by Anna-Lena Swager August 4, 2016

Do Computer Issues Get In The Way Of Your Work Performance?

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Ever feel like your work performance suffers due to issues related to computers? There's little else that's as frustrating in the workplace as being blocked from working on something by technical issues. What can we do to minimize it?

For many of us, our work and daily performance depends on our PC or laptop working properly. It's vital that our computer systems function as they should and that we can always access our data.

But when the computer doesn't co-operate we suddenly have problems.

And computer downtime can also have a serious effect on our levels of performance.

How Do Computer Issues Affect Performance?

Computer downtime means lost working time. Even though the time can be "made up", the original working hours are lost for good.

It also means our overall level of performance suffers. It can lead to missing project and delivery deadlines, which in turn results in dissatisfied customers, colleagues and employer.

And of course, computer downtime interrupts our focus and concentration. The result is more stress, not just for ourselves, but for everyone affected.

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A survey carried out by CA Technologies [http://www.ca.com/~/media/files/articles/avoidable_cost_of_downtime_part_2_ita.aspx] of 2,000 organizations across North America and Europe revealed that IT outages are surprisingly frequent.

What's more, computer downtime adversely affects business

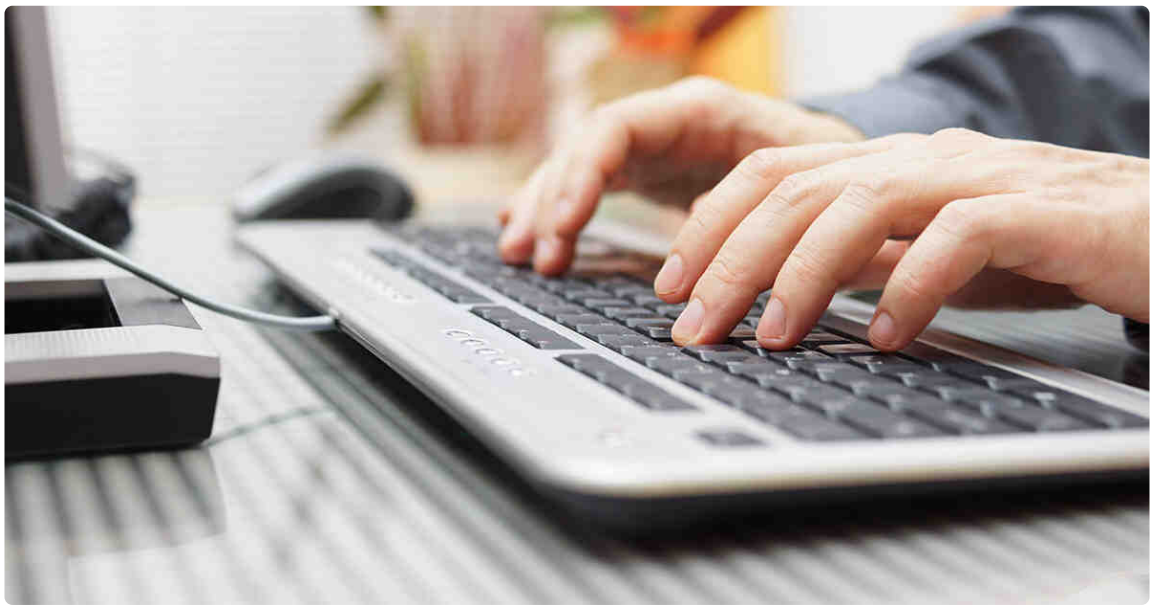
revenue and customer loyalty, as well as negatively affecting employee morale.

Even when your computer system is restored and running once again, it takes time for you to get fully back into the flow of your work.

The survey found the average business suffers around 14 hours of downtime each year, during which time employees are only able to work at 63% of their usual performance.

And after each downtime incident, they report that employee performance only returns to around 70% of its pre-downtime level.

It's clear computer downtime is a major cause of a low level of performance for many people.



What Are The Most Common Causes Of Computer Downtime?

IT disaster recovery specialist Quorum researched the top main causes of computer downtime among small and medium-sized businesses.

Quorum's 2013 Disaster Recovery Report [https://quorum.net/eva/2013/may/disaster-recovery-lp/index.php] found hardware and software failures, together with human error to be the most common causes of computer downtime, with computer hardware failures accounting for 55% of all incidents.

