

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 157. Puran Defrag, a Book on Windows 7, and SlimDrivers

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There is a new (free) defragmenting program available that merits your attention. Puran Defrag (latest version at this writing is 7.2), available at <http://www.puransoftware.com/>, is a simple but highly effective disk defragmenter. It can be completely automatic (if you so select), and will even do a boot time defragmentation of the Registry, pagefile and MFT – things that cannot be manipulated safely while Windows is running. The program that does run when Windows is up does its job intelligently, putting files that are used more often on faster areas of the disk platter (disk optimization). It works with XP, 2003, Vista, 2008 and 7. You can also get it at <http://www.majorgeeks.com>, where it is touted as a **pick** (a winner). You know, given that you have a speedy CPU and enough memory, there is no other single thing that you can do to keep your machine speedy than to keep it defragmented. Puran defrag not buggy or complicated, and it appears to be the best defragging software currently available. Try it.

Many folks are moving to Windows 7, and rightly so. It has been widely accepted as the best Microsoft operating system ever. Very stable, intuitive, foxy, and so on. But, it is an operating system and there is no way to learn all the ins and outs without a reference. If you have Windows 7 now or are thinking seriously about getting it, let me refer you to what I consider a superb reference. It is **WINDOWS 7 – THE MISSING MANUAL, THE BOOK THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN IN THE BOX**, by David Pogue, ISBN: 978-0-596-80639-2. Published by O'Reilly Media, Inc., 1005 Gravenstein Highway North, Sebastopol, CA 95472. Take a look at their website – www.oreilly.com - and you can search there for how to order the book if you want it. Retail price is \$39.99, and well worth it. The book is very well written and clear and the author doesn't hesitate to tell you when a feature is useless or does not work correctly. It is witty and actually funny in places, a welcome relief from the usual computer manual. I have read it through once and am about ¾ done with a second reading and find that I have learned much about Windows 7 from it.

By the way, Windows 7 Service Release 1 is out. It is worth installing, though there are not a lot of changes you will observe as you work with your machine after SR1 is installed. Several gurus have observed that the reason for this is that Windows 7 is already so good. It really is. Still, install SR1 to keep all the hidden processes up to date. Give yourself an hour of free time to get it done.

I found another marvelous, free program in mid-February, and have installed and run it on my six home computers and another four that I take care of remotely. It is **SlimDrivers**, put out by Slim Utilities, a company that uses cloud computing to help target their software to your machine. I won't go into cloud computing, but let me explain what the program does. Basically, it scans your computer for missing or outdated device drivers and installs whatever is necessary (with your permission, of course). You might think your machine is up-to-date with regard to drivers, but I promise you, it is not. Driver updates are written and released constantly without any regard of how to get them to end-users. So, even a month after purchasing a new machine, some of your drivers may be out of date. Or even the same day you purchase it!

Let me move off the point a bit to define device drivers for you so that you know how important they are. The Windows operating system does not know how to communicate with the hardware devices connected to your computer. It doesn't even know how to communicate with the hardware that is built into your computer. Imagine that! But it is true. A driver is a (usually small) software program that tells Windows how to communicate with a particular hardware device. Video card drivers tell your video card exactly how to translate data coming from Windows into signals that can be sent to your monitor so as to show on the display. A keyboard driver tells Windows how to interpret the electrical signals coming in from the keyboard as letters, numbers or control key functions. There are drivers for sound cards, USB hubs, printers, network connections and so on. Some are not so obvious. If you have a laptop that has a PCMCIA slot to accept modem or wireless cards, there has to be a driver for that slot for it to work. There are even drivers for slots on the inside of your computer, and even for parts of the buss on the motherboard. Windows is written for everyone, but everyone's computer is not hardware-identical with all others. Drivers translate what you and Windows want into a language that the hardware can understand (and vice versa). Darned important! And, a hardware driver is used each time Windows needs to communicate with that hardware.

When Windows is first installed, there are literally thousands of drivers built into the installation files that come with the disk. Furthermore, once you install Windows, there is a database of drivers on your hard drive forever, so that if you add a new device, it is likely that Windows will find the proper driver to install. However, if you install a new device, let's say a printer, you should really use the CD that came with the printer. Why? Although Windows may well have a driver in the database to use, the one on that disk that came with the printer is likely to be newer than the one in the Windows database. Nevertheless, the one on the disk that came with the printer may itself be outdated! A newer driver written by the hardware manufacturer may be available. That is where SlimDrivers comes in.

Download SlimDrivers and install it, and run it. It will ask your permission to scan your machine, and if you let it, it will most assuredly find some drivers that are outdated. When it finds and reports the drivers, you have the opportunity to select one for updating. The program will then ask you if it can turn off Microsoft Updates (temporarily – it turns it back on for you later), so that there is no chance that Microsoft will reboot your machine during the update process. Let it. Then it will ask if you wish a restore point before installation of a new driver. Say yes, in case anything goes wrong. Then it will back up your current drivers as an added safety measure. Then it will download and install the new driver. It may ask if it can reboot at this point. If it does, a reboot is a good idea – to finish installing the driver completely.

You may have to do all this several times, once for each driver that needs updating, so give yourself some time to accomplish this update process. If you pay for the program, it will do all of them in one batch, but the free program will only do them one at a time. But that is OK – it is well worth the effort and you don't need to run this process often. When all finished downloading and installing, SlimDrivers sits in the background, looking for the release of new drivers for your machine. And, you are completely up to date.

In all fairness, let me reflect that there are two schools of thought concerning driver updates. Not whether or not you need a driver – you do if the device is to work at all – but whether or not you should always update to the latest driver release. One school says yes, the latest driver is a Good Thing (I am in this school). The other says, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it". In other words, if you have a driver and the device is working, leave it alone. My point of view is that the manufacturer released an updated driver to fix problems and provide new capabilities. That cost the manufacturer money, effort and time as part of its support function. Far be it for me to reject that upgrade. It costs me nothing except the time to install it.

Where can you get SlimDrivers? The best place on the planet for free software – www.majorgeeks.com. Happy computing!