

*Cleaning*  
*Windows Vista*<sup>™</sup>  
FOR  
DUMMIES<sup>®</sup>

by Allen Wyatt



Wiley Publishing, Inc.



*Cleaning*  
*Windows Vista*<sup>™</sup>  
FOR  
DUMMIES<sup>®</sup>



*Cleaning*  
*Windows Vista*<sup>™</sup>  
FOR  
DUMMIES<sup>®</sup>

by Allen Wyatt



Wiley Publishing, Inc.

## Cleaning Windows Vista™ For Dummies®

Published by  
**Wiley Publishing, Inc.**  
111 River Street  
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774  
[www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

Copyright © 2007 by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana

Published by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana

Published simultaneously in Canada

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 646-8600. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Legal Department, Wiley Publishing, Inc., 10475 Crosspoint Blvd., Indianapolis, IN 46256, (317) 572-3447, fax (317) 572-4355, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

**Trademarks:** Wiley, the Wiley Publishing logo, For Dummies, the Dummies Man logo, A Reference for the Rest of Us!, The Dummies Way, Dummies Daily, The Fun and Easy Way, Dummies.com, and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries, and may not be used without written permission. Windows Vista is a trademark of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Wiley Publishing, Inc., is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

**LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY: THE PUBLISHER AND THE AUTHOR MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS WORK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ALL WARRANTIES, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION WARRANTIES OF FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES OR PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR EVERY SITUATION. THIS WORK IS SOLD WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PUBLISHER IS NOT ENGAGED IN RENDERING LEGAL, ACCOUNTING, OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. IF PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE IS REQUIRED, THE SERVICES OF A COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL PERSON SHOULD BE SOUGHT. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR THE AUTHOR SHALL BE LIABLE FOR DAMAGES ARISING HEREFROM. THE FACT THAT AN ORGANIZATION OR WEBSITE IS REFERRED TO IN THIS WORK AS A CITATION AND/OR A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF FURTHER INFORMATION DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE AUTHOR OR THE PUBLISHER ENDORSES THE INFORMATION THE ORGANIZATION OR WEBSITE MAY PROVIDE OR RECOMMENDATIONS IT MAY MAKE. FURTHER, READERS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT INTERNET WEBSITES LISTED IN THIS WORK MAY HAVE CHANGED OR DISAPPEARED BETWEEN WHEN THIS WORK WAS WRITTEN AND WHEN IT IS READ.**

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 800-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002.

For technical support, please visit [www.wiley.com/techsupport](http://www.wiley.com/techsupport).

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2006934838

ISBN-13: 978-0-471-78293-3

ISBN-10: 0-471-78293-9

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

1B/SY/RS/QW/IN



# *About the Author*

**Allen Wyatt**, an internationally recognized expert in small computer systems, is president of Discovery Computing, Inc., a computer and publishing services company located in Mesa, Arizona. He has worked in the computer and publishing industries for almost two decades, writing more than 50 books and numerous magazine articles. Allen's popular lectures and seminars have reached audiences throughout the United States, as well as throughout Mexico and Costa Rica.

Besides writing books and technical materials, Allen helps further the computer book industry by providing consulting, production, and project management services. He publishes two free weekly newsletters, WordTips and ExcelTips ([www.VitalNews.com](http://www.VitalNews.com)).

Allen can be reached by e-mail at [awyatt@dcomp.com](mailto:awyatt@dcomp.com).





# *Author's Acknowledgments*

I would like to thank the good folks at Wiley for their invaluable assistance in bringing this book to fruition. The people I worked with — Greg Croy, Nicole Sholly, and Laura Miller — were all very professional and helpful in creating what you now hold in your hands. I also extend a special thanks to Jim Kelly for his technical expertise, liberally provided as a technical reviewer.

## **Publisher's Acknowledgments**

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments through our online registration form located at [www.dummies.com/register/](http://www.dummies.com/register/).

