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News You Can Use

COMPUTING RESOLUTIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR

Much easier than losing weight or getting in shape!

It's that time of year again. Like most people, I have my list of resolutions that I will faithfully follow, at least for awhile. Otherwise I wouldn't have a list to make for next year.

My personal list aside, I have put together a list of "computing resolutions" that everyone needs to follow, both at school and with their personal computers at home. While they require self-discipline just like any resolution, they are much easier to do than losing weight or getting back into shape. So here we go:

Backup Important Stuff: No matter what happens, intentional or accidental, if you don't keep redundant backups of your important files, you will have to start over. For your most precious data, redundancy means at least three forms of backup – disk, tape, CD, USB Drive, etc. I do not recommend floppy disks as these are very unreliable and will fail over time. Our network is backed up to tape each night, but do not rely on this as your only source of recovery.

As Murphy's First Law of Computing states, "A properly backed up hard drive will never fail; but a hard drive that does not have a current backup will always fail at the most inopportune time."

Patch Broken Windows:

Microsoft regularly provides updates for its operating systems. This is done on all computers in our school on a monthly basis. You will also want to perform this task on your home computers. The Windows Update feature, located in your Web browser (it's under the Tools menu), provides a quick way to keep updated. You should also run this monthly, at a minimum, to automatically check for upgrades and patches to Windows XP, Me, or 98.

THOUGHT FOR THE MOMENT:

"In teaching it is the method and not the content that is the message."

-- Ashley Montague (b. 1905)
(American anthropologist)

Keep anti-virus software

updated: New viruses are released daily. We use Symantec's Norton Anti-Virus on all school computers and it is updated daily. If you do not have virus protection installed at home, you absolutely need to. I can recommend several excellent programs, some available at no charge for personal use. There is no excuse now!

Don't Open

Unexpected/Unknown File

Attachments: Be sure attachments are from trusted sources. Especially be suspect of files with the following file extensions- .exe, .pif, .bat, .vbs, .scr, .com, or .lnk. These are not the only types of files that can cause damage, just a sampling of the most common ones. Also, help stop virus proliferation by not forwarding emails from unknown sources. While we're at it, also stop forwarding hoaxes and fictitious emails. Check the veracity of the message (<http://www.hoax-slayer.com/>) before sending it on.

Regularly Check for

Spyware/Malware: If you surf the Internet, your computer is already infected. Spyware, and its variants, ranges from being an annoyance to completely rendering your system unusable. We use a number of programs available to remove spyware as well as prevent infection on the school computers. If your system runs unusually slow, let me know.

Clean Out the (File) Drawers:

No one really enjoys sorting through all the stuff that accumulates over the years. But the school computer network is a shared resource and files can quickly accumulate. Be sure to delete unused and duplicate files from your and your students' folders. Also, make sure to save to your correct folder and not just anywhere.

Now, about my personal list...

'Till next time... Joe Ambrosia