

ello, and welcome to this month's edition of A Spider Speaks. This column is dedicated to tips, tricks, and other information for use by every type of Mac user. This month my column will be a little different. I guess it fits into the "miscellaneous" part of the title graphic. If you have any comments, send me an email at erik@applewizards.net . Note: Picture captions are available by clicking on the pictures. Click everywhere!

[piderism #1](#) — New Year's Resolutions

My friend's New Year's resolution was to take better care of his Mac. This struck me as odd — how could you NOT take care of your Mac? To my surprise, I slowly began to realize that many, many people don't take proper care of their Macs. Oh no!

I encourage everyone out there to make a New Year's resolution right now, even though it is past New Year's Eve. That resolution is to take care of your Mac. To help you get started, I've outlined a general "New Year Caretaking" list below. Take it to heart, and your Mac will be a happy one for years to come. Note that this routine is not all-inclusive, but it's a good starting point. Feel free to add your own steps.

1. Back Up Files

I can't say it enough — backing up is very important. There's a saying that there are only two types of computer users — those who have lost data and those who will. Being either is not particularly pleasing, though you can beat that saying by regularly backing up. With the many options available nowadays, including Zip disks, Jaz disks, external hard drives, SyQuests, etc., it makes a lot of sense to back up. There is even a whole section of the software market devoted to backup

utilities. It is well worth your time to back up files..

2. Wipe it Blank

If you know what you're doing, it may be worthwhile to completely erase your hard drive and reformat it with the latest drivers available. Reinstall all important applications, including the operating system, and copy the files that you backed up to return your computer to its normal (though now much cleaner) state.

3. Play Doctor

Run Disk First Aid. If you have a commercial program such as Norton's Disk Doctor, run that as well. Repair any problems and replace any damaged files. If you have utilities to clean or refurbish your hardware, you should use it at this time as well. Run your virus programs (like Disinfectant, which is still freeware). If you know what you're doing, defragment your hard drive at this time as well.

4. Play Garbage Man

Go through all of your folders and trash old or unnecessary stuff. This includes preference files that you don't need anymore, ugly fonts, and those shareware games you always download but never actually play. The saying "when in doubt, throw it out" does not apply here! If you find a file and don't quite know what it does, just leave it alone. You can always trash a saved file later, but it's very hard to recover a trashed file.

5. Update Everything

Go find updates or new versions of your favorite shareware items. Open all of your control panels and make sure that they're set to perform just as you like. Check the preferences in each of your applications as you work with them. Find some cool new icons, a new desktop picture and Kaleidoscope scheme, rename your hard drive, and update the whole look of your Mac while you're at it!

6. Clean Up

This step isn't the same as number four. Instead, you're going to clean up instead of just trashing stuff. To start, rebuild your desktops.

That's right, both of 'em! Rebuild the desktop file on your Mac by holding down the command and option keys as your Mac starts up. Clean up the actual desktop that your Mac sits on. Next, clean the outside (and, if you know how, the inside) of your Mac. Make sure that you use a dust spray and rag that are specially designed for use with electronics equipment. Finally, find a couple of tie wraps and rubber bands and straighten out all of the

cords hanging from your Mac. Mine has 23. I'm guessing that most of you will have fewer than that. You can't be too clean, as my mom used to say.

When you're done, sit back and smile right along with your Mac!

You now deserve to take a nap or play your favorite game.

However, be sure to keep taking proper care of your Mac each month. Rebuild the desktop file at least monthly and perform other maintenance on a regular basis. Macs are happy creatures, but they need to be loved just like you and me!

[piderism #2](#) — Basic Disk Information

I mentioned above that it is a good idea to defragment your hard drive. Exactly what is defragmentation, and how does it affect your Mac's performance?

To understand fragmentation, we must first understand how files are written to the hard disk. The hard disk can be thought of as a large pie, cut from the center out as well as in concentric circles. Data is written in these slices, so to speak, in a contiguous fashion. Everything works fine until you delete a file — that leaves a gap! Below is a picture of my hard drive. You can see that some of the hard drive space is occupied (shown in blue) and that some is free (white). The problem arises when your Mac tries to use the "white" space. Let's suppose that I want to write a 500K file to my hard disk. My Mac begins copying the file only to run out of room after, let's suppose, 200K. It then skips to the next free part of the hard drive and writes more of the file. It continues this until all of the file is written, in however many pieces it takes.

The problem with this is that it is not very efficient. If I then want to read that file (open it in Photoshop or whatever), the reading apparatus of the hard disk must read the first 200K of the file, stop, skip to the second part, start reading again, and so on.

This file is called a "fragmented" file.

Defragmenting files involves locating all pieces of a file and writing it contiguously to a large free space. This is obviously not something

any person can do, but rather it is a job for various software applications. My favorite is DiskExpress Pro by Alsoft Inc. It monitors my file usage and places the most often-used files near the front, or head, of the disk. I have complex schedules set up to optimize my nine hard disk

partitions at various times of the week. This is also the only defragmenting application that allows you to continue using your computer while it is defragmenting. Another defragmentation utility is Speed Disk, part of the Norton Utilities set. Many of my colleagues use Speed Disk, so I can recommend it to you as well. I will not list other defragmentation utilities, as I have used no others. I won't recommend something I haven't used.

DiskExpress Pro — <http://www.alsoftinc.com/DXPinfo.html>

Norton Utilities — <http://www.symantec.com/nu/>

[piderism #3 — Viewing Your World](#) [MacOS 8 Tip and Trick](#)

How do you view your (Mac) world? Do you prefer small, arranged icons? Do you prefer list views? Do you sort by label color? Do you have no sense of organization whatsoever?

Regardless of how you view your world, realize that organizing your world can make things a lot easier. I personally prefer to sort many things as icons (large or small, depending on how many are in that particular folder) by name. Occasionally I employ the list view. Below is a list (no pun intended) of ways in which various viewing methods are best used.

List view — great for quickly sorting by name, size, type, and various other options. I use this for folders that I don't need to navigate on a regular basis, such as my extensions folder.

Small icons — great for folders with lots of files and sub-folders. For example, my "www.applewizards.net" folder has 35 files and folders in it, so sorting by name-arranged small icons suits my needs quite well.

Large icons — good for folders with few files or sub-folders as well as the desktop. I usually arrange these icons by name as well, but it is not as necessary as when viewing by small icons.

Buttons — I've never found a use for buttons, but I don't have small children, elderly persons, or handicapped/disabled individuals around my computer. If you have any of the above, you may find a wonderful use for the button view.

Aiding Your Task

This icon represents the "FinderViewContextMenu."

FinderView-

ContextMenu is a contextual menu plug-in (do you see why this is a MacOS 8 tip now?) that records and plays back your favorite view settings of your Finder windows.

Control-click in a Finder window to bring up the contextual menu. FinderViewContextMenu lets you record the view settings of this window or simply choose one of the previously-recorded settings to apply them to this window.

This makes it very simple to switch among your favorite two, three, or ten views! I no longer have to bring up the contextual menu to switch from list to icon view, then bring up the menu again to arrange my icons by name.

I recommend that you check out FinderViewContextMenu. It is currently at version 1.02 and can be downloaded at <http://www.artissoftware.com/finderview/> .

act of the Month:

Apple is ranked #1 in customer loyalty, with over 87% of Mac users repurchasing Apple computers.

From <http://www.apple.com/whymac/>

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