Some of the people who helped bring this book to market include the following:

### ***Acquisitions, Editorial, and Media Development***

**Project Editor:** Nicole Sholly

**Executive Editor:** Greg Croy

**Copy Editor:** Laura K. Miller

**Technical Editor:** Jim Kelly

**Editorial Manager:** Kevin Kirschner

**Media Development Manager:**  
Laura VanWinkle

**Editorial Assistant:** Amanda Foxworth

**Sr. Editorial Assistant:** Cherie Case

**Cartoons:** Rich Tennant  
([www.the5thwave.com](http://www.the5thwave.com))

### ***Composition Services***

**Project Coordinator:** Patrick Redmond

**Layout and Graphics:** Carl Byers,  
Barbara Moore, Barry Offringa

**Proofreaders:** Rob Springer, Lisa Young Stiers

**Indexer:** Techbooks

**Anniversary Logo Design:** Richard Pacifico

---

## **Publishing and Editorial for Technology Dummies**

**Richard Swadley**, Vice President and Executive Group Publisher

**Andy Cummings**, Vice President and Publisher

**Mary Bednarek**, Executive Acquisitions Director

**Mary C. Corder**, Editorial Director

## **Publishing for Consumer Dummies**

**Diane Graves Steele**, Vice President and Publisher

**Joyce Pepple**, Acquisitions Director

## **Composition Services**

**Gerry Fahey**, Vice President of Production Services

**Debbie Stailey**, Director of Composition Services

# Contents at a Glance

---

<b><i>Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b><i>Part I: The Basics of Cleaning Your System</i></b> .....	<b>7</b>
Chapter 1: First Things First: Why You Should Clean.....	9
Chapter 2: Determining What to Clean and When .....	21
<b><i>Part II: Programs and Data</i></b> .....	<b>35</b>
Chapter 3: Identifying What You Have.....	37
Chapter 4: Making Your Programs Run Faster.....	53
Chapter 5: Getting Rid of Old Programs .....	69
Chapter 6: Data, Data Everywhere .....	83
Chapter 7: Organizing and Archiving Data.....	97
<b><i>Part III: E-Mail and the Internet</i></b> .....	<b>111</b>
Chapter 8: Tackling E-Mail Overload.....	113
Chapter 9: Organizing Your E-Mail .....	127
Chapter 10: Banishing Internet Villains .....	143
Chapter 11: Managing Internet Information.....	157
<b><i>Part IV: The Operating System</i></b> .....	<b>171</b>
Chapter 12: Cleaning Up the User Interface.....	173
Chapter 13: Streamlining Windows .....	187
Chapter 14: Speeding Up the File System.....	211
Chapter 15: Managing Windows Updates.....	223
Chapter 16: Getting a New System .....	231
<b><i>Part V: Advanced Cleaning for the Truly Brave</i></b> .....	<b>245</b>
Chapter 17: Memory and Storage.....	247
Chapter 18: Becoming Security Conscious .....	257
Chapter 19: Cleaning House in a Networked Environment .....	271
Chapter 20: Jumping Into the Registry .....	283
Chapter 21: Wiping the Slate Clean .....	299

<b><i>Part VI: The Part of Tens</i></b> .....	<b>309</b>
Chapter 22: Ten Troubleshooting Ideas .....	311
Chapter 23: Ten Online Resources to Help You Clean .....	315
Chapter 24: Ten Cool Things in Vista.....	319
<b><i>Index</i></b> .....	<b>323</b>

# Table of Contents

---

## ***Introduction* ..... 1**

How to Read This Book.....	1
Assumptions About You.....	2
How This Book Is Organized.....	2
Part I: The Basics of Cleaning Your System .....	3
Part II: Programs and Data .....	3
Part III: E-Mail and the Internet.....	3
Part IV: The Operating System .....	3
Part V: Advanced Cleaning for the Truly Brave.....	4
Part VI: The Part of Tens .....	4
Customs and Practices.....	4
Icons Used in This Book.....	5
Where to Go From Here.....	6

