

ixing your Mac - AppleMax

So these days we all rely on our computers, we place so much trust in them, we place all our important documents on them and for many their business's rely on them. But what do you do when you switch your computer on and are confronted with a flashing question mark or your Mac crashes half way through booting up and telling you that "A system error has occurred type 11" and no matter how many time you type 11, it doesn't help. Well after 10 years of experience of fixing Macs I hope I can offer you a few tips. And over the next few months that's what I intend to do

First things first don't panic, 9 times out of ten the problem is rectifiable and usually within an hour.

Mac problems can be spit into 3 distinct categories

1. Hardware failure

There isn't a great deal you can do about a hardware failure apart from calling an engineer to replace the bit that has gone wrong. But some hardware problems are more obvious than others. For example if you switch your Mac on and you hear nothing, no fan no start-up chimes then apart from checking the power source and fuse you can pretty much safely say that the power supply has died. However what would you think was wrong if when you switched your Mac on you heard the fan start-up but you got no chimes and no video? This would appear to be a hardware problem but in fact all it may need is a new battery.

2 .Software failure

Most of the time the problems you encounter on your Mac are software related. From extension conflicts to system corruption. Some are more serious than others some stopping your Mac from booting up while others cause intermittent problems that are hard to identify and track down. The key to fixing these problems is to be logical and follow a simple set of guidelines.

3. User error

Well this speaks for itself.

Obviously there are far too many scenarios for me to cover them all here so I'll cover three or four of the main ones you will encounter.

This month I'm going to cover what to do if your Mac starts up with a flashing question mark.

Firstly you will need to boot up your Mac from another disk. It is a good idea to prepare some kind of external disk whether that be an optical, zip, CD or external hard drive with the software you need for fixing your Mac in case of emergency. The software I would recommend you put on this disk is Norton utilities, system installer for the current version of Mac OS that you are running, disk first aid, and if your hard disk was formatted with something other than drive set-up the utility you used to initialise your disk, and of course a bootable system folder. Failing that you will just have to boot up from the CD that came with your Mac but you won't be able to fix some of the more serious problems. If you are booting from a CD hold down the C key until you see the smiley face, if you are booting from an external drive then you will need to hold down alt/option, shift and the backspace key at start-up to force the Mac to boot from something other than its internal drive. Once the Mac has booted you will be greeted by one of two scenarios either you will be able to see your hard drive or you won't.

If you can see your hard drive

You have a damaged system folder. You have two options one involving a little more work than the other. You can either perform a standard reinstall or a clean install. For those of you who are unaware a reinstall just writes over the old files in your system folder but sometimes this leaves residual problems so I have found over the years that in the long run it is easier and quicker to do a clean install from the outset. It will make your job a hell of a lot easier if you have a utility called 'clean install assistant' or 'CIA' as I will refer to it from now on available from www.marcmoini.com. CIA is a utility that will gather all your 3rd party control panels, extensions and prefs from your system folder and then add them back to your new system folder after a clean install. But if you haven't you'll just have to do it the long way round.

The method of performing a clean install varies with the version of OS you are using for example before 7.6 when in the installer screen you had to press shift and K. From 7.6 onwards there is an option within the installer. If you have 'clean install assistant' run it now and select the system folder on your hard disk and click collect. Once it has finished quit. Launch your OS installer and select perform clean install and run the installer. Once the installer has finished doing its stuff quit. You should now have a folder named previous system folder and one named system folder. This is where clean install assistant is going to save you time. Launch CIA and click the add back button this will now move all the items it collected earlier into your new system folder. However it sometimes reports an error that it couldn't move everything into the new System folder. No problem open up the system additions folder that CIA has created and the only

important file I have ever known it not to copy is the TCP/IP prefs file.

anually drag it into your prefs folder in your new system the Mac will tell you the file already exists but tell it to replace. Now that was the easy way now for the difficult way. Perform the clean install as described above and when finished quit the installer. If you have booted from a CD then you will need to reboot at this point. Open up the system folder and select the Apple menu items, Control panels, extensions, Fonts, and Preference folders, Drag them to your desktop.

Now open up your previous system folder and copy those same items into your new system folder along with any other odd files and folders that are lying around for example KPCMS. Now go to the desktop and open the Apple menu items folder and select all and move these files into the Apple menu items folder in your system folder and tell the Mac to replace the files with the same name. Do this for all the folders on the desktop with a couple of exceptions. When moving the files from the extensions folder select all but deselect the printer descriptions folder and when moving the prefs deselect the TCP/IP prefs. As you can see you will really save yourself some time and hassle if you get a copy of CIA. If you have used the second method then you are more likely to have a few teething problems with your new System. Just remember to check your extensions and control panels disabled folders etc for items that need to go into your new system folder, use your common sense as this article is going to end up 20 pages long if I have to cover every permutation.

2.If You can't see your hard drive

Firstly run disk first aid. Can it see your drive, if it can ask it to repair. If this fixes the problem great reboot and you're sorted. If not then launch Norton Utilities try to keep your copy of Norton as up to date as possible as using older versions can cause more problems than they solve. Can Norton see your hard disk? If it can run disk doctor and fix all the problems it finds if not you will have to select 'show missing disks' from the disk menu. If this still doesn't find it you will need to select 'add custom disk' from the same menu. Select the SCSI id of your hard disk, usually 0 and click add. You should now be able to see your disk, run disk doctor and fix the problems. If Norton comes across a problem that can't be fixed then your only hope is to run volume recover if you had filesaver installed or Unerase if you didn't. The problem with unerase is even if it can recover your files it doesn't retain the directory structure so it simply throws everything into the one folder. I also use MacMedic from Total Recall software which is really slow but sometimes succeeds where Norton fails. Just a little tip run Disk doctor over your drive several times as once doesn't always do the job.

There is one other situation that you may be faced with and that is that even if you boot from an external disk your Mac crashes when it gets to the desktop. The only way around this is when the Mac is switched off open it up and disconnect the internal hard drive. Then boot up your Mac from your external disk, reconnect your hard drive and

then run Disk doctor.

As I have said it is impossible to cover every eventuality and situation you are going to encounter but nine times out of ten if you follow these guidelines your Mac will be smiling again fairly quickly.

Until next month.

 AppleMax

www.applemax.co.uk

Team@applemax.co.uk

Tel. 0870 7421176

(calls charged at national call rate)