
◆ Dan's Desktop ◆

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Tutoring and consulting for your specific needs

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Windows 95 and Tape Backup: "A Train Wreck"

The above quote is courtesy of a friend of mine from Chicago. The recent experience of one of my clients bears this out as well. She needed to order a new version of her Connor Backup software which didn't work. She spent a lot of time on the phone with the people at Seagate (current owners of Connor Backup), and she had to download a different version of the program. She invested many hours over a week. During that time she had no back up capability.

Meanwhile, my Chicago friend, after researching the issue on various bulletin boards on America Online, decided to buy a new tape drive. He bought the Exabyte Eagle 96 on sale for \$99. It comes with an accelerator card and the Arcada Backup for Windows 95. It does not include a tape.

He did encounter a problem with the documentation that was critical to the installation of the drive. After 45 minutes on hold with an 800 number he got the information he needed.

The new drive backed up 600 meg in an hour with an additional hour required if verification is done.

Here's what my friend wrote about Windows 95 and tape backup:

Windows 95 and tape backup don't go together. It's a train wreck. I thought the problem was related just to my older unit. But it's not. Successes are few and far between, and users are really hot about it. They're getting new computers from companies like Dell and Micron that come equipped with tape backup units, or adding tape backup units on to their computers on their own, that just don't work well under Windows95. Or, like me, they're upgrading their OS and, surprise, it doesn't work anymore. Tape backup has always been kind of slow going, typically taking a few hours to backup or restore a 1mg+ hard drive. Even restoring one small file can take several minutes because the unit has to find the file on the tape by slowly scrolling through the tape. But it was reliable. I used it many times to restore a file or directory that got trashed, and once to restore the whole hard drive.

Under Win3.1, Microsoft had a Backup program that required floppies. If you bought a tape backup unit, it came with DOS/Win backup software. When Win95 came out, everyone knew their old DOS or Win3.1 tape backup software wasn't going to work under Win95 because of the long file names and other information stored about the file like last access date. But, not to worry, said Microsoft, we're including a new Win95 backup program that will support existing tape drive units, and if you prefer to use proprietary software, the tape backup companies would soon, it was assumed, release their own versions of the software. And they have.

But the software is failing in a couple of areas. Microsoft's, HP/Colorado's, and Iomega's software are 16 bit based. They are unacceptably slow backing up or restoring Win95, a quasi 32 bit OS, with the tape systems. They can typically backup 5mg/minute on systems that are rated and will backup 20mg/minute on DOS or Win3.1. And Iomega's software, at least for its more reasonably priced backup units (Ditto and Zip) don't backup for most users; and some people who have gotten backups that seemed to go on tape without a hitch, will not restore when they need them! So some people who think they have a good backup find out when they really need it that they don't. Yikes.

I've seen some good comments and some bad about the Conner/Arcada/Seagate system and about Cheyenne's backup software. Both Arcada and Cheyenne have 32 bit backup software for Win95 systems, but since the software hasn't been out for long and some people are reporting problems with it, it seems kind of risky to me. Microsoft, HP Colorado, and Iomega all say they are working on 32 bit backup software, but they can't say when it will be ready for prime time.

The interesting thing to me is that the computer magazines seem to just be ignoring this flap, and so people continue going in to stores and buying these units for Win95 applications and then can't get them to work. PC Magazine and PC World have not done review roundups this year of entry-level tape backup systems since Win95 appeared, and I bet the reason is that the reviews would have to say these units work reasonably well if you have DOS or Win3.1, but don't try them with Win95, a conclusion that would not please their advertisers.

Clearly tape backup problems are something you should keep in mind should you update to Windows 95 or if you plan to add a tape drive to your Windows 95 machine.

And remember, even if you don't have a tape drive, you need to back up important files to diskette.

Postscript: My client was never able to resolve her Connor tape drive problems. She is buying the same drive my friend did.