## ***Part I: The Basics of Cleaning Your System* ..... 7**

### **Chapter 1: First Things First: Why You Should Clean ..... 9**

Telltale Signs of an Unclean Computer.....	10
The view from the desktop isn't pretty .....	10
Traversing the Start menu jungle is an adventure .....	12
Your PC is slower than molasses.....	13
You have files older than your dog .....	13
Your Notification area looks like a parking lot .....	14
Cleaning Up: The Pros and Cons .....	15
The pros.....	15
The cons .....	16
Balancing pros and cons .....	17
Keeping Your House Tidy.....	18

### **Chapter 2: Determining What to Clean and When ..... 21**

How to Eat an Elephant .....	21
Precautions for Safety's Sake.....	23
Finding the Right Tools .....	25
Finding Windows tools .....	25
Finding third-party tools .....	27
Creating a Cleaning Schedule .....	28
Now. Do it now — right now.....	29
Once a week should do it .....	30

It's the end of the month already! .....	30
Time for the annual clean-a-fest .....	32
Time for an Overhaul? .....	33
Is New Hardware the Answer? .....	34

## ***Part II: Programs and Data* .....35**

### **Chapter 3: Identifying What You Have .....37**

Creating a Program Inventory .....	37
The think-tank approach .....	38
The laid-back approach .....	39
Finding Out What Programs Are Installed .....	40
Inspecting your desktop .....	40
Scrutinizing the Start menu .....	42
Checking the Control Panel .....	43
Peering in program folders .....	45
Discovering What Programs Run When .....	46
Starting up for all users .....	47
Starting up for just you .....	48
Figuring Out What's Running Right Now .....	49
Making a Game Plan .....	52

### **Chapter 4: Making Your Programs Run Faster .....53**

Common Sense for Programs .....	53
Turn off whiz-bang features .....	54
Watch out for networking "gotchas" .....	54
Never upgrade unless you have to .....	55
Speed up specific software .....	56
Speeding Up Access to Large Data Files .....	60
Change your hardware .....	60
Reconfigure your data .....	61
Reconfigure your program .....	62
Are We Compatible? .....	62
Playing Games .....	64
Pushing the Envelope: Multimedia Editing Programs .....	66

### **Chapter 5: Getting Rid of Old Programs .....69**

Identifying Candidates for Removal .....	69
Unused programs you installed .....	70
Preinstalled software .....	70
Stuff you find in the Program Files folder .....	70
Four Ways to Remove Unwanted Programs .....	72
An application's uninstall command .....	72
The Installed Programs area of the Control Panel .....	74
Third-party software .....	75
The brute-force method .....	75
Eliminating Remnants of Failed Programs .....	80

**Chapter 6: Data, Data Everywhere . . . . . 83**

- Finding Temporary Files .....84
  - Locating and deleting files from temporary folders .....85
  - Finding and eliminating specific files.....86
- Tracking Down Orphan Data .....87
- Doing a Disk Cleanup.....88
- Finding and Eliminating Duplicate Data .....91
- What to Do with Multimedia Files.....94
- Empty the Recycle Bin Often.....96

**Chapter 7: Organizing and Archiving Data . . . . . 97**

- Organizing Your Data.....97
  - Adding and partitioning hard drives .....98
  - Creating a folder structure.....99
  - Watch your depth.....101
  - Moving, renaming, and deleting folders .....101
- Clearing Out Your Root Directory.....103
- What About the Default Folders? .....104
- Archiving and Backing Up Data.....106
  - Archiving what you don't need.....106
  - Backing up what you still need.....108
  - Storing backups and archives.....109

