



By Ned Hickson

Computer acting up? Back-hand it with an antistatic wrist strap

Today, we will be covering basic troubleshooting techniques for your computer. By the end of this column, you will know how to identify a problem within your system, and then determine whether you can:

- a) Fix it yourself, or
- b) Save yourself the trouble by taking your computer somewhere and shooting it.

To begin with, most of us have absolutely no idea how a computer works. This is illustrated by the fact that, when there's a problem, we get really mad and yell at the monitor.

This is sort of like yelling at the refrigerator because the container we thought was "Cool Whip" actually turned out to be refried beans left over from last year's Cinco De Mayo party.

The fact is, refrigerators and computer monitors are just boxes filled with stuff coming from somewhere else; over time, improper maintenance can result in something that really stinks.

One of the reasons we know so little about computers is because they keep making them easier and easier to use. This in turn makes them harder and harder to understand because, as technology makes things smaller and smaller, there's less and less actual STUFF inside. Right now, you can still look in and see a few wires and some solder melted onto a plastic motherboard, which makes it possible to at least PRE-TEND you understand

what's going on:

You see! If I take a piece of aluminum foil and touch this part to that shiny blob over there I can AAAAAAGH!

At the current rate of technology, that's all going to change as ever-increasing macro-technology scales down the internal components of personal computers. This means we need to take better care of our current computers so that we can pretend to understand them for as long as possible. It does not require being able to tear apart and reassemble your entire PC system. In fact, a recent study conducted by Falcon Safety Products, Inc., showed that 70 percent of computer malfunctions are simply caused by...

You guessed it:

People shooting their computers.

No. Actually, according to a nationwide survey of 1,300

computer technicians, most computer malfunctions were caused by things like food, dead rodents, cockroach nests, and, in the case of one Pittsburg, Calif., technician, "a stash of marijuana" that mostly effected the computer's memory.

This brings us to how to clean your computer. You will need an antistatic wrist strap, a can of compressed air, and, if at all possible, a drug-sniffing dog.

Once you have these items, you can remove the housing from your computer and use your antistatic wrist strap to begin cleaning. Depending on what you find inside, you can utilize the alligator clip attached to the wrist strap as either 1) a conductor to keep static electricity from discharging into the sensitive internal circuitry of your computer, or 2) a way to keep from burning your fingers.

Once this phase of cleaning has been completed, use the can of compressed air to blow out particles in some of those hard-to-get-to places—such as the nostrils of a drug-sniffing dog.

Repeat this process at least twice a year, or, depending on your situation, as often as you'd like for the next 3 to 5 years.

By then, of course, it will be time to get a new computer.

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