Wanted: New Clients

I still want my existing clients, too! I greatly appreciate your passing my name, brochures, and business cards onto others. Please keep me in mind as you talk to other PC owners.

Technical Support Hot Lines: In the End You May Be on Your Own

Everyone, at one time or another, has had a problem with hardware or software. (If you haven't, don't feel left out, you will!) Often times the only place to turn to is the technical support people at the company that built the machine or the program.

Over the past couple of years I have dealt with the technical support lines of a number of companies. I have personally dealt with Microsoft, Canon, Packard Bell, and Maxtor. My clients have also dealt with Gateway 2000, Seagate, and a number of others. I am often called in to assist a client in dealing with technical support. Based on my own and my clients' experiences, I can see why.

Getting the results you need from a company's technical support line is hit or miss. As one client said, after several calls to Gateway 2000, "I haven't gotten to the right person yet." It can be a lot like playing a slot machine.

The people who answer the phones at these lines often have only a limited technical knowledge. That is why every so often they may need to talk to a supervisor or someone else about your problem. In fairness to them, they are working under difficult circumstances. The possible combinations of hardware and software problems, along with the varying expertise of computer users, are just beyond almost anyone's abilities to handle effectively over the phone. They are trained in how to handle the most common problems.

One concern I do have is how often we receive misinformation from these hotlines. The line, "You might have a computer virus" seems to be tossed off pretty early on as the cause of many problems. There are often things suggested that defy the common sense of even some inexperienced users.

I have rarely had the solution to a problem handed to me as a result of one of these phone calls. However, they do sometimes supply me with a piece of the puzzle that I can put together with other information to solve a problem.

My New Address: Prodigy Internet

I have become a member of Prodigy Internet and plan to phase out my old "Classic" Prodigy ID and account over the next month or so. Prodigy Internet is based on the World Wide Web and uses Netscape Navigator as a browser. Netscape Mail is used for Email. Cost is \$9.95 a month for 10 hours service. For \$19.95, unlimited access is provided. Billing is done monthly. My new email ID is **DanHenry@prodigy.net**.

Please call me if you would like help with any of the online services or if you would like help with the Internet.

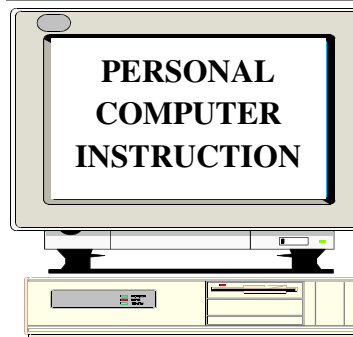
Technical Support Numbers are usually listed in the front of the documentation or on the cover. Be sure to have these numbers where you can find them.

Many companies supply ongoing technical support using an 800 number. This support is often free of charge. Some companies like Microsoft, do not have an 800 number. Typically, you'll wait a long time on a 800 number before reaching someone, unless you call at an off time. Response to long distance numbers is often immediate.

Windows 95 users have 90 days of free support commencing with the initial call. After that, the charge \$35 per incident.

Help is often available at a company's World Wide Web site at no charge.

Be sure to be near the computer when you call and have all relevant information handy.



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Buying a New Computer?

Here's what the December issue of *Consumer Reports* recommends it should have at a minimum:

Processor: 133-megahertz Pentium

Memory: 16 meg RAM

Hard drive: 1.6 gigabytes

CD-ROM Speed: 8X

Modem Speed: 28.8 kbps, V.34

Memory cache: 256 kilobytes

Free Email from www.juno.com

One of the primary uses for the Internet is Email. If you don't care about the World Wide Web or Newsgroups, but really would like to keep in touch with friends and family, there may be a solution for you.

Juno provides free Email on the Internet that is accessed using an 800 number. It's free because it is advertiser supported. You may order through www.juno.com. If you do not have access to it, please call me. I have ordered the software for use by anyone who would like to have it installed.