

CRITIQUE OF THE ULTIMATE TROUBLESHOOTER UTILITY PROGRAM

LAST YEAR I PRESENTED SEVERAL PROGRAMS THAT DEALT WITH VIRUSES AND MALWARE. IN ONE OF THESE I TALKED ABOUT HOW TO DEVELOP A LIST OF ALL PROGRAMS THAT ARE LAUNCHED ON YOUR COMPUTER AT STARTUP AND WHERE TO GO TO DETERMINE WHAT THESE PROGRAMS ARE, WHAT THEY DO, AND WHETHER OR NOT IT IS NECESSARY THAT THEY BE LAUNCHED AT START-UP AND RUN CONTINUOUSLY IN THE BACKGROUND HOGGING UP MEMORY. I PROVIDED THE URLS FOR THREE SITES THAT HAVE EXTENSIVE LISTS WITH THE NAMES OF MOST EXECUTIBLE PROGRAMS YOU ARE LIKELY TO HAVE INSTALLED ON YOUR COMPUTER WITH INFORMATION AS TO WHAT THEY ARE, THE APPLICATION THEY RELATE TO, AND A RECOMMENDATION AS TO WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE CONSIDERED NECESSARY FOR AUTOMATIC LAUNCHING AT STARTUP. ONE OF THE SITES I RECOMMENDED YOU VISIT TO CHECK OUT YOUR LIST OF PROGRAMS WAS ANSWERSTHATWORK.COM.

THANKS TO WALT PARSONS IN A PRESENTATION HE MADE FOR OUR DVPC COMPUTER USERS GROUP I BECAME AWARE THAT ANSWERSTHATWORK.COM NOW HAS A UTILITY THAT YOU CAN DOWNLOAD AND INSTALL ON YOUR COMPUTER THAT DOES ALL THE WORK FOR YOU OF IDENTIFYING PROGRAMS THAT LAUNCH AT STARTUP, ADVISING YOU OF WHAT YOU SHOULD DO, AND HELPING YOU TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS.

AS SHOWN ABOVE, TO CHECK THIS UTILITY OUT, GO TO ANSWERSTHATWORK.COM'S HOME PAGE AND CLICK ON THE LINK IN THE UPPER LEFT CORNER, TITLED "HAVE YOU TRIED THE ULTIMATE TROUBLESHOOTER YET?"

THIS WILL TAKE YOU TO A PAGE THAT WILL LINK YOU TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING THE ULTIMATE TROUBLESHOOTER (TUT) UTILITY AND PERMIT YOU TO EITHER PURCHASE AND DOWNLOAD A REGISTERED COPY OR TO DOWNLOAD A FREE EVALUATION COPY.

I WILL NOTE HERE THAT THIS UTILITY IS SAID TO WORK WITH ALL MICROSOFT PLATFORMS EXCEPT WINDOWS NT4 (I.E., WIN 95, 98, ME, 2000, XP, AND 2003).

ALTHOUGH I DIDN'T DOWNLOAD THE EVALUATION COPY I CHECKED WITH ANSWERSTHATWORK.COM AND WAS TOLD THAT THE EVALUATION COPY IS A) LIMITED TO 10 RUNS, B) DOES NOT PROVIDE DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOST OF THE PROGRAMS IT LISTS AND C) DISABLES MANY OF THE FUNCTIONS PROVIDED SUCH AS HOUSEKEEPING AND PRINT. IN THE FRAME ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE TUT INFORMATION PAGE THERE IS A LINK TITLED "VIEW SCREENSHOTS". THIS WAS SUFFICIENT FOR ME FOR EVALUATION PURPOSES SO I OPTED TO ORDER AND PAY FOR A REGISTERED COPY. THE PRICE IS \$20.00. THE LICENSE FOR THE REGISTERED VERSION OF THIS UTILITY PERMITS YOU TO LOAD THE PROGRAM ON ONE DESKTOP AND ONE LAPTOP COMPUTER.

EITHER WAY (EVALUATION COPY OR REGISTERED VERSION) YOU WILL BE DOWNLOADING THE SAME PROGRAM FILE (TROUBLESHOOTER.EXE). YOU WILL WANT TO SAVE YOUR DOWNLOADED COPY OF THE UTILITY TO YOUR HARD DRIVE. AFTERWARDS MAKE A BACKUP COPY OF YOUR UTILITY AND STORE IT IN A SAFE PLACE.

IF YOU ARE PURCHASING A COPY, THE LAST PAGE IN THE ORDERING PROCESS WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH YOUR ORDER NUMBER AND REGISTRATION INFORMATION. THE REGISTRATION INFORMATION IS IMPORTANT SO PRINT THIS PAGE OUT AND SAVE IT. THE REGISTRATION INFORMATION IS NEEDED TO ACTIVATE ALL THE FUNCTIONS OF THE PROGRAM; IT INCLUDES THE SERIAL NUMBER NAME AS WELL AS A SERIAL NUMBER.

