Radio Days – 2012-04-07

Discussion – Six-Monthly Check-up

The CFA advises us to change the batteries in our smoke alarms every six months when we change our clocks from Summer Time to Winter Time, then replace our batteries again when we change our clocks back again six months later. Their slogan is *Working Smoke Alarms Save Lives*. I urge you to check your computer and perform some simple tasks to ensure that its performance stays as close to peak as possible.
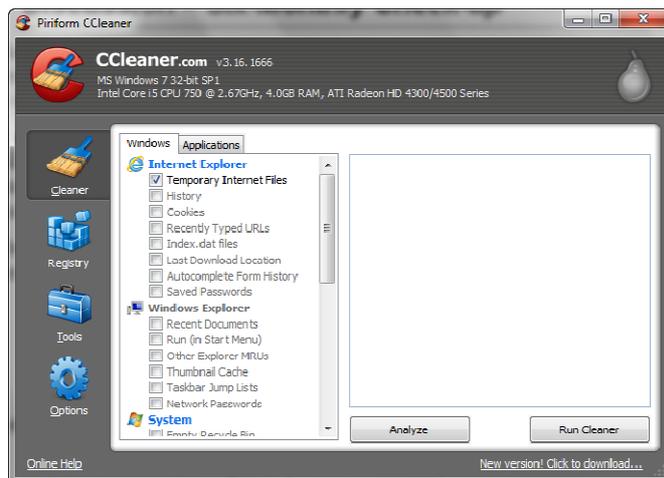
There are a number of tasks which will only take you a few minutes to perform. These tasks will do a lot towards keeping your computer working closer to its peak, but they do not need much effort for the amount of result that they bring. This means that they are very effective because the results are out of proportion to the effort involved.

These are the tasks which I suggest you perform when Summer Time starts then, six months later, when Winter Time starts:

- Remove old temporary files
- Clean out the registry
- Defragment your hard disc
- Update all the programs on your hard disc

Let's cover each of these tasks in more detail.

Remove Old Temporary Files

Many programs leave traces behind when they have finished. Sometimes this is intentional but often it is the result of a problem. Either way, these temporary files clutter up your hard disc and can slow your computer down quite considerably.

Enter CCleaner to the rescue.

If you have not downloaded and installed CCleaner then please do so now from the link at the end of this document. Once installed and run you will see a window like the one to the left.

Firstly you need to check, and possibly adjust, the settings. There are a number of sections in the left-hand part of the screen: I suggest that you ensure that you only check the following:

- Internet Explorer
    - Temporary Internet Files
- Windows Explorer
    - None
- System
    - Temporary Files
    - Clipboard
    - Memory Dumps
    - Chkdsk File Fragments
    - Windows Log Files
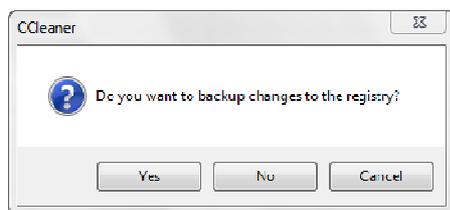- Advanced
    - Old Prefetch Data

You will probably not know what each of these does, but that does not matter. If you follow my recommendations you will have a computer with most of the unwanted files removed.

Now click on *Analyse* to start the process. Depending on your computer this could take from 20 seconds to 30 minutes to complete. While it is working you will see a green bar sliding across the screen to show how much of the task has been completed. When it gets to 100% just click on *Run Cleaner* to remove all the files found.

First job done!

Clean out the Registry

The registry is a Microsoft invention. It can quickly become cluttered with unwanted entries: these unwanted entries will slow your computer down and may make it unstable. There are many programs which offer to clean your registry but the only one which I know which is both free and does not do any damage is CCleaner.

After you have removed all the unwanted old temporary files you should clean the registry. CCleaner is still open so click on *Registry* in the left-hand column. Again, click on *Scan for Issues* to start the process. After the green bar has reached 100% you then click on *Fix Selected Issues* to complete the process. You will see a small dialogue box like the one to the left: please ensure that you click on *Yes* to save the changes just in case there is a problem. I have only known one problem in several years of use so I do not expect that you will see one, however to be safe please backup the changes which CCleaner is about to make to your registry. Save the changes to *Documents* then click on *Fix All Selected Issues*. When the selected issues have been deleted just click on *Close* to complete the process.

Second job done!

Defragment Hard Discs

The next step, now that you have removed all unwanted files to clear space on your hard disc, is to defragment it. Defragmenting a hard disc is the process of tidying all the files on your hard disc. As you (or Windows) create, change or remove files, different parts of your files can be placed in different parts of your hard disc. Defragmenting a file involves finding all the different parts of a file and placing them in one single block. This makes your computer faster because it is not hunting all over your hard disc for the various parts of a file.

There are two programs which I recommend: *Defraggler* and *JkDefrag*. Because they use slightly different ways of defragmenting I recommend that you chose one and stick to it. If you mix and match you will find that each program will undo the changes made by the other each time you start it.

Defraggler wants to know which disc to defragment: you select the disc to be defragmented (most computers have only one disc, but you still have to select it) then click on *Defrag*: this starts the process. You can then select *Settings » Shutdown after Defrag* and go to bed: the rest happens automatically as if by magic then your computer will put itself to sleep.

JkDefrag works slightly differently: all discs are defragmented in one hit so there is no need to select a disc to defragment. Just start JkDefrag and all your hard discs are defragmented one after the other. This program does not have the option to shut your computer at end.

Both programs may take a number of hours if you have never done a defragment of that disc before, but that does not matter. If you decide to stop a defragment before it has completed its task it will just continue from where it left off next time you start it. This means that you can do a complete defragment in a number of steps rather than in one enormous bite of time. Defragmenting has never been so easy!

Third job done!

Update Programs

All programs have errors. All manufacturers want you to use their program so they provide updates to fix the errors in their programs. These two reasons explain why you should keep your programs updated.

Up till now I have recommended that two programs to update all your other programs. These two programs are Ninite and Secunia PSI. Ninite is a nuisance to use: you have to select all the programs which you want Ninite to keep updated then you have to run Ninite to update them.

The old version (version 2) of Secunia PSI, on the other hand, checked all the programs on your hard disc and worked out which ones needed to be updated. Sometimes the automatic update did not work and you then had to do the update yourself. No longer! A new version of Secunia PSI has just been released and it seems to do all the work for you with no intervention. This has worked so well that I have now removed Ninite from my computer.

I recommend that you download and install this new version of Secunia PSI now. This program, like all the ones I have mentioned, is free. After you have done the download and install you can relax as it seems to do most, if not all, the updating automatically. In my computer it could not update iTunes so I had to do that manually.

Still, updating one program manually is much easier than finding all programs which need to be updated and then doing the full update manually. I am so glad that there are people who will take all the hard work out of keeping my computer as safe and clean as possible.

One thing to note: I found that the initial run of Secunia PSI took much longer than I had expected. I was expecting that the initial screen would disappear after about thirty seconds. Instead it took about two hours to display the final screen. During this time the program had downloaded and installed all the needed updates. This saved me lots of time but did cause me to worry that something had gone wrong! It may take longer than you expect for Secunia PSI to do its initial update but do not worry: it is working behind the scenes!

Fourth job done!

Further Information

CCleaner	www.piriform.com
Defraggler	www.piriform.com
JkDefrag	http://www.kessels.biz/JkDefrag/
Secunia PSI	www.secunia.com