the scanner remained unusable.

To fix the problem, I uninstalled the scanner, disconnected it and tried to reinstall the software. But I received several error messages such as 'The Windows installer service could not be accessed' and 'C:\Windows\Temp\...\Isrtd.dll Access Denied'.

A The error messages relate to the InstallShield setup program that the Epson scanner drivers are presumably using. We suggest that you completely clear out your Windows Temp folder and reboot before reinstalling. You should also close down any other software that may be running at the time you run Setup, especially your virus checker.

If you still experience problems, you may find some help by visiting the technical support page for your scanner at http://support.epson.com/hardware/scanner/pr24p_/documentation.html.

I Although Disk Defragmenter has run happily on my Windows 98 PC for years, it now sticks for hours at 10 percent. ScanDisk shows no errors, no restarts occur due to disk changes and

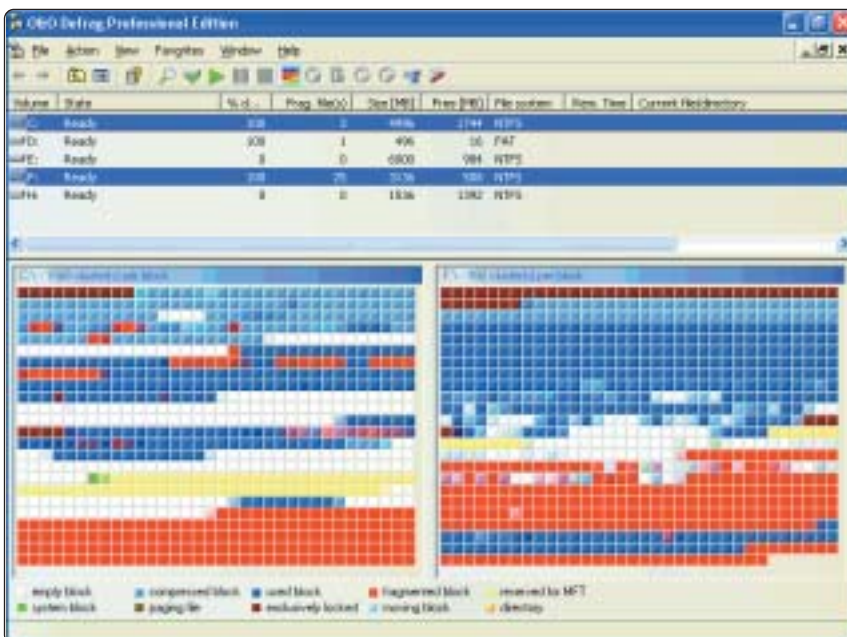
the full display appears to show that clusters are being moved. The same thing happens if I try to run it in Safe Mode.

A We have no advice other than to be more patient. Start the defrag when you've finished with the computer and see how it has got on in the morning.

The percentage progress is not based on any calculation of how long the task will take (which would be almost impossible to estimate) but on the stage the task has got to. From 0 percent to four percent Defrag is actually running ScanDisk to check that the disk is okay; from five percent to nine percent it is working out where to put things on the disk.

The fact that it has reached 10 percent shows that it has started the defragmentation. However, if the disk is badly fragmented or the presence of many hidden system files that are normally never moved makes the task more difficult, the initial estimate of progress may show that it will take a very long time.

You could try another defragmenter such as O&O Defrag, which is shown below (www.oo-software.com/english/products/oodefragv4), DiskKeeper Workstation (www.homeusersoftware.com/index.htm) or PerfectDisk 2000 Personal Edition (www.raxco.com/products/perfectdiskpe), all of which are available on this month's cover disc. But unless the time you waste waiting for Defrag to finish is costing you money, it isn't worth it.



I recently installed Windows 2000 on my PC. Since then, after watching a DVD movie for 10 or 15 minutes the screen freezes and I have to Ctrl, Alt, Del. I then get a blue screen error that reads: 'Stop: 0x00000076 (0x00000000, 0xFE55D020, 0X00000001, 0X00000000) Process_Has_Locked_Pages'.

I asked in the *PC Advisor* Helpline and was directed to an article in the Microsoft Knowledgebase which showed me how to determine the cause of the error. It turned out to be a faulty driver, but having identified the file in question I don't know what to do with it.

