

Computer Issues... Things you should know

This Month's CADNET Corner will cover some things you should know about your computer systems, as well as some tips for working with them.

Drivers: No, I am not talking about people who drive cars. In computer terms, a driver is a file that lets your computer use and control a device either inside or attached to your computer. Some examples are video drivers, printer drivers etc. When a manufacturer creates a new device, they also will create a driver to make that device work. Typically the drivers are shipped with device on a CD or diskette. In order to make the device work, you would simply install the driver.

As you upgrade devices and software on your computers, sometimes you will run into problems with drivers. Some may conflict with other software, some may not be supported and others may just not work. In this case you will need to update the device drivers. An example may be that you want to upgrade your PC from Windows 98 to Windows 2000. Many of the drivers on the system for 98 will not work on 2000. You will need to go to the websites of your device manufacturer and download the drivers for Windows 2000.

Sometimes you may install new software, which may conflict with an existing software or device. Again in that case you would want to install the latest driver for that device. One way of obtaining the latest drivers for some of your devices is from Windows Update. On the Internet Explorer menu, "Tools", you can select Windows Update (Figure 1). This will check your system to see if you have the latest drivers. Unfortunately not every manufacturer allows Microsoft to check for their drivers, but many do. If they do, you will get a notification that there is a new driver available, and you can download and install it quickly and easily.



Figure 1

Driver problems account for a majority of the issues we get tech support calls for.

TIP: This question comes up all the time when I am talking to people about computer issues. I often ask people to send me the error message they get when calling in for tech support. Many times they try writing down the whole error, and emailing me a typed message.

A simpler and more complete way to do this is to use the "Print Screen" button. While the error is displayed on your screen, hold down the "Alt" key, and press the "Print Screen" button. This will copy the active window to the clipboard. Then open a program such as WordPad, Word, WordPerfect etc, and click in the document, click the right mouse button and select paste. This will paste the window into the document. You can then save the document. You now have a copy of the error window that can be printed or emailed.

This works with any active window. You can use this for copying windows to any document. If you use the "Ctrl" and "Print Screen" buttons, you will get a copy of your entire desktop. Use the same procedure above to paste into a document. This is the technique I use to include screen captures in these columns.

TIP: Keyboard commands. When Windows took over with icons and drop down menus, many keyboard commands were forgotten. There are still a number of them that can be quicker and easier than using those menus or icons. Some examples:

Alt+F4	Closes the current window
Alt+Tab	Toggles through open programs
Ctrl+A	Selects all items in a window
Ctrl+C	Copies the selected item
Ctrl+X	Cuts the selected items
Ctrl+V	Paste
Ctrl+Z	Undo
Shift+Delete	Deletes items without sending them to the recycle bin
F5	Refreshes the active window
F1	Displays Help menu

When you select a drop down menu, many of these shortcut keyboard commands are shown on the menu items. You also can create your own customized commands.

If you have any questions on these or any other CAD or IT topic, you can call me, Rick Ladd at 1.866.522.3638 toll free or email me at rladd@cadnetserv.com.