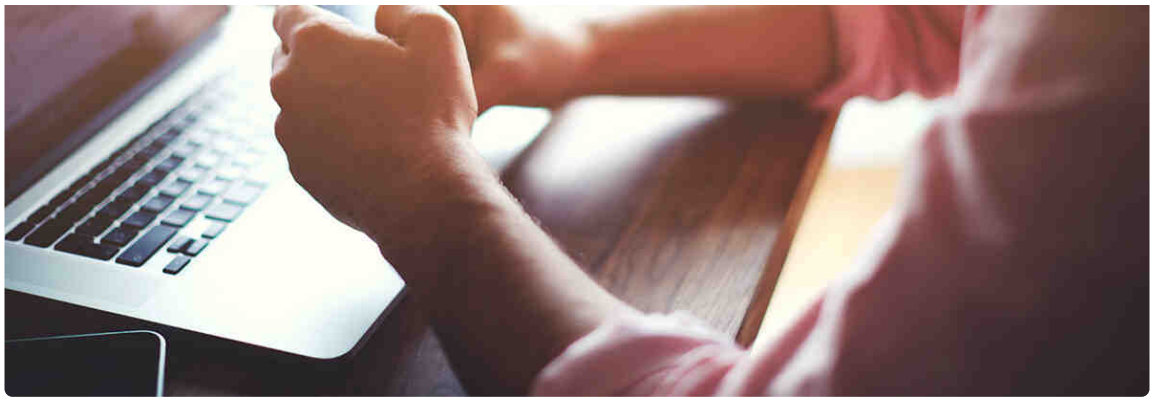
Their report revealed it takes an average of 30 man-hours to recover from this kind of downtime.

The second most common cause of downtime was human error, responsible for some 22 percent of downtime incidents. This includes events such as accidentally deleting an important folder.

Software failure was the third most common cause of downtime, accounting for 18 percent of incidents.

This includes issues such as buggy or unreliable patches, problems with system updates and upgrades, as well as the disruptive impact of malware and viruses.

Another cause of downtime is computer-related health issues, such as RSI hand or wrist strain, which make it difficult or impossible to perform computer-based activity.



How Can I Prevent Computer Issues From Occurring?

The best way to maintain a high level of performance at work is to anticipate and prepare ourselves for possible downtime incidents in advance.

For example, it's a fact that all hardware fails eventually. So we can make sure we always have backup hardware ready to hand.

Backup hardware means anything from a spare laptop or PC, to a reserve hard drive, as well as other accessories.

Even something as trivial as a broken mouse or keyboard can disrupt our performance if we don't have a replacement to hand.

Hard drives especially are an item where failure can have a devastating effect on our level of performance.

Hard drives can fail gradually, with defective sectors gradually appearing, or also quite suddenly without warning. Either way hard drive failure leads to loss of data.

We can prepare for drive failure by using multiple drives. External USD hard drives are a great option. And it's a good idea to have at least two hard drives for your PC or laptop.

Even better is to ensure we have everything in place to backup our vital data regularly. This comes in handy in protecting from Malware such as viruses [https://blog.teamviewer.com/prevent-computer-virus/] , to recovering after hardware failure [https://blog.teamviewer.com/computer-overheat/] .

Data Is The Key To A High Level Of Performance

Data availability is vital for maintaining a high performance level. If our data gets damaged or deleted, this can mean big problems for our work and business.

We need to pay attention to the difference between archives and data backups. Archives are copies of software or data which are no

longer or only seldom subject to change. Software for example does not usually need to be backed up daily.

Data backups however need to be done frequently if the data is constantly changing or being added to.

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It's also vital to check the restore procedures for our software and data backup recovery do actually work. There's little point backing up if we can't restore properly in the event of data loss.

USB storage sticks are useful as on-the-spot data backup devices. But their small size makes them easy to mislay or be stolen.

PCs are more reliable than laptops, but they are of course not mobile. If one morning a laptop for some inexplicable reason suddenly does not boot, then you can be faced with a major disruption, as has happened to me a few times.

Software Issues Can Also Affect Performance

Software upgrades and updates which cause conflicts with other software are a common cause of computer downtime.

When it comes to major operating system version upgrades we can ask ourselves whether or not it is worth updating to the latest operating system [https://blog.teamviewer.com/updating-latest-operating-system/] .

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New operating system versions are sometimes released with bugs that haven't yet been found and rectified. The result can be compatibility problems with existing software which can play havoc with our work performance.

Unless the new version contains important security patches, it can be better to wait until the first update to the new release comes out. Don't forget you can also check the feedback from other users who've already upgraded.

Protect Your Computer From Malware

According to a survey by Solutionary [https://go.solutionary.com/GTIR.html] , a major threat to data security for businesses and computer users now comes from malware which costs businesses an average of $3000 per day per incident [http://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/malware-attack-

recovery-costs-an-average-of-3000/] .

To avoid becoming the victim of malware and ransomware we can make sure we always follow computer security best practices.

For example, don't automatically click on links or attachments in emails. Don't allow data files to auto-execute programs. Keep your anti-virus software up to date and make sure it regularly scans your system. And always ensure your system is securely firewalled.