A For the benefit of readers we'll start at the beginning of the problem you originally described in the Helpline forum. The Stop error 'Process_Has_Locked_Pages' with an initial value of 0x76 means that a device driver has not released pages of memory that it locked.

The only reason for this is a poorly written driver. To determine the name of the culprit, you'll need to open the Registry Editor, expand Hkey_Local_Machine\System\CurrentControlSet\Control\Session Manager and select Memory Management.

In the righthand pane, right-click and select New, DWord Value. Name the new value TrackLockedPages and set it to 1. The next time the error occurs, you'll receive additional information enabling you to identify the faulty driver. After you have obtained this information, open the Registry Editor again and delete the DWord value you created, since leaving the memory tracking switched on will have an adverse effect on system performance.

In your case, you received a report that said:

```
***ADDRESS EB63435C base at
EB630000, DateStamp 377d563a -
mpegport.sys
```

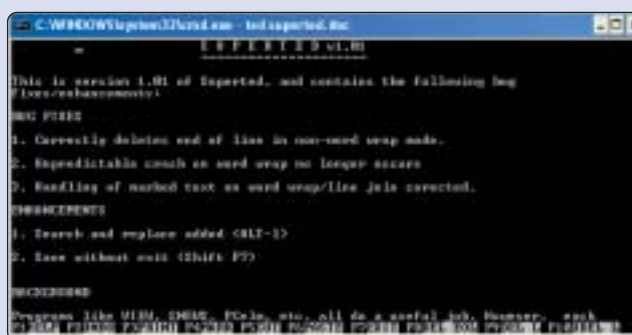
← If Windows' own defrag tool takes too long, you could try an alternative such as O&O Defrag PE

Emergency recovery? Call SuperTED!



Savvy PC users keep a bootable system disk handy with tools like SYS, Fdisk and Format for use in emergencies. But sometimes when you're trying to fix a broken system you need to edit text files like config.sys, autoexec.bat or win.ini. Most versions of Windows include the DOS editor Edit, but if you boot from floppy the chances are you'll see 'Command not found' if you try to run it. The simplest solution is to carry a DOS text editor around on your emergency recovery disk.


Enter SuperTED. SuperTED is a DOS text editor that occupies 7KB, so there should be room for it on any emergency floppy. To find how to use it, hit F1 to see the online help file. It's easier to use than it looks: just type 'TED filename' to open a file and press F7 to save and exit. You can download SuperTED from <ftp://ftp.demon.net/pub/ibmpc/dos/apps/editors/superted.zip> or see this month's cover disc.



→ It's small, it's powerful, it's SuperTED

This tells you the culprit is the driver mpegport.sys, which we believe to be associated with a Creative Labs hardware decoder. Deleting the driver won't be a big improvement; it will prevent the error from occurring, but only because you won't be able to view DVD movies at all. Therefore your best next step is to see if there are any newer Windows 2000 drivers for your Creative Labs product on its website at <http://uk.europe.creative.com/support/drivers/welcome.asp>.

If you have a Creative Labs DXR3 then there's another thing you can try which has resolved other problems with this hardware. Check in Device Manager that the DXR3 is the only device using its assigned IRQ except for the IRQ Holder for PCI Steering. If another device is sharing an IRQ with it, try to resolve the problem by changing the positions of the PCI cards in your computer or by manually assigning the IRQs (if your computer's Bios supports this.)


 **My computer, which runs Windows 98 SE, has an annoying tendency to stall during startup.**

The border at the bottom of the Windows logo screen stops moving until I hit Enter then it continues and Windows loads normally. How can I resolve the problem so I don't have to stand over the computer while it boots up?

A This symptom indicates that one of the programs or drivers loaded by the startup files config.sys or autoexec.bat has displayed a message and is awaiting a response from you before startup can continue. To see what the message is, hit Esc instead of Enter. This will get rid of the Windows logo so that you can see what's on the text mode screen.

Obviously, without seeing what the message is we can't advise you what to do about it, but in about 99 out of 100 cases the best solution is simply to get rid of these DOS startup files altogether by renaming them to, for example, xconfig.sys and xautoexec.bat. If this has an adverse affect, restore the original filenames, use Notepad to edit the file containing the line that caused the error and remove the offending command.

