
◆ Dan's Desktop ◆

Issue 4

December 1995

Replacing the Hard Drive: Almost Easy

A year ago in this space, I wrote about how expensive it would be to purchase a hard drive. Well, prices have come down significantly since then. Now may be a good time to add a new hard drive or update your existing one.

If you are going to upgrade your hard drive, I recommend that you go right up to a 1.6 gigabyte drive. That's 1600 meg! Such drives are generally priced around \$400. I purchased a Maxtor 1.6 gigabyte drive at Staples for \$350. A smaller drive does not cost that much less--in fact if you don't shop around you might pay more for a smaller one.

Installation of the hardware was a breeze. I just replaced the current hard drive with the new one using the same mounting hardware and wiring. The software that comes with the drive configures the drive to your system and allows you to format the drive. Its software controls the set up parameters of the drive rather than BIOS. ("Basic Input/Output System", controls computer hardware and start up.) In order to access the software, you need to first boot up from the **a:** drive with a system diskette. *You should always keep a bootable disk available.* I also found out I needed to install an updated version of the disk drive software. Maxtor sent it to me at their expense within a couple of days.

In any case, after formatting the new hard drive, you'll still need to restore all the files onto the new disk by reinstalling all the software and/or recovering from a back up. Be sure you have everything backed up before you even install the new drive.

I restored my PC back to its original store bought condition using my Packard Bell System Back Up CD. I needed to call Packard Bell for a password to unlock the files in order do do

this. I then reinstalled all my other software, copied all my data files back and customized everything back to the way I had it. This was an extremely time consuming job. If you have a tape back up, you would be better served by backing up everything and restoring it to the new drive. Stores like CompUSA will install a new hard drive for you for about \$80. That includes copying all the software onto the new drive.

Everything works beautifully with the new hard drive. Its much faster seek time and the fact that I am not compressing my application programs have caused a phenomenal increase in the performance of my PC. It is as noticeable as when I went from a 25Mhz to 75Mhz processor.

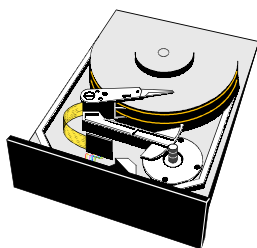
I've put my old hard drive into my PS/1 as a second drive. This was easy, since the PS/1 had the necessary bay and appropriate wiring. I just had to reset a switch on the old drive. So now my PS/1 has 440 meg of compressed space or about

880 when it is compressed.

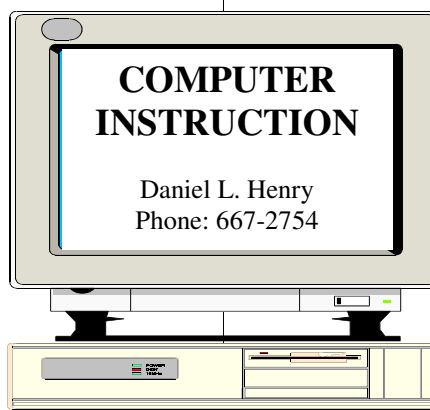
Hope my hard drive installation experience is helpful to you. The hardware part was easy. Reinstalling the software was tedious and stressful at times.

Please don't hesitate to call me if you would like to discuss any of the topics discussed in this newsletter or anything else related to computer hardware or software. Some of the issues discussed here are a bit technical, so please call me if you would like any clarification or additional details. Please remember that I do not charge for phone consultations.

Happy Holidays.



Hard drive prices have fallen significantly in the past year. A 1.6 gigabyte drive can be bought for about \$350. They are easy to install if you have a back up of your system's files.



Windows 95: Nice, New Interface but Problems Can Occur

First let me say that I really enjoy Windows 95. It is a much nicer interface than the old Windows. I was also happy to see that it kept all my favorite settings and that my Microsoft Office Toolbar still appears on the screen. The title bar and menu bars of all my Windows applications now look different to reflect this new interface.

Please keep in mind that there is no immediate need for most people to install Windows 95. If you do, you should have at least 8 meg of RAM. I also suggest you have over 100 meg of hard drive space available. If you do not have lots of hard drive space, upgrade your hard drive.

I installed Windows 95 on one of my PCs. It installed easily, but a day later I encountered a serious and rather quirky problem. I talked to Microsoft for 3/4 of an hour about the problem. I think it was related to my PC. They suggested I get updated software from my hard drive manufacturer. (See the hard drive article.) I uninstalled and reinstalled Windows 95. I have had no problems, however, I have avoided the action that caused the problem, which was making some changes to the BIOS (system set up that can be done right after turning on the computer).

I installed it primarily to be ready for new clients who might be buying PCs with Windows 95 already installed. However, I have really enjoyed using it.

I did run into one major problem--I was not able to print large print files including old issues of *Dan's Desktop*. This was extremely annoying. I thought the problem might be the Windows 95 print driver.

I spent \$15-20 in long distance charges to Microsoft one afternoon trying to find a fix for this problem -- with little success. I figured out how to put my old print driver into Windows 95, but it had the same problems. After dinner, a light bulb went off--it's not the driver, so it must be something about how Windows 95 interfaces with printers. I looked in Control Panel to see if I could find anything. Then I noticed I had more than one icon for my display. The old one said I was using 16 colors on my display, but the Win95 one said I was using 256.

Why is this significant? Well, during my call to Microsoft, the technician mentioned that the display and print drivers somehow or other share resources. Using a higher resolution display setting could cause such a problem. So, I changed the number of colors to 16, and voila--I can print my graphics again.

I'm less than satisfied with this solution, since this means I will have to change the number of colors whenever I work with programs that use any special graphics or photographs. Each time I make the change Windows has to restart. I'm hoping this goes away when I install additional memory.

At least I can get back to work on some things now, including this newsletter. I've lost many hours of time working on this plus the long distance toll. I've learned a lot, though. And although they don't have an 800 number, and haven't been too helpful the two times I called -- they do answer their phones real promptly!



ZIP Drives: What Are They?

A Zip drive is typically hooked up externally to your computer using its parallel port. (This is used by most people to connect their printers to the computer.) Your printer can then be connected to the Zip drive so that either the Zip drive or the printer may be used. A Zip drive is like a diskette drive, except it is much faster and uses special disks that can store about 100 megabytes each. For that reason, they are often used to supplement hard drive storage as well as to do backups of hard disk directories. They might also be useful for anyone who does a lot of work with graphics or video. Since they are external drives and so easily connected (some software installation may be required), people often move the drive from computer to computer. A Zip drive costs about \$200. Disks for it cost \$20 to \$30 each.

Some Ways to Speed Up Your PC

- Defragment your hard drive on a regular basis
- Close all Windows other than the one you are using
- Clean up (carefully) Windows .INI files
- Add more memory to your computer
- Upgrade your CPU with an Intel Overdrive chip (\$120-\$275)
- Replace hard drive with quicker one (\$300-\$500)
- Install Windows 95. It is faster in some ways. (\$85-\$200)
- Install a 14.4 Kbs or greater modem if you use online services (\$70-\$200)
- Learn or improve your touch typing skills (doesn't really speed up your computer but may speed up your work!)
- Buy a new PC. It may be cheaper to buy a new PC without a monitor than to add memory, buy Windows 95, and replace the hard drive, modem and CPU. On the other hand, you can replace and upgrade as a gradual investment.