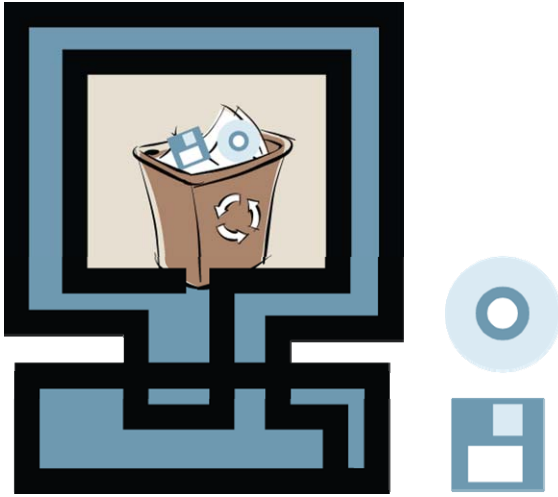


Junkware



Have you ever wondered why your new computer takes so long to start up or why simple applications suddenly hang up?

The answer may lie in the fact that there are many programs operating in the background. Some are essential to the smooth operation of various software systems used everyday, but others are add-in trial software, or adware; both may have links to existing programs as well as to the operating system.

Some programs are already partly preloaded at startup. Thus, even if you are not using the application, a part of it is always running in the background using precious resources and slowing the operation of your computer.

Many programs also have pop-up windows that appear when the software detects a “need” to link to a program in use. Pop-ups can also be activated by triggers such as a time or date, or the availability of a new version of the program. These interruptions distract the user who often has to intervene manually before continuing work. Since each of these applications is connected to the computer’s operating system and may share similar commands, the operating system can sometimes become confused and hang up. This stoppage in turn frustrates the user who must reboot the system, reopen the applications and check that no critical data has been lost.

Software Vendors Want Exposure

Why are these unwanted programs on your new computer in the first place? There are three reasons that major computer manufacturers load what has become known as junkware, adware or trial software in their systems:

- Software vendors want to give purchasers the opportunity to investigate new software applications. Installation creates user awareness of additional features.
- Software vendors provide incentives to computer manufacturers to install their software. The manufacturers are then able to lower the cost of the hardware to the consumer.
- Software vendors provide incentives to computer manufacturers to advertise their software in their print and other media advertising.

If unsolicited software were the domain of only one or two manufacturers, computer buyers could force an end to these practices by switching to other manufacturers. Unfortunately, all major PC makers carry unsolicited software.

So pervasive is this proliferation of unsolicited software that manufacturers find themselves caught between customer complaints and the fear they will lose market share if purchasers turn to another brand. To maintain consumer loyalty some computer manufacturers have started to offer their systems with “no-trialware installations.”

Not All Junkware is Bad

To suggest that all unsolicited software is “junkware” is, of course, unfair. Few would argue that free CD/DVD burning or basic photo software, for example, are undesirable. On the other hand, preloaded background applications that must be processed before you can begin to use the computer only increase your frustration by adding to the time needed to start your spreadsheet program. Given that sometimes the system must sort through upward of 80 irrelevant applications, it is understandable why startup takes so long.

Eroded Efficiency

All these hidden applications affect the operational efficiency of your system. Tests of computers from major manufacturers showed that, after removal of this junkware, performance improved by 1.4% to 8.2 %, depending on the manufacturer.

Combating Junkware

Some advocate reinstalling the operating system immediately after the computer is out of the box and before company software is installed. Since most computer manufacturers preinstall the operating system and seldom supply a copy in CD/DVD format, you may wish to purchase the original operating system from your computer manufacturer, or make your own “recovery disk.” (This is not a complicated process; manufacturers often supply instructions in the operations manual.) Once this process is completed, the reinstalled operating system will, in most cases, be free of bundled junkware.

Unfortunately, there are exceptions. Reinstalling the operating system may not work on all manufacturers’ computers since some have integrated the junkware into the operating software install program.

Try the traditional means of ridding the system of junkware in XP by clicking the Add or Remove icon and reading the populated list of software that is installed. Unnecessary software can be uninstalled. Before doing this, however, be sure you know which applications are safe to remove or you may not be able to access your operating system and certain applications without using the Safe Mode to bring your system back online.

Another approach is to have a computer technician evaluate your system and remove as many unnecessary applications as possible. This may be the preferred approach if you are uncomfortable about the possibility of removing necessary programs. If you don’t have a computer technician, many big-box computer retailers provide a “computer optimization” service, which removes programs not needed to run your everyday applications.

You may contact your computer manufacturer or computer technician and ask whether they can provide either a third party software removal utility or access to an appropriate website that will permit downloading a removal utility.

Realize You May Have a Problem

For the most part, junkware may simply be an inconvenience. But, if your system freezes without apparent reason when switching between programs or other processes, then perhaps it is time to consider whether junkware, trialware or adware is the problem.

Less Software Can Mean More Productivity

Consumers may never be able to void all background items since every manufacturer has a vested interest in ensuring the consumer has the opportunity to purchase enhanced and updated software products with Internet links. As a user, however, if your system can be enhanced by removing software not directly connected to the manufacturer's requirements, performance and productivity can be improved without compromising operational integrity.