INSTALLATION IS STRAIGHTFORWARD WITH NO SURPRISES, EXCEPT THAT IT DOES NOT PROVIDE YOU WITH THE OPTION OF INSTALLING THE PROGRAM FILES TO A PARTITION OF YOUR CHOOSING. AS YOU KNOW I HAVE ALL MY PROGRAM FILES IN A DEDICATED PARTITION (AS I DO MY DOCUMENTS AND DATA FILES). THIS IS A SHORTCOMING THAT IS EASILY CORRECTABLE AND I HOPE THEIR PROGRAMMERS WILL SEE FIT TO DO THIS IN SOME FUTURE VERSION. THEIR PROGRAMMERS ARE NOT EGOCENTRIC AS NO PROGRAM ICON (AS WELL AS ICONS FOR UNRELATED WEBSITES) IS PLACED ON YOUR DESKTOP OR YOUR SYSTEM TRAY AND YOU WILL FIND THAT THIS PROGRAM DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY LAUNCH AT STARTUP.

IN THE INSTALLATION SEQUENCE YOU WILL BE ASKED TO READ AND ACCEPT AN END USERS AGREEMENT. I SUGGEST YOU PRINT OUT AND SAVE THIS AGREEMENT. IN ADDITION TO THE USUAL DISCLAIMERS AND LIMITS OF LIABILITY IT HAS SOME INFORMATION THAT YOU MAY FIND USEFUL IN USING THE UTILITY. (LACK OF USEFUL INFORMATION FOR USING THIS UTILITY IS A SERIOUS DRAWBACK, THOUGH NOT FATAL, AND I WILL TALK ABOUT IT LATER).

YOU'LL FIND A SHORTCUT TO LAUNCH THE UTILITY BY CLICKING YOUR START BUTTON/ PROGRAMS/ AND LOOKING FOR THE SHORTCUT TO THE TUT PROGRAM FILE IN A FOLDER CALLED THE ULTIMATE TROUBLESHOOTER. HERE'S WHERE THEY SEPARATE THE MEN FROM THE BOYS. IF YOU HAVE A PAID COPY CLICK ON THE REGISTER BUTTON AND INSERT YOUR SERIAL NAME AND NUMBER IN THE APPROPRIATE SPACES. THIS IS REQUIRED ONLY THE FIRST TIME YOU LAUNCH THE PROGRAM (UNLESS YOU HAVE AN EVALUATION COPY, IN WHICH CASE YOU CLICK THE LEFT BUTTON WHICH SHOWS YOU HOW MANY EVALUATION RUNS YOU HAVE REMAINING).

THE FIRST SCREEN THAT APPEARS, WHEN OPENING TUT, LISTS ALL TASKS PRESENTLY RUNNING ON YOUR MACHINE. THIS INCLUDES THOSE TASKS THAT ARE IN OPEN WINDOWS AS WELL AS THOSE LAUNCHED ON STARTUP. THEY ARE LISTED FROM TOP TO BOTTOM BY COLOR CODE WITH RED SIGNIFYING USELESS, HARMFUL, DISASTROUS, OR UNNECESSARY; YELLOW, SIGNIFYING THAT IT IS YOUR CALL BASED ON THE INFO PROVIDED; AND BLUE AND GREEN, REPRESENTING PROGRAMS THAT ARE ESSENTIAL OR AT LEAST ACCEPTABLE TO BE RUNNING IN THE BACKGROUND. THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ITEMS WITH BLUE DOTS NEED TO BE REVIEWED. THEY ARE GENERALLY OKAY, BUT HERE IS WHERE YOU MAY FIND A TROJAN HORSE PROGRAM IF THE PATH TO THE PROGRAM IS NOT APPROPRIATE.

IN THIS SLIDE, ABOVE, YOU SEE TWO BOXES – THE BOX ON THE LEFT, WHICH RESULTS WHEN RIGHT CLICKING ON A HIGHLIGHTED PROGRAM NAME, LISTS TASKS THAT CAN BE PERFORMED AND THE ONE ON THE RIGHT LIST OPTIONS AVAILABLE UNDER ONE OF THESE TASKS (SET PRIORITIES).

THIS SCREEN REPRESENTS DETAIL THAT WOULD APPEAR FOR A PROGRAM RATED YELLOW – THAT IS, IT IS YOUR CHOICE. I HAVE ALSO SUPERIMPOSED THE OPTIONS BOX THAT WOULD APPEAR WHEN RIGHT CLICKING ON A HIGHLIGHTED PROGRAM AND THEN SELECTING PROPERTIES.

