What You Can Do Before Your Laptop Gets a Refresh

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May 1, 2017

Handing over your computer to Portland Internetworks can sometimes feel like giving up your labradoodle at doggy daycare. You know they're going to scrub last week's beach trip from his paws, he might even look weird after he gets a haircut. The important thing is that he smells fresh and isn't missing any significant bits when he runs back into your arms. When we operate on your workstation, we treat it like a member of your family. It's our goal to give it back to you without harming a single hair on its head, but computers, unlike puppies, are prone to breaking down in weird and mysterious ways. We can't always recover everything exactly as it was before, but we can get close, with your help of course. The following best practices can mitigate the surprises—and who knows, they may even improve your day-to-day relationship with technology.

Save your work in the right place

Think of your local network like a wallet and key dish. If you don't remember to drop your car keys into it every evening, then you're more likely to misplace them. The same is true for your important files and documents. When you save your work to your local desktop, and not your company's network drive, it's easier to lose everything when tragedy strikes. Your network drive will be backed up daily and have redundancy built in for security. The next time your IT gal asks, "is there anything else you want me to save before I reinstall your operating system?" You'll be able to say with confidence, "Nope. Everything's backed up on the network."

Use a password manager

Password managers are so hot right now, but there's a lot of information--and miss-information out there. Let's clear the air a bit before we continue. Yes. Some of the most reputable password managers, including the one I use, Last Pass, have been hacked. Nothing is 100% secure, not even the CIA. Security is about layering, like a parfait of everyone's least favorite ice-cream toppings. It's about delaying and inconvenience an intruder long enough to make them think twice, or buy you enough time to act. That's why Portland Internetworks uses a vast suite of tools and best practices to keep every nook and cranny of your network secure. That's also why a password manager is far better than that post-it note you keep in your desk drawer with "ilovepuppies123" scrawled across it.

Password managers use encryption, and multi-factor authentication to keep your passwords so safe, that the IT guy at Last Pass doesn't even know them. The next time some malicious operative tries to peek inside your password vault, all they will see is a database full of obscenely complicated character

combinations, called salted password hashes. If your password manager's company is compromised, it's not likely that your passwords will be revealed; You will be notified immediately by the company; and it's much easier to change all your passwords when they're all in one place rather than rifle through your desk drawers while trying to remember every application you've used a password for.

Keep all your license keys

I know. I know. Believe me, I'm not a fan of holding onto software CD keys either. That's the kind of thing my father would do. Ugh. However, it can greatly reduce the headaches for you and your IT person the next time your computer needs to be completely refreshed.

The good news is that you can save your license keys in your password manager by writing them down or uploading them as a photograph. Ask your employer if they already do this for you. The important thing is to remember if you use any other proprietary software that your company may not be aware of. We run into these situations more often than we care to. It's never fun for us to tell someone their work has been lost because their employer doesn't have any record of it. Save your license keys. Maybe even consider making a list of every application that's important to you. We can't save what we don't know about.

Double-Check Everything

When we finish refreshing your computer, we will always ask you to do this for us, sometimes in front of us, just to make sure we haven't missed anything. You will have a small window of time to make sure everything you told us to save is where it needs to be, before we eliminate any snapshots we've taken. This is where knowing what's on your computer comes in handy. Scan through your list of applications and folders, that you've diligently saved in your password manager, and test everything by clicking around. Doing that once can save you a lot of trouble later.

Refreshing your computer, it's applications, and even its operating system means that some things may never work the same. That's the nature of technology. It changes so fast. It also means that you may have to manually restore your old settings to return it to its original glory. Computer problems tend to burry themselves deep within the innerworkings of your system, like fleas in Rover's fur, sometimes you must shave it all off before you can consider cuddling again.