↓ Internet

 **I use AOL 7.0, Windows XP Home and a SmartLink 56K voice-only modem. I'm having constant problems and crashes when connecting to the internet. Evesham and Microsoft both say that a modem driver update is needed, but the driver update facility tells me no update is available.**


I found an update from the SmartLink site but when I try it a window appears saying that it is not XP approved. How do I proceed?

A Although AOL 6.0, supplied with Windows XP, works well with it, AOL 7.0 and 7.0a both suffer from problems. AOL 7.0b works with Windows XP but apparently this is only available upon request from AOL. This may be one explanation for your troubles.

Apart from this, some SmartLink modems can experience problems with AOL including crashes, shutdowns and blue screen errors. New Windows XP drivers can be obtained from www.modem-help.co.uk/chips/smlhamr.html#con.

If the SmartLink site you visited said that the drivers you downloaded were for Windows XP then it is probably safe to install them, despite the 'non-approved' warning. Unfortunately, vendors have to pay Microsoft to certify products for XP so many of them just don't bother.

As you mentioned Evesham, you probably don't have a Packard Bell PC. For the benefit of others, though, it's worth mentioning that Packard Bell SmartLink modems have problems connecting to AOL for a different reason. You can find driver updates for these at www.pbnet.nl/support/drv/cat131.html.

 **I'm using BT Openworld, Windows 98 SE, Internet Explorer and Outlook Express 6.0. My connection stops working at random intervals. When I try to go to another page I see that the icon of two screens in the System Tray give an occasional flash and after a couple of minutes I receive a message that the page cannot be displayed.**

If I start Outlook Express at this point it offers to connect me, despite the connection symbol still showing in the System Tray. My settings are correct according to the automatic test provided by BT Openworld. Where do you suppose the fault lies?

A It's very hard to say, as there are so many possible points of failure. By the looks of it, there is a loss of connectivity with your internet provider. Try accessing your ISP's home page the next time this happens, as this would show whether you have a general connectivity problem or whether it's simply the site you're trying to reach that is uncontactable at that time.

If you are losing all connectivity then it's most likely to be an ISP problem, although it's possible that noise on your telephone line has disturbed communication to the extent that neither side knows what to do next. If a software upgrade is available for your modem, installing it might improve the reliability of your internet connections.

The vogue for software-based personal firewalls and inline virus checkers doesn't help much, as they introduce another couple of possible points of failure. While appreciating the risks involved, if you're running such software we would recommend disabling it for a while to see whether this is the cause of the problem.

→ Not how the designer intended



Q When I look at the preview of The Sandgate Singers web page, which I designed, or view it on the web using my computer, the words 'Sandgate Singers' are in smaller sized letters than the word 'The'. On another computer both lines are the same size. This disparity only became apparent after I upgraded my computer's motherboard.

A You have made several errors in formatting the heading of your page. We can't see a connection between this problem and your motherboard upgrade, though. When we noticed that your fax was dated 1 April, we wondered if the bit about the motherboard was meant to be a joke...

Looking at the source code of your page, the word 'The' is formatted with heading tags <H1> as well as italic <I> and is also a hyperlink to the site www.choirs.org.uk. The next line, 'Sandgate Singers', is not a heading style. It is formatted with tags <P>, <I> and and it is not part of the hyperlink. In both lines, you've used tags containing a 'size' value to get the letters to the size you wanted.

The trouble is that the first line's <H1> tag could override the other format tags, depending on what you're using to view the page, so there is no guarantee that the two lines will look the same. This is probably why you're seeing different results on separate computers.

That's the trouble with using visual design tools like Microsoft FrontPage: they make it possible to design web pages without understanding the underlying HTML code, but they aren't clever enough to stop you from generating HTML code that's rather silly.

The other mistake you've made is to specify for your heading the font Lisbon

Cursive. This may look very nice on your machine, but most people who visit your page won't even have this font on their system so your heading will come up in good old plain Times New Roman, as it did when we visited it (see above).

If you want to create a heading or logo using an unusual font it's best to do it using a graphics package then create a GIF file and insert this into your web page. That way, everyone will see it how it was meant to look, regardless of what fonts are installed on their computer.

Q Why can't I insert a Tiff image into my web page?

A Only three types of image files are supported natively by web browsers. These are Jpeg, GIF and PNG. All of these image types support compression, so they can be quick to download. Tiff files can be much larger than the equivalent Jpeg or GIF file, which is probably why the format isn't supported, although compression is available as an option.

