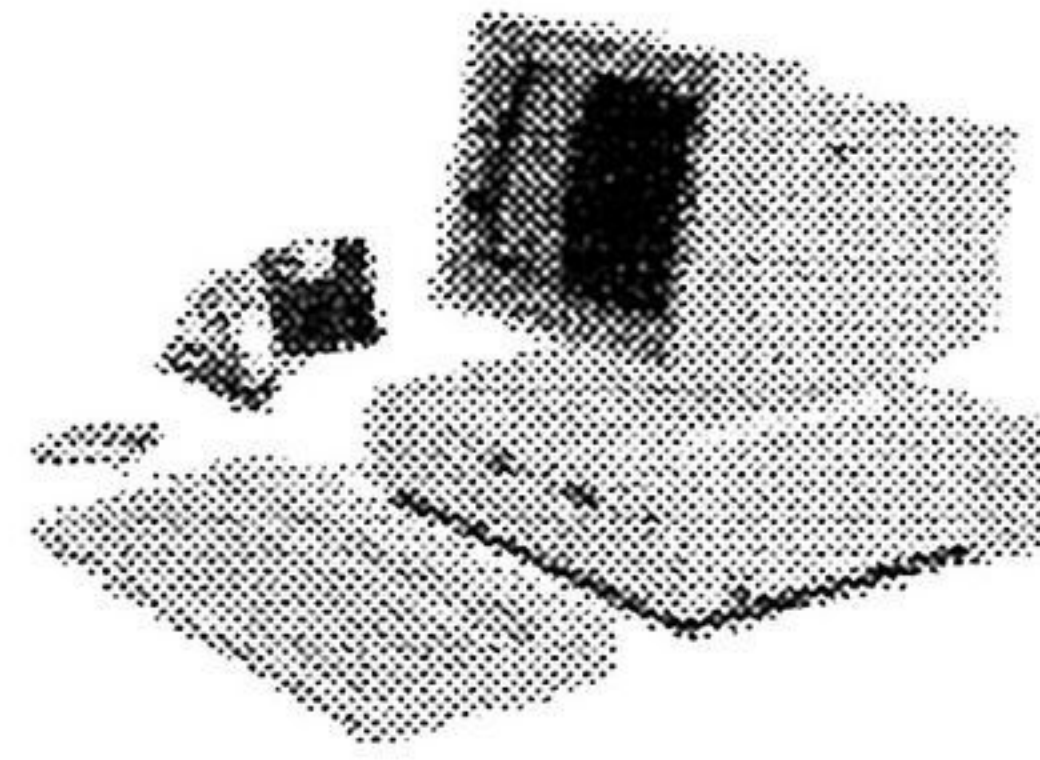


Computer Tips



Upgrades, upgrades, upgrades. Sometimes the best thing to do with an old machine is to upgrade a few of its components rather than purchasing a whole new machine. This can breath new life into an old machine. There are some things to be aware of before stepping off into the land of upgrades. If you own a 286, 386, or 486, or any machine running windows 3.1, save yourself the hassle and buy a new system. Nothing from these machines is salvageable. If the machine still works well, you might consider donating it to a local charity. However, many charities are not even taking these machines. If you have a Pentium 1 or Pentium II, the choices are still slim. The first thing you should check is to see if your machine is form factor AT or form factor ATX. Now, before you get concerned that I have just dropped a new unexplained acronym into the equation, this is actually quite easy to do. Look at the back of your machine. If your machine is AT then you will see a large connection for the keyboard located beneath the power supply fan. The rest of your connections will be beneath the keyboard socket. Your mouse will probably have a square (serial) connection rather than the small round (ps2) connection. If your machine is ATX then you will have two small connections for the keyboard and mouse, beside each other. The rest of the connections for the machine should be located beneath these, running in a strip down the left side of the machine. If you found that your machine is AT then I have bad news, probably time for a new system, though you may find some upgrades in the used computer store. All machines these days are ATX, and if you have an ATX case then your upgrade options are quite better then most.

The easiest upgrade available to most people is RAM. If you currently have 64 megabytes or less, then it is time to upgrade your RAM. 128mb is the current industry standard, with most current motherboards having the capability of handling up to 1 gigabyte of RAM. Extra RAM will help the speed of your machine and enable you to process a greater number of tasks at the same time. To check how much RAM you currently have, go to your desktop, right click on My Computer and choose properties. In the windows that opens you should see how much RAM you have, displayed in the bottom right hand corner.

Are you running out of space on your hard drive? To check this, go to your desktop, double left click on My Computer. In the new window that opens, right click on your C: drive and choose properties. A pie graph will appear telling you what capacity your drive is, how much space is being used, and how much is free. If this pie graph is full, then you may be interested in upgrading your hard drive. Current industry standard is 20 gigabytes and this should be ample space for the home user. Also, a lot of the newer drives are rated at 7200 rpm. These drives are very fast and the end user will note a substantial difference in the speed of their machine if they upgrade to one of these drives.

Processors are a slightly different story. If you have a recent machine, say purchased in the last two years, processor upgrades should be no problem. If your machine is older than that, get a technician to look it over before trying to upgrade. Connections for processors have changed greatly over the past few years and it is best to know what you are getting into before hand. If you have a slot 1 or socket 7 connection then you are probably looking at upgrading your motherboard at the same time. This can be a little more costly, but if done wisely, could lead to some more money savings down the road, when you are looking at upgrading again.

Most other upgrades are quick and easy. If you are using any modem other than a 56k .v90 modem then you should upgrade your modem to get full use of our minimal bandwidth in the County. If you are looking for improved sound, a new sound card and speakers will greatly enhance your listening pleasure. If you are trying to use the latest 3d game and your machine can't keep up, then a new video card is the answer. All of these upgrades are very easy and a technician should be able to advise you on what is best for your situation.

That should cover the most basic of upgrade situations. Before we close out this month, one last tip for users of Norton Antivirus. Norton comes out of the box, configured to scan only program files. This is good, unfortunately not all viruses are program files. To change this, do the following: open Norton Antivirus, click on options, click on auto protect. You should find a heading called Files to Scan. Make sure the check box for all files is checked. Your virus scan will take a little longer now, but you will be checking your whole machine for viruses. Next month, we will cover back ups. From all of us at Debug Computers, we would like to wish you a Merry Christmas and all the best for the New Year.