“SERVICES” ARE SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS THAT PERFORM A FUNCTION IN SUPPORT OF OTHER PROGRAMS. THESE SERVICES MAY INTERACT DIRECTLY WITH HARDWARE OR PERMIT YOUR COMPUTER TO INTERFACE WITH OTHER COMPUTERS AND/OR THE INTERNET. QUITE FRANKLY, THIS FUNCTION IS MORE OF INTEREST TO OUR ADVANCED USERS WITH WINDOWS 2000/XP/OR 2003 PLATFORMS. ON THIS SCREEN I HAVE HIGHLIGHTED A MICROSOFT SERVICE WHICH TUT ADVISES IS NOT NECESSARY. BUT NOTICE THAT UNDER “STATE” IT INDICATES THAT THIS SERVICE IS STOPPED. I ACCOMPLISHED THIS BY RIGHT CLICKING ON THIS ITEM AND, UNDER STARTUP MODE, I HAVE CHECKED THIS SERVICE AS “MANUAL”. THIS MEANS THAT I HAVE NOT DELETED THE PROGRAM AND IT IS STILL AVAILABLE IF I MANUALLY LAUNCH IT. BUT IT WILL NOT LAUNCH AUTOMATICALLY AT STARTUP.

THIS SCREEN ILLUSTRATES JUST SOME OF THE INFORMATION DISPLAYED UNDER THE “HARDWARE” TAB. THE INFORMATION FOUND HERE IS AS EXTENSIVE AS ANY YOU WILL FIND ON YOUR COMPUTER. TO ME IT IS A “FREEBE”. YOU MIGHT THINK IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE UTILITY NAME, TROUBLESHOOTER, BUT I CAN THINK OF THREE USES OFFHAND. ONE: I AM JUST PLAIN INTERESTED IN WHAT IS INSIDE MY BOX. TWO: HERE IS WHERE I WILL GO FOR INFORMATION NEEDED WHEN I WANT TO MAKE MODIFICATIONS TO MY COMPUTER. AND THREE: IF YOU REQUIRE TECHNICAL SUPPORT YOU MAY BE REQUIRED TO FURNISH INFORMATION WHICH YOU WILL BE ABLE TO EASILY FIND HERE.

IF YOU WANTED TO PRINT OUT THE INFORMATION SHOWN ABOVE, UNDER THE HARDWARE TAB, OR ANY OTHER PAGE PROVIDED BY THIS UTILITY YOU CLICK THE PRINT MENU BUTTON AND SELECT YOUR CHOICE OF PRINTING OPTIONS SHOWN IN THE BOX IN THE CENTER OF THE SCREEN. ONE EXCEPTION: FOR WHATEVER REASON THE PRINT OPTION IS NOT AVAILABLE TO USERS FOR THE STARTUPS FUNCTION. I HAVE NO IDEA WHY THIS PROHIBITION.

FROM THIS SCREEN YOU CAN SEE I HAVE REDUCED THE NUMBER OF PROGRAMS THAT I RUN ON STARTUP TO A VERY FEW. I SHOW THE TASKS AVAILABLE WHEN RIGHT CLICKING A HIGHLIGHTED ITEM. IN THIS CASE, AS THE RECOMMENDATION NOTES, I HAVE TO ACTUALLY LAUNCH THE PROGRAM AND DESELECT AN ITEM IN THE OPTIONS MENU TO PREVENT THIS PROGRAM FROM LAUNCHING AT STARTUP. AS YOU CAN SEE THE PRINT BUTTON IS “GRAYED” OUT. I HAVE NO IDEA WHY BUT THE PRINT OPTION IS DISINGAGED FOR THIS FUNCTION.

I WAS ASKED WHY EXPLORER.EXE IS NOT SHOWN AS ONE OF MY STARTUP PROGRAMS. I AM NOT SURE; HOWEVER, I CHECKED PROGRAMS LISTED IN MY MICROSOFT SYSTEMS INFORMATION/ STARTUP PROGRAMS LIST AND I HAVE ONLY THE FILES SHOWN ABOVE LISTED THEREIN.

AGAIN, I AM TROUBLED THAT I HAVE NO CLEAR UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE TASKS ARE THAT

CAN BE PERFORMED WHEN RIGHT CLICKING ON ANY OF THE HIGHLIGHTED STARTUP ITEMS.

“HOUSEKEEPING”, LIKE HARDWARE, IS A SEPARATE LITTLE UTILITY THAT IS A “FREEBE”. IT ALLOWS YOU TO IDENTIFY AND DELETE UNNEEDED TEMPORARY FILES THAT ACCUMULATE FROM INTERNET SESSIONS. YOU CAN ACCESS IT AT ANY TIME BY CLICKING ON THE HOUSEKEEPING MENU BUTTON.

