NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS FOR COMPUTER USERS

The start of a new year is always a good time to reflect and make new resolutions. While most people vow to exercise more often, quit smoking, and make other self-improvements, few people actually make computer-related resolutions. So why not make 2017 the year you make the effort to improve your computer habits? We listed a few resolutions below that, if carried out, will make you and your computer happier in the new year.

Back up your data

In order to protect your important files – photos, music, videos, and work documents – it's vital that you back up your data on a regular basis. Some great ways to back up your files include cloud storage programs like Google Drive, Dropbox, Amazon Cloud Drive, and iCloud. If you'd rather have a physical copy of your files, other ways to save data include USB flash drives and external hard drives. As a general rule, you should back up your data on a weekly basis. Check out our complete guide to backing up your computer for more info.

Delete unnecessary files

If you're like most people, you may have a whole slew of files and programs on your computer that you no longer need or want. It might take a chunk out of your day, but turn on some tunes and take the time to delete these files. Your computer will thank you for it since you'll also have more space and a speedier PC as a result.

Organize files

Once you've deleted all of your unnecessary files, try sorting through the ones you have left and organizing them by year. This way, you'll be able to find important photos and files much more quickly and easily.

Defrag

In order to make your computer run faster and smoother, it's a good idea to defrag the computer. If you're using a computer running Windows Vista or later, or Mac OS X, your computer is already defragmenting itself automatically. If you're not using one of these operating systems, check out our guide on how to speed up your PC for tips on how to defragment your computer.

Clean out your inbox

Email inboxes can easily become cluttered and disorganized. In addition to cleaning out files on a computer, cleaning out unnecessary emails should also be near the top of your New Year's to-do list. If you're using Gmail, you can easily create filters and organize emails into folders. For example, you can create a filter for anything shopping related and have those emails automatically added to your Shopping folder when they arrive. The same goes for work emails, personal emails, emails from your running group, etc.

If you want to start 2017 off on a clean slate by wiping out all of your emails but are afraid you may need them at some point down the road, check out our post on how to back up your Gmail to make sure you have a copy stored when you need it.

Consolidate and delete old email addresses

If you have multiple email addresses, it may be a good idea to combine them. If you have a Gmail account, but also a Yahoo, AOL, and Hotmail account, you can either set up Gmail's POP Mail Fetcher feature, which will grab your emails via Post Office Protocol (POP) and add them to your other Gmail messages; or you can go into each account and forward the emails to your Gmail address. Lifehacker has a great rundown on how to do both.

That said, if you can't even remember the last time that you logged into your Hotmail account, it may be a good idea to consider deleting this email address altogether.

Protect your computer against viruses

There's always a chance your computer will get infected with a virus, which is why it's important to install – and use – anti-malware software. Not only will this software protect your computer against viruses, it also protects your computer or laptop against potential hackers, spyware, and malicious phishing attempts. You should update this your antivirus software, as well as your operating system, Web browsers, and other crucial software, regularly. Don't know where to start? Check out our guide to the best free antivirus software.

Change your bank account password

Online banking is a convenient time saver, but it also opens up your bank account to hackers. You should consider changing your banking password at least once a year. Though many banks offer two-step verification, sending you a separate email or text to verify you as the correct user, you also need to make sure your password isn't easy to hack. Check out our guide to making yourself unhackable for some great password tips.

Make sure your wireless network is secure

Nowadays, we often take wireless Internet for granted. However, as a New Year's resolution, you should take the time to make sure that your wireless network is indeed secure. Why? Hackers can easily infiltrate an unsecure network and gain access to your bank account and other confidential information. Check out the password tips above, and make sure the password for your router is hard to crack. For example, don't make it your last name and house number. Also, some outdated routers are easier to hack into, so check out our wireless routing guide for more info on buying a secure router.

Keep your computer cool

In order to help keep your computer running smoothly, it is essential to keep your computer cool. To do so, you should be sure that there is adequate ventilation around your computer. If you're using a laptop, you can use a special stand to keep air flowing, some of which come with built-in fans. As dust can keep your computer warm, you should periodically remove dust from your computer using a vacuum cleaner and/or a can of compressed air. Before you stick the vacuum attachment into your PC, check out our guide to speeding up your computer for detailed instructions on how to safely clean your vents.

Avoid carpal tunnel syndrome

Carpal tunnel syndrome can be serious and debilitating, but there are certain measures you can implement to prevent damage to your body while using the computer. For example, always remember to support your wrists when you are using a mouse, and hold the mouse loosely in order to minimize tension in your hand.

Try something new

The New Year is an excellent time to jump into fresh experiences, so why not try something new on the computer? For instance, if you're still using Internet Explorer, why not give another browser a try like Google Chrome or Firefox? Or if you're a Pandora user, try out Spotify. And if you're really brave, how about checking out the new MySpace?

Spend time away from the computer

While computers are pretty awesome, it's important to remember to step away from the glowing screen from time to time – no, taking your laptop out of the house doesn't count. Make a resolution to get involved with a new activity, take a walk, or even read a book.

Document your passwords

Get a hard-covered notebook. Systematically record in the notebook <u>EVERY</u> username and password that you know. Make sure the entries that are case-sensitive are written correctly. Essential passwords that you MUST keep safe include:

- Your internet router (modem) username and password
- Your Apple iTunes/app store username and password
- Your email username and password
- Security codes that open iPhones, iPads, andrioids, tablets etc

Don't lose the notebook! Bring that notebook with you every time you want to get help with your computer, phone or tablet.

You should now be well on your way to implementing some helpful computer-related resolutions in 2017. Like more traditional New Years resolutions, sticking with these may require some effort on your part. However, by implementing at least some of these resolutions, you are making your time on the computer that much more efficient, safe, and enjoyable. Happy New Year!