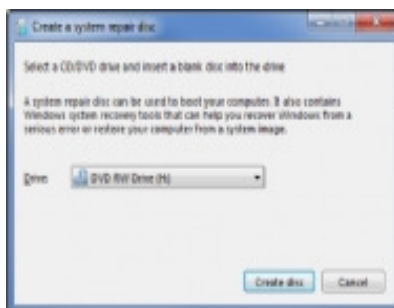# Make Your New PC Hassle-Free

Follow these three steps to head off most computing problems before they have a chance.   Recommended by Rick Broida, PCWorld

Did you find a new PC under the tree (or menorah) last month? If so, there are steps you should take to make it as hassle-free as possible. If you want even more tips, read my recent "Essential Windows Tricks" collection.

Step One: Create a System Repair Disc

You never know when some catastrophe will strike your PC, rendering it unable to boot. And because few vendors these days bundle actual operating-system discs, it's up to you to build a bootable CD or DVD that can help save the day.

Thankfully, Windows 7 makes this quite easy. Just click Start, type **repair**, and then click *Create a System Repair Disc.* Pop a blank CD or DVD into your drive (netbook users will need to connect an external one), click *Create disc,* and then sit back while Windows gets to work.

When it's done, label the disc, file it away, and hope you never need it. If you do, you can boot the disc to load a basic repair environment with diagnostic tools and System Restore.

The important thing to remember is that you can't do this after a problem has occurred; you need to create your repair disc ahed of time. So take 10 minutes and do it right now. At some point in the future, you may be awfully glad you did.
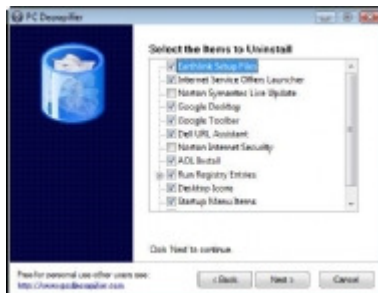
Step Two: Remove the Crapware

Now that you've created a system-repair disc for your new PC, let's get it running at peak performance. That means removing some, if not all, of the software that was preloaded by the system maker. Some call it shovelware; I call it crapware.

Why the derogatory moniker? Simple: The proprietary and/or third-party software that many vendors preload on their PCs is mostly junk. It consumes space on your hard drive, causes your system to boot slower than it should, and just generally gets in the way.

Yes, I'm looking at you, McAfee Internet Security 90-day trial. And Google Desktop. And Roxio everything. You're not bad products, but I didn't ask for you, and I don't want you unless I want you. Get it?

There are two ways to go about shoveling out the shovelware. First, you can install one of my longtime favorite utilities, Revo Uninstaller, then manually remove unwanted apps one by one.

Second, you can take advantage of the aptly named PC Decrapifier, which was created for the sole purpose of removing crapware. The latest version (2.1) can kick nearly 100 crap apps to the curb, everything from AOL to Yahoo Toolbar. Of course, it's not an all-or-nothing proposition: You can choose which programs it uninstalls.

Yes, I recognize the irony of installing software to remove software. But Revo Uninstaller is worth having anyway, and you can dump PC Decrapifier when you're done with.

As to the question of what programs you should keep and what you should pitch, tread carefully. For example, if your system came with a Blu-ray drive and you remove a bundled program like Arcsoft Total Media Theater, you may lose the ability to watch Blu-ray movies. When in doubt, keep the app.

In most cases, however, if there's a program you don't recognize or don't think you want (a Web search can answer most questions), get rid of it.
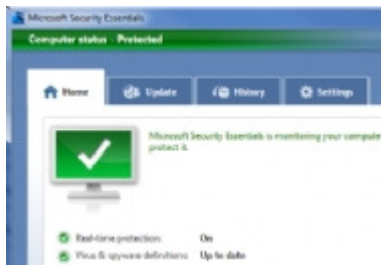
Step Three: Keep It Secure

Now let's talk security. As any regular PCWorld reader knows, computers and their users are vulnerable to all manner of threats, from hackers to phishing to viruses. That's why it's critical that you batten down your new machine's hatches right from the get-go.

Psst! Guess what? Right out of the box, Windows 7 is already pretty darn secure. Its firewall and built-in anti-malware tool (Windows Defender) offer robust protection from everyday threats.

Meanwhile, the latest versions of Firefox (3.5) and Internet Explorer (8) help keep you safe from pop-ups, phishing attempts, browser hijacking, and the like.

As for e-mail, both Gmail and Yahoo employ Norton antivirus software at the server level (meaning there's nothing you have to install), along with anti-spam and anti-phishing tools. If you happen to use either one, well, you've got clean mail.

There are a couple tools of your own to consider adding to the mix. The first is a router, which has a built-in firewall that effectively renders your PC(s) invisible to the Internet at large--so no hackers will be able to break in.

Second, for that little bit of extra protection, install Microsoft's widely acclaimed--and free-- Security Essentials antivirus software.

I also highly recommend Web of Trust, a free browser plug-in that shows you if Web links are safe--before you click them.

And that's it! I firmly believe that you can dispense with pricey, intrusive, performance-sapping third-party security software and rely on Windows' own tools (and a few extras). That's what I've done for years and years, and I haven't encountered a single problem. Not one. (You can read more about this in Security Software: Protection or Extortion?)