Software updates are often released to address security holes. Make sure to always apply these patches as a matter of high priority. This is especially the case with web browser, email, and web server software, as well as for operating system patch updates.

Many operating systems can be configured to install all patch updates automatically without our intervention, for example outside of working hours. That way we can avoid lost working time and lost performance.

Computer-Related Health Issues Can Also Cause Downtime

Another problem which can cause low performance is health issues resulting from over-intensive computer usage.

According to the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration [http://www.rsi-therapy.com/statistics.htm] (OSHA), computer work induced RSI or repetitive strain injuries affect hundreds of thousands of Americans and has a significant negative effect on performance.

RSI includes injuries to hands, wrists, and fingers caused by excessive keyboard and mouse usage. The [http://download.microsoft.com/download/1/3/4/1340dfe4-a8c1-485f-be3b-4e8991323df3/ergo_whitepaper.pdf] OSHA estimates [http://download.microsoft.com/download/1/3/4/1340dfe4-a8c1-485f-be3b-4e8991323df3/ergo_whitepaper.pdf] RSI in the US costs up to $20 billion a year in employee compensation and a typical single RSI injury results in 12 working days of lost performance.

How To Minimize The Effect Of Computer-Related Health Issues On Your Performance

There's a number of things we can do to minimize our risk of

developing RSI and to help us maintain a high level of performance at work.

Firstly, be sure to use a keyboard and mouse that is comfortable.

Sometimes a smaller sized mouse is better than the larger standard ones which can strain and stretch the hand tendons. Try not to rest your hand continually on your mouse as you work and remember to clench and stretch your hands from time to time.

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Microsoft [http://download.microsoft.com/download/1/3/4/1340dfe4-a8c1-485f-be3b-4e8991323df3/ergo_whitepaper.pdf] have produced a [http://download.microsoft.com/download/1/3/4/1340dfe4-a8c1-485f-be3b-4e8991323df3/ergo_whitepaper.pdf] report on avoiding RSI [http://download.microsoft.com/download/1/3/4/1340dfe4-a8c1-485f-be3b-4e8991323df3/ergo_whitepaper.pdf] by using ergonomically designed keyboards and pointing devices – which is well worth reading.

Secondly, pay attention to the computer monitor. Ensure your monitor is positioned at the correct height for your seat and eye level.

Make sure your monitor frequency is set high enough to avoid flicker. Set your monitor luminosity for your own comfort and to match the lighting of your workplace.

You can install a free app called f.lux [http://justgetflux.com/] which adjusts your screen fluorescence automatically according to the time of day or night.

Make sure you take regular breaks away from your computer. Tony Schwartz's famous article "A 90-Minute Plan for Personal Effectiveness" [https://hbr.org/2011/01/the-most-important-practice-i.html] in the Harvard Business Review explains why 90 minutes is the optimum working period for most people to achieve a high level of performance before taking a break.

What Should I Do When Experiencing Downtime To Maintain A High Performance Level At Work?

If we find computer downtime is interrupting our work, then why not use the opportunity to take a look at how we are working.

How much of our work actually needs to be done by sitting at a keyboard and monitor? Remember that a "notebook" does not only have to mean a laptop!

Obviously tasks such as programming code, sending emails, working on a spreadsheet, or doing online research have to be done at the PC or laptop.

But other activities such as content writing, report drafting, or planning can be done away from the computer. See if you can also carry out some of your work using pen and paper. This will help you avoid RSI strain.

Try and utilize downtime to work on other activities such meetings and contacts with colleagues, other team members, and clients.

Can Computer Downtime Ever Be Good For Performance?

There's no denying computer downtime has an adverse effect on performance. However, it can also have a positive side if it encourages us to take action to avoid similar downtime incidents occurring again in the future.

Take a look at what is causing the downtime. Is it software updates leading to compatibility problems?

Are you losing data and not being able to restore it satisfactorily? If so, use the time to review your data backup procedures.

Are you experiencing reliability problems with your computer hardware? Do you have replacement hardware available to provide for sufficient redundancy?

Are computer-related health issues causing problems?

It can also be worth taking the opportunity to pause and think about how you are working. Are you in a constant state of stress, or 24×7 “always on” pressure?

With the pressure of project deadlines and the drive to achieve and maintain a high performance level, it’s easy to forget we also need to plan in our own downtime in order to relax and recuperate.

Try switching off the devices occasionally and allow yourself some “disconnect time” to go and do other things instead.

Go for a walk or a trip now and then without taking your mobile or tablet with you. You may find you actually enjoy it!

What advice do you have to prevent computer issues affecting your work performance? Leave a comment below!

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