The best answer is undoubtedly to convert your Tiff image into one of the other formats for display on your web page. This will ensure that everyone who visits the page will be able to view the image. However, this may not be a convenient solution if you need to frequently update the images, can't change the format they arrive in and want the process to involve as little work as possible.

In this case, you can use an internet browser plug-in to display the images in the web page. Be aware, though, that many visitors to your site may not want to download a plug-in just to view your images. You'll also need to use a different syntax to embed Tiff images in your pages,

Glossary

tip

Unsure of a technical term? Want to check exactly what that acronym means? Load up our searchable Glossary which you'll find on the cover disc. To navigate the Glossary you'll need to install Acrobat Reader, also on the CD.



Stop the screensaver

tip

If you're a regular Helpline reader you'll already know that to avoid interruptions it's a good idea to shut down all applications before defragmenting your hard disk. But it's easy to forget to disable the screensaver. By creating a special entry in the Registry you can make Disk Defragmenter disable the screensaver automatically when you run it. Note that this tip will have no effect if you run the defragmenter as a scheduled task.

Start the Registry Editor, expand the folders Hkey_Current_User\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion then select the folder Applets. Right-click Applets and select New, Key. Name the new key Defrag. It will be shown as a folder. Select it, right-click it and select New, Key. Name this new key Settings then select it. In the righthand pane double-click the value (Default) and enter the text 'Yes'.

To make the task easier, we've created a REG file called disable.reg (you'll find it on this month's cover disc), which will do this for you. Simply right-click the file and choose Merge.

which might require you to edit the HTML by hand if your web page design tool doesn't support it.

Most image viewer plug-ins must be purchased before you can use them on your website and some of them are horrendously expensive. There is, however, a free Tiff viewer plug-in available as a small download at www.alternatiff.com or on this month's cover disc. AlternaTIFF has one off-putting feature, though: to activate it users must register via a form that requires their name, company and email address.

The simplest way to install AlternaTIFF is to do it online. View the source code of the test pages to see how to use it.

When I start Internet Explorer, it opens at a site I don't wish to visit. I find that the home page setting in Internet Options has changed. If I reset this to my preferred home page, it lasts only until I shut down Windows. The next time I turn on the computer and start IE, I'm back at the unwanted site again. Please help – this is very annoying.

A What has happened is that a website you've visited or email you've received has installed a bit of software that runs at startup and changes the Registry value where your home page setting is stored. There are several different ways someone can hijack the home page setting of your web browser, and without knowing what method has

been used it's impossible to give specific recovery instructions.

One way to help prevent this happening in the future is to upgrade to the latest version of Internet Explorer. It's more secure, so at least you'll see a 'Do you want to allow this?' warning before

anything is able to change your settings. To help identify the culprit, use a tool like Spybot Search and Destroy, shown below and available from <http://security.kolla.de> or this month's cover disc. This will scan your system for known hijackers and spyware and remove any it finds.

It's worth running this package even if you have a good virus checker and use a firewall, because some of this rogue software is not detected by either type of product.

If for some reason Spybot doesn't detect your particular hijacker, try using HijackThis (from www.spywareinfo.com/~merijn) instead. HijackThis, also on this month's cover disc, is a less sophisticated program that lists all the things that could potentially be hijacking your browser.

Many of the things HijackThis lists are perfectly harmless programs or browser add-ins, so it's up to you to decide whether something is the hijacker before telling the program to fix it. However, there's a backup and restore function that should enable you to undo any undesirable changes.



→ Let Spybot search out and destroy hijackers

Helpline FAQs Directory

Ever have a problem with your PC and feel sure you once read about the solution in a past issue of Helpline? The FAQ Directory can help you. Comprising 18 months worth of questions and answers from Helpline, the Directory is a searchable database of almost 400 questions and answers. It covers common Windows dilemmas, plus bugs and glitches in software, hardware errors and web troubleshooting. Whatever your problem, our Directory can almost certainly provide you with the solution. The FAQ Directory is available with *Tips & Tricks*, on sale now at all good newsagents.



