

Some things to remember about physical computer maintenance “Cleaning”

Issue / Problem:

When caring for your computer, whether these are in the library or at home, these are some good tips I have used in the field to help maintain and keep a healthy computer.

Background Information you should know about:

What are computer wipes? They are your typical cleaning wipes you can purchase from just about any store to be used to clean the surfaces of your PC. What is canned spray air, also known as compressed air? Basically it is air in a can that is used to blow out dust and other debris that collects in your computer. You can also purchase this at just about any store around. Also you should have a pair of finger nail clippers around for the nail cleaner extension. I'll explain why further along.

Resolution / How we solved the problem:

If you're going to want to have a healthy computer for your home or library, then you should use the following tips below to help maintain the computer to stay healthy. And when I say healthy, I am talking about the physical aspects of the hardware, not necessarily the software aspect.

1. Unless you bought an expensive water cooling system for your PC, then your computer is cooled by air. With that in mind your computer's case has several fans inside. One in the power supply, typically one on the video card and one to three in the case to help circulate air around to keep things cool because your computer gets very hot during usage. The heat gets bled off the parts that generate heat by what is called a heat sink. The fans inside the case (the case is the outside of the tower, also known as the tower) then carry the heat off the heat sinks and out of the case when air flows. Over time debris and dust will build up and can clog up your air flow. This is where your canned air comes in handy. I would recommend that you use your canned air about once every 6 months per PC. This will prevent any major clogs from building up in your fans and vents within the computer case. Be sure to follow the directions on the bottle for proper use as people tend to want to do things they shouldn't like shaking the can before use. Nine times out of ten, computer lockups are due to overheating. Clogged vents and fans can help cause this failure, so be sure your computer has proper airflow by keeping these parts of your computers clean
2. Patrons in your library like to touch the monitor screens of the computers. Although you have put up sign after sign to “Please Don't Touch The Computer Screen”, patrons tend to do it anyway. To help keep your computer screens clean, you can purchase specific cleaning cloths that are disposable and that won't hurt the anti-glare layer on your monitor. If you try cleaning the screens with anything such as Windex or other glass cleaner, you can damage this layer: it will cause the screen to look horrible with different levels of glare coming through and colors will be brighter in some areas than others. Using the wrong type of cloth on the screen can also

scratch the surface of the screen, so it is also important to use the proper cloth when cleaning the screen. Again follow the directions on the screen cleaners you buy. Mis-use can cause damage to your computer.

3. Now for the fingernail clippers. Why in the world would you need these? you ask. Well that depends on the type of mouse you have for your computers. If you have an optical mouse then the clippers won't be needed here. But if you have a mouse with a ball inside that has rollers, this can be a handy tool. Over time your rollers will build up gunk and cause the mouse to perform poorly. I have found that using the nail cleaner off of a pair of nail clippers makes it easy to scrape the gunk off the rollers inside the mouse and keeps you from having to use your own nails to get at the gunk. If you wish to avoid this entire issue, along with the issue of lost or stolen mouse balls, then I would recommend you replace the older style mouse with a newer technological optical one.
4. One last thing I would like to talk about is keeping the parts clean that patrons touch, the keyboard and top of mouse. Here you can sanitize these areas when the computer is turned off. That way you won't potentially damage any electrical parts when doing a proper cleaning of these parts of the computer. For the keyboard, you can use the compressed air to spray out any debris. You can also flip the keyboard over and shake it briskly to loosen anything in the keyboard. You can then take a cleaning disinfectant wipe and clean the surface of the keyboard and mouse to kill any germs that may be on the surface from other users that previously used the machine. This part might be used more often during flu season to help prevent patrons from giving unwanted gifts to other patrons in your library while using your computers.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at abeatty@ntrlis.org.