BE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT EACH OF THESE ITEMS REFERS TO BEFORE DELETING THEM. FOR MYSELF, I HAVE NO PROBLEM WITH ANY OF THEM, BUT I DO MOVE THEM TO THE RECYCLE BIN TO BE SAFE – AND DELETE MY RECYCLE BIN AFTER A WEEK OF COMPUTER USE.

I WILL NOTE THAT IT TOOK A LONG TIME TO DELETE MY TEMPORARY INTERNET FILES, BOTH ON MY DESKTOP AND MY LAPTOP COMPUTER. THIS IS NOT SURPRISING AS IT IS EASY TO ACCUMULATE THOUSANDS, TENS OF THOUSANDS OF FILES IN THIS FOLDER. ALSO NOTE THE AVAILABLE MEMORY. THE UTILITY SHOWS I HAVE 41% AVAILABLE, AND I HAVE 512 MB OF RAM. I SUSPECT THIS UTILITY REQUIRES A LOT OF MEMORY FOR ITS DATA FILES, THUS SLOWING DOWN THE PROCESS OF TRANSFERRING FILES TO THE RECYCLE BIN. AS AN OTHER ASIDE, ALTHOUGH I DID NOT SEE ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEMORY LIMITATIONS FOR THIS UTILITY, I SUSPECT THAT USERS WITH 32 MB OF RAM MAY FIND THAT IT TAKES NOTICABLE TIME TO LOAD PROGRAMS WHEN SWITCHING FROM ONE FUNCTION TO ANOTHER.

I WAS NOT OVERLY IMPRESSED BY THE FUNCTIONS THAT ARE AVAILABLE UNDER THE MENU BUTTONS. THIS SCREEN SHOWS THE FUNCTIONS AVAILABLE UNDER THE TOOLS MENU BUTTON. THESE ARE ALL USEFUL PROGRAMS TO BE ABLE TO ACCESS WHEN USING THIS UTILITY, BUT I WOULD THINK THAT THERE ARE A NUMBER OF OTHER FUNCTIONS THAT COULD BE LISTED HERE.

AND LASTLY I SHOW THE FUNCTIONS AVAILABLE UNDER THE HELP MENU BUTTON. AGAIN I WAS NOT IMPRESSED. BUT I DO WANT TO MENTION THE “CHECK FOR UPDATES FUNCTION” SHOWN HERE. YOU WILL WANT TO CHECK FOR UPDATES WHEN YOU INSTALL YOUR SOFTWARE AND EACH TIME YOU USE THE PROGRAM. I CHECKED WITH ANSWERTHATWORK.COM, AND THEY ADVISED THAT, IN GENERAL, THEY PROVIDE 2 UPDATES PER MONTH. ADDITIONALLY, THEY NOTED THAT THE HOUSEKEEPING FUNCTION WAS INTRODUCED ONLY LAST MONTH. LICENSED USERS GET 1-YEAR OF PRODUCT UPDATES AND UPGRADES AND 1-YEAR OF DESCRIPTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS UPDATES.

AS NOTED EARLIER, I HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO FIND A USER’S MANUAL FOR THIS UTILITY AND, AS YOU CAN SEE HERE, THE UTILITY DOES NOT INCLUDE A HELP SECTION. I ALSO QUERIED ANSWERSTHATWORK.COM ON THIS AND WAS ADVISED “We do not as yet have a manual, unfortunately. There is one in the pipeline but the speed at which things have moved since we released the product, what we thought would be a product of only "mild interest", has prevented us from producing a manual. The immense interest in the product has resulted in many of the features evolving and getting better as end-users make suggestions, etc..., and therefore, till it reaches maturity, the product is a constant moving target from the point of view of documenting it, from week to WEEK! For example, between version 2.31 and 2.33 there was a total interface redesign, 2 new right-click menu options on the Startups tab, Housekeeping, warning windows, etc...

When a user feels they need some hand holding, the guys in Product Support provide it as requested. Usually, within two email exchanges the end-user has picked up on what to do and no further exchanges are needed.”

IF PRODUCT SUPPORT IS AS HELPFUL AND RESPONSIVE AS THEIR SALES PERSONNEL IN RESPONDING TO MY QUERIES THEN I CAN LIVE WITH THE FEW SHORTCOMINGS I HAVE NOTED ABOVE.

MY RECOMMENDATION? I THINK IT IS WELL WORTH THE \$20 INVESTMENT EVEN IF YOU ONLY USE IT BUT ONCE, THE DAY YOU DOWNLOAD IT. BUT THIS IS CERTAINLY A DIAGNOSTIC UTILITY THAT I WILL USE CONTINUOUSLY WHEN I DEVELOP COMPUTER PROBLEMS OR MY COMPUTER BECOMES SLUGGISH.

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