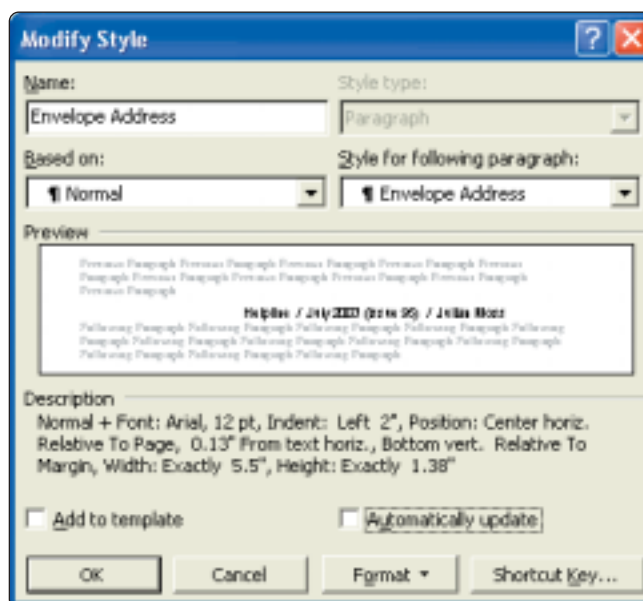
↓ Applications

I'm using Microsoft Office 97 and I find that envelopes no longer print correctly. No matter what size of envelope I specify, Word now prints the address details as an A4-size document. I tried your tip of renaming the Data folder in the Registry, but it didn't help this time.

A The way envelope addresses are printed depends on the Envelope Address style. This has obviously got messed up. Click on Format, Style, select Envelope Address, click Modify and then correct the settings by clicking the Format button. It looks as if the Frame settings are the ones requiring attention.

If it's difficult to find the right settings, a simpler approach would be to close Word, locate the file normal.dot and rename it. The next time you start Word it will create a new normal.dot with default settings. If you lose too many personal preferences as a result of this, note down all the settings for the default Envelope

→ Envelopes won't print correctly if the Envelope Address style is wrong



Address style, as shown in the Modify Style dialog box above. Rename your old normal.dot back to its original filename and make its Envelope Address style settings match the default ones.

I My computer runs Windows XP. The other day I was browsing its Documents and Settings folder which I found contained 1,287

files with an IDX extension, starting with ca00.idx. What are they and can I delete them?

A After searching the web, we have unearthed several instances of this and they are not specific to Windows XP. Some people have discovered these files in their My Documents folder and other places. We can't be certain of the identity of the program that created them.

The file type IDX, being a three-letter shortening of 'index', is used by a great many different programs for their index files (which are basically tables that allow quick access to a record in a database.)

However, we have a strong suspicion that the program Nero Burning ROM is the culprit. If you're using Nero, it should be easy to confirm this (the files will average about 50KB each). You probably chose this location when Nero first asked you for a location for its track database. It's not the best place to store these files, but if Nero is happy it doesn't really matter that they're there. You can delete them if you don't mind losing your CD track database.

I Some time ago I installed a freeware utility called CleanUp. I recently uninstalled it, but despite using RegCleaner I'm still left with a hand holding a duster superimposed over most of my shortcut icons – a graphical reminder used by CleanUp to prompt me to start it. How can I get rid of this?

Pass it on: tips from readers

tip

If it's broke, don't Fix-It

Steve Fitzsimmons was experiencing frequent lockups on his PC running Windows 98 SE. Neither the free Fix-It Utilities nor SiSoft Sandra could find anything wrong, and running ScanDisk and Defrag didn't make a difference either. Eventually, Steve uninstalled Fix-It Utilities and the lockups stopped. It isn't the first time we've heard of tools intended to solve problems actually causing them. Thanks for passing your experience on, Steve.

Outlook settings backed up

Anthony Vickers wrote to advise how to back up account settings – for example, server names, login details and so on – in Microsoft Outlook. He searched in vain for any help in the Microsoft Knowledgebase and even tried Genie Outlook 2000/XP Backup (from www.genie-soft.com), which claims to do the job, without success. Eventually, he discovered that these settings are stored at Hkey_Current_User\Software\Microsoft\Windows Messaging Subsystem\Profiles (under Windows 95/98/Me) or Hkey_Current_User\Software\Microsoft\Windows NT\CurrentVersion\Windows Messaging Subsystem\Profiles (under NT/2000/XP). To back up the settings, use the Registry Editor to export this key to a REG file.

