

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 164: Why You Can't Just Delete Programs

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A friend came over the other day with his computer and a problem. He had two copies of a favorite program on his machine, one in the C: drive and one in the D: drive. He suggested that he just delete one by deleting its folder. But which one?

Well, there are several approaches to this problem. One is to do some research to find out which copy is active, then delete the other. But that can be difficult to do, and it might cause problems if the one you are going to delete has written options or other subprograms here or there. Furthermore, it is possible that both copies are installed and active! A much better approach is to uninstall both, then reinstall one where you want it to go. Here is how:

1. Use CCleaner's uninstall utility (TOOLS, UNINSTALL) to uninstall BOTH copies. If just one is active, one pass will take care of this (the attempt to uninstall the second copy will fail because it will not show as being installed after the first one is removed, but that is OK). You can also use the Control Panel's ADD/REMOVE PROGRAMS to do all this, but it will take much longer.
2. Make sure that the program's folders are gone from both the C: and D: drives. That is, if the program's name is Microwhiz Doitall, Make sure no folders exist in C: or D: named Microwhiz or Microwhiz with a Doitall subfolder. If they do, delete any Doitall subfolders, but thereafter delete any Microwhiz folders only if they are empty (maybe you have several programs by the Microwhiz Corporation).
3. Reboot the machine. An important step! Don't skip it.
4. Run CCleaner, both the CLEANER: RUN CLEANER section and the REGISTRY: SCAN FOR ISSUES section.
5. Reinstall the program to the partition (C: or D:) and folder (Microwhiz or Doitall) of your choice.

Why is all this necessary? Because when you install a program, it does much more than simply copying files to your hard drive. It also sets up one or several entries in the Windows Registry, a huge database of everything that is on your machine. For example, there is info in the Registry on how to handle files when you double-click them, such as opening a specific file with Doitall, or at least starting Doitall and loading the file you clicked into the Doitall program. If you simply erase a program, it does not alter the Registry and these now useless entries can cause problems. But uninstalling a program does fix the Registry. And CCleaner will clean up any junk entries that were left over because the program's uninstall utility was not well written. Even then, almost always the user is left with the task of deleting left over folders. So, the message is, never simply delete a program - always uninstall it properly. We are stuck with this necessity so long as we use Windows with its built-in Registry.

Another tip: If you are tired of paying for Microsoft Office, try Kingsoft Writer. Less than half the size of another alternative, Open Office, it works well and reads and writes Office documents. It includes analogues for MicroSoft Word, Excel and Powerpoint. It is very nice, indeed. I am using it to write this article. Get it at majorgeeks.com. Happy Computing!