***Part III: E-Mail and the Internet..... 111***

**Chapter 8: Tackling E-Mail Overload . . . . . 113**

- Using Different Accounts to Manage and Reduce E-Mail .....114
  - Managing incoming mail.....114
  - Reducing unwanted mail .....115
- Psychology 101: Don't Answer That Phone . . . er, E-Mail.....116
- Why You Get Spam.....118
  - Harvesting addresses .....118
  - Guessing addresses.....119
  - Purchasing addresses.....120
- Tactics for Limiting Spam.....121
- Implementing Spam Filters .....122
  - Types of filters .....122
  - Types of filter technology .....124
- Combating Spam with a Challenge/Response System .....125

**Chapter 9: Organizing Your E-Mail . . . . . 127**

- Using Folders Effectively.....128
- Smart Move: Using Mail Rules .....129
  - Creating a rule.....129
  - Rearranging the rules .....133
  - Deleting a rule.....134

Deleting E-Mail Regularly .....	135
Determine a cutoff point for e-mails .....	135
Empty the deleted items folder .....	135
Empty the junk mail folder .....	136
Watching Out for Attachments .....	138
Archiving Valuable E-Mail .....	139
Enabling built-in archives .....	139
Using the Mailbox Cleanup tool in Outlook .....	141
Rolling your own archive process .....	142
<b>Chapter 10: Banishing Internet Villains .....</b>	<b>143</b>
Uh-Oh! Do I Have a Virus? .....	144
Finding viruses on your computer .....	144
Blocking viruses .....	145
Sizing Up Spyware .....	146
Identifying spyware .....	147
Getting to know spyware .....	148
Eliminating spyware .....	150
Blocking Pop-ups .....	153
Employing pop-up blockers .....	154
Blocking Flash ads .....	156
Resisting the Lure of Trinkets .....	156
<b>Chapter 11: Managing Internet Information .....</b>	<b>157</b>
Are Cookies a Reason for Worry? .....	157
Blocking cookies .....	158
Managing your cookies .....	160
Deleting all cookies .....	161
Negotiating Newsgroups .....	162
Organizing Web Favorites .....	163
Taming Web Cache Files .....	165
Cleaning the cache .....	166
Finding the cache .....	167
Changing the cache size .....	169
<b>Part IV: The Operating System .....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Chapter 12: Cleaning Up the User Interface .....</b>	<b>173</b>
Master of the Desktop .....	173
Displaying the traditional desktop icons .....	174
Renaming and deleting icons .....	175
A word on themes and screensavers .....	176
Ordering the Menu System .....	176
Picking a Start menu layout .....	177
Customizing the Start menu .....	178
Moving items in the All Programs list .....	179
Creating your own program groups .....	180



Effectively Using the Taskbar .....	180
Birds of a feather . . . ..	181
Cleaning the Notification area .....	182
Cleaning Up the Control Panel .....	185
<b>Chapter 13: Streamlining Windows .....</b>	<b>187</b>
Installing Just What You Need .....	188
Setting Performance Options .....	189
Understanding visual effects .....	191
Advanced performance options .....	192
Using the Microsoft System Configuration Utility .....	193
Modifying the startup process .....	195
Modifying startup files .....	196
Modifying what's started .....	197
Working with the Latest Drivers.....	198
Checking a driver's signature .....	198
Checking for updated device drivers.....	200
Removing device drivers.....	200
Going on a .DLL Diet .....	201
Shut Down Unused Services.....	202
Services in the Computer Manager.....	203
Services in msconfig .....	205
Putting System Protection to Work.....	206
Configuring System Protection.....	207
Setting a restore point .....	208
Reverting to history .....	208
<b>Chapter 14: Speeding Up the File System .....</b>	<b>211</b>
Which File System to Use? .....	212
The FAT file system .....	212
The NTFS file system .....	212
Making your choice.....	213
Changing File Systems .....	214
Seeing what file system you use.....	214
Converting to NTFS.....	215
Converting to FAT.....	216
Defragmenting Your Drive.....	217
Checking for Errors.....	219
Using Windows' disk tools .....	219
Using chkdsk .....	221
To Compress or Not? .....	222
<b>Chapter 15: Managing Windows Updates .....</b>	<b>223</b>
Getting Updates the Way You Want .....	224
Manual updates .....	224
Automatic updates .....	225
Picking an update method .....	227
Which Updates Do You Really Need? .....	228