Thanks for the tip, Anthony. Note that if you import the backup file to a new computer you'll have to ensure that the PST files are also restored to their original locations. Alternatively you could edit the paths in the Registry profiles so that they point to the files in their new location.

A We don't know how CleanUp, shown right, achieved this effect, and the version we tried didn't seem to use it, so it's difficult to advise you. CleanUp's home page is at <http://cleanup.stevengould.org> and there is a support group for users of the product at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cleanup>. We suggest that you ask there.

→ CleanUp deletes unwanted files from your computer



C I'm using Microsoft Access 2000 on Windows 2000. If I try to create a new database using a wizard or by importing data from Excel I receive the error message 'ActiveX component cannot create object'. However, I can create a database manually.

A The usual cause of this error is that the data access objects DLL is not properly registered. To correct this, use the Windows search tool to look for `dao*.dll;regsvr32`. On completion, the results window should show two files: `regsvr32.exe` and `dao360.dll`. (The name of the DAO file will be different for other versions of Microsoft Access.) Drag the DAO file and drop it on `regsvr32.exe`. You should see a message box telling you that 'DllRegisterServer succeeded'.

If this doesn't solve the problem, search for `Acw*.mde` (these are Microsoft Access wizards) and delete them. Then delete the entire DAO folder (it is probably in `C:\Program Files\Common Files\Microsoft Shared\DAO`). Now run Setup and reinstall Microsoft Access.

C I've been using a database called Masterfile PC for more than 10 years, first on Amstrad PCWs and then on PCs. I bought a PC with Windows

Me and was still able to run it, even though it's a DOS program. What I want to know is, if I upgrade the PC to Windows XP Home will Masterfile still work?

A We asked Trevor Rix of TWR Computing (www.twrcomputing.co.uk), the sole supplier of Masterfile PC. He replied: "Masterfile PC runs fine on Windows XP and on all versions of Windows that we are aware of. Although it has been around for a long time it is still extremely good, lightning fast and very flexible."

C I have some old DOS programs that I wish to run occasionally. I have created a DOS partition for them on my new PC, but the problem is that my video card (a 32MB GeForce MX II AGP model) apparently doesn't support DOS graphics. Can you suggest a solution?

A One of the advantages of Windows over DOS was that it had a common graphics interface that

allowed any application to use any graphics card. DOS graphics programs, on the other hand, had to provide their own drivers for each graphics card, which was a bit of a nuisance for software developers and a complete pain for users when a new graphics card came out that their favourite game didn't support.

The Vesa (Video Equipment Standards Association) standard was an attempt to provide a solution to this problem. It provided a common graphics interface that all DOS programs could use. Many games developers, however, continued to prefer using custom drivers for each graphics card as this let them exploit the hardware-specific features of individual cards, which resulted in greater performance.

Vesa support is largely irrelevant now that the majority of software runs under Windows, although it's still used by many people who run Unix and Linux. A number of modern graphics cards still provide Vesa support, however the Vesa standard has moved on since the days of DOS. Your GeForce MX II has Vesa 3.0 support in hardware but some DOS programs will only work with Vesa 2.0, while others will only work if they detect a software Vesa driver in memory.

There are a couple of tools that have been developed to overcome the problems of running Vesa 2.0-compliant software on modern hardware. VBEPlus (<http://home.student.utwente.nl/r.muller/unirefresh>), available on the cover disc, is a software driver that adds support for older Vesa modes to graphics cards like yours that are based on an nVidia chipset. For users of other graphics cards, AdvanceCAB (<http://advancename.sourceforge.net>) may provide the solution. ■

Contact us

Please send your Helpline questions to pcadvisor_letters@idg.com. To help us sort your messages, please use the word 'Helpline' in the subject header. Alternatively, you can post your queries to Helpline, *PC Advisor*, Fifth Floor, 85 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 4TQ.

We aim to give you the best assistance we can. However, given the limitations of this type of advice, we can't guarantee that what we say will work, and we can't accept responsibility for any damage arising as a result of this advice. Always back up your system before you make any changes. If you send us software disks, make sure they are not original copies as we cannot return them. We regret that we cannot answer technical queries over the phone except via our Expert Advice Hotline on 0906 906 0272. Calls are charged at £1.50 per minute.