<b>Chapter 16: Getting a New System</b> . . . . .	<b>231</b>
When Is a New System Justified? .....	232
What Should You Get? .....	233
High-end systems .....	233
Mid-range systems .....	234
Low-end systems .....	235
Portable systems .....	235
Preparing for the New System .....	236
Collecting pieces and parts .....	236
Collecting information .....	237
Reinstalling Programs .....	242
Transferring Data .....	242

## ***Part V: Advanced Cleaning for the Truly Brave*** .....245

### **Chapter 17: Memory and Storage** . . . . . **247**

How Windows Uses Memory .....	248
Determining Whether You Need More Memory .....	249
Will Another Hard Drive Help? .....	250
Faster speed .....	251
Move your pagefile .....	252
Choosing Between Internal or External Hard Drives .....	254
Easy backups .....	255
Easy data transfer .....	255
Alternative Storage Solutions .....	256

### **Chapter 18: Becoming Security Conscious** . . . . . **257**

Battening Down the Hatches .....	258
Physical security .....	258
Data loss .....	259
Data recovery .....	259
Malicious programs .....	260
Insecure passwords .....	261
Staying Secure on the Internet .....	261
Using Internet zones .....	262
Harnessing SSL .....	264
Closing down security problems .....	265
Adding Firewalls .....	266
The Windows firewall .....	267
ZoneAlarm .....	268
Hardware firewalls .....	269

### **Chapter 19: Cleaning House in a Networked Environment** . . . . . **271**

Getting Rid of Old User Accounts .....	272
Deleting network user accounts .....	272
Deleting local system user accounts .....	272

Moving Frequently Accessed Data.....	274
Removing Shared Printers .....	275
Limiting shared printer hours .....	275
Turning off shared printing.....	277
Removing Shared Folders .....	278
Cutting Your System Off the Network.....	280
<b>Chapter 20: Jumping Into the Registry .....</b>	<b>283</b>
Groking the Registry Behemoth.....	284
Seeing the trees in the Registry forest.....	284
Buzzing through the Registry hives .....	285
Unlocking Registry keys .....	286
Appreciating Registry values.....	287
Editing the Registry .....	287
Backing up the Registry.....	289
Finding information.....	291
Editing values.....	292
Adding keys or values.....	293
Deleting Registry items.....	294
Using Registry Cleaning Software .....	295
Registry analyzers .....	295
Registry cleaners .....	296
Registry compactors.....	296
Restoring the Registry.....	297
<b>Chapter 21: Wiping the Slate Clean .....</b>	<b>299</b>
Doing a Windows Reinstall.....	299
Using an OEM System Restore Disc.....	301
Wiping Out Your System .....	303
Preparing for the wipeout .....	303
Doing the deed.....	304
Picking up the pieces .....	306
<b><i>Part VI: The Part of Tens .....</i></b>	<b><i>309</i></b>
<b>Chapter 22: Ten Troubleshooting Ideas .....</b>	<b>311</b>
Check Your Startup Files.....	311
Install Windows Updates.....	311
Run a Spyware Removal Program .....	311
Remove Unused Programs.....	312
See What Processes Are Running.....	312
Run the Disk Cleanup Utility.....	312
Defragment Your Disk Drives.....	313
Check File Sizes .....	313
Check the Size of Your Registry .....	313
Start Your System in Safe Mode .....	313

<b>Chapter 23: Ten Online Resources to Help You Clean</b> .....	<b>315</b>
Sysinternals.....	315
Google.....	315
Gibson Research Corporation .....	316
Symantec Security Response.....	316
SpywareGuide.....	316
SpywareInfo .....	316
Experts Exchange.....	317
Spam Arrest .....	317
Urban Legends Reference Pages .....	317
Vista Software Archive .....	317
<b>Chapter 24: Ten Cool Things in Vista</b> .....	<b>319</b>
Windows Firewall .....	319
Sidebar and Gadgets.....	319
Greater System Protection.....	320
Parental Controls .....	320
Performance Information.....	320
Network Administration.....	320
Virtual Folders .....	321
Snipping Tool.....	321
Tabbed Browsing.....	321
Phishing Filter.....	321
<b>Index</b> .....	<b>323</b>

# Introduction

---

A computer is nothing but a tool. It's bigger than a hammer (well, most hammers), heavier than a screwdriver, and generally less noisy than a chain saw — but it's nonetheless a tool. You can do more stuff with a computer than you can with a hammer and a screwdriver, but hammers and screwdrivers are simpler to use and easier to clean up. (Chain saws are another story; things can get messy really fast — although I've seen some really amazing things done with them.)

Your computer *does* get messy; have no doubt about it. Programs load and unload, files pop into existence and then slither off to unknown parts of your hard drive, and spyware tries to adhere itself to your operating system. Every day, your system changes as information is added and new demands are placed on old programs.

All these things add to the unique clutter that comes to define and weigh down your system. You can redefine your system and free your system, all by identifying and removing the clutter. *Cleaning Windows Vista For Dummies* shows you how.

## *How to Read This Book*

I'm a firm believer that you should read this book out loud, while standing on the coffee table in your neighbor's living room. It surely will make an impression on the neighbor's kids and free up time you previously spent going to dinner parties.

Whether you decide to read this book out loud or not, you should read the first two chapters before reading any others. Dire consequences won't result if you decide not to, but those chapters lay a pretty good foundation for everything else you find in the book.

After that, read whatever strikes your fancy. You know your system better than I do. If your big problem is properly getting updates to Windows, skip to Chapter 15. If instead you want to focus on archiving your data, turn to Chapter 7.

You get the idea — this book can be as flexible as you are.

## *Assumptions About You*

Being the amazingly gifted and highly skilled author that I am, I can report that I've achieved every author's ideal and made no assumptions about you in writing this book.

Well, I guess that's not entirely true. I do assume that you read English. And that you're using Windows Vista. And that you know how to turn your computer on. And that you know how to navigate through your system by using Computer (from the Start menu) or Windows Explorer. And that you think your system might be cluttered. And that you want it to be less cluttered.

Nope; I make no assumptions at all, other than those. Oh, and that you know how to use a Web browser. And an e-mail program. And that you aren't afraid to try new things once in a while. And that you want your system to run like it did when it was new. And that you're tired of menus longer than the want ads and file folders that go on forever.

That should be it. Except that I assume you're tired of being deluged with e-mail. And that you want to protect yourself from spyware and viruses. And that you aren't sure if cookies are a bad thing. And that you think you can do something to make your system cleaner.

Dang. I guess I do make some assumptions about you. But, being the somewhat gifted and nominally skilled author that I am, I know that these assumptions only identify you as a person who wants to use the computer better and recognizes that cleaning that computer can help toward that end.

Working together, we can make that happen. (That's why assumptions can be a good thing.)

## *How This Book Is Organized*

My editor tells me that organizing a book into parts is a good thing. It helps keep the chapters from running into each other. (Apparently, having unrelated chapters freely associating with each other is unhealthy.) To keep with longstanding tradition, and to keep my editor from yelling at me, I've organized *Cleaning Windows Vista For Dummies* into the following parts.

---

## ***Part I: The Basics of Cleaning Your System***

Get off on the right foot by discovering why you even need to clean your system (as if you didn't know). You find out what you should clean, when you should clean it, what tools to use, and whether you should consider getting a new system.

## ***Part II: Programs and Data***

Programs and data are the two great components of any computer system — including yours. Part II focuses on identifying what programs you have, how to make them run faster, and how to get rid of programs you no longer need.

You can also find out how to identify all the data on your hard drive, as well as targeting and deleting the data you no longer need. I've dedicated a full chapter to concepts about organizing and archiving your important data.

## ***Part III: E-Mail and the Internet***

E-mail and the Internet are, for better or worse, a part of most people's daily lives. This part zeroes in on how you can manage the glut of e-mail you get daily. You can discover how to deal with spam and organize the e-mail you keep.

You can also find out the tell-tale signs of virus and spyware infections, as well as how to get rid of these troublesome pests. Finally, you can discover how to deal with information (not related to e-mail) that you may receive when using the Internet.

## ***Part IV: The Operating System***

Windows Vista is nothing if not flexible and configurable. Part IV discusses how to clean up the user interface so using Windows is easier than ever before. You can discover how to streamline Windows so it runs faster, as well as how to speed up the file system.

Microsoft wants you to have the most up-to-date system possible, and Windows Vista makes it easy to stay updated with automatic downloads. You'll understand how to use the update system and find out when it makes sense to get a new system rather than clean up the old one.

## *Part V: Advanced Cleaning for the Truly Brave*

This part focuses on things you can do to implement deep-cleaning strategies. You can determine whether you need more memory in your system or whether you need a larger hard drive. You can discover ways to make your system more secure and thereby minimize the chance of having others clutter your system. I also discuss the special needs of cleaning up in a networked environment.

An entire chapter covers the ins and outs of working with the Registry, your computer's central nervous system. You can find out how to edit the Registry and use special software to keep it in tip-top shape.

The final chapter in this part explains different ways to fix a corrupted Windows installation. You can even find out how to start all over by wiping out your computer system and installing Windows anew.

## *Part VI: The Part of Tens*

Ahhh! The Part of Tens. Here's where you find small, bite-sized tidbits that can help get your system cleaned up and keep it that way. You can find troubleshooting ideas, a multitude of online resources to help you tidy up, and some of my personal favorite things in Vista.

## *Customs and Practices*

I followed a few conventions that you might be interested in. Why? Because then you know why I chose to do something, and we can understand each other better.

First, if I talk about clicking the mouse, I mean clicking the left button. If I want you to click the right button, I specifically talk about right-clicking. (Quite a bit of right-clicking goes on in Windows.)

If a procedure takes more than a couple of discrete steps to complete, I try to detail those steps as much as I can. It's frustrating as heck to read "do this" in a book, and when you do it, the steps don't work for you. The steps should work if you're using Windows Vista; I've tried them out, as have my editor and my technical editor. (Three heads are better than one.)



Finally, if you must make a series of choices with the mouse, I separate the choices with an arrow. For example, if you see “Choose Start→All Programs→Accessories→Notepad,” that means you should click the Start menu, then the All Programs option, then Accessories, and finally Notepad.

## Icons Used in This Book

As part of agreeing to write this book, I insisted that Wiley break with tradition and include cute little icons that call your attention to things that I think need your attention. They tried to balk at my demand, but I held firm, with my only desire to put the needs of you, my reader, first. Finally, they got tired of my expert negotiating and gave in to my demand. (I hope the other *For Dummies* series authors appreciate all my hard work in this area.)

With that in mind, you see the following icons sprinkled liberally throughout this book. Pay attention to this; you have a test later!



If something is really short and really cool, I used this icon. Tips are bite-sized nuggets of information that can — hopefully — make your life easier and more fulfilling. (They should at least make you feel better about cleaning your Windows system.)



This icon alerts you to the gotchas of cleaning your Windows system. Ignore these tidbits at your own risk. (Ohh . . . that sounds ominous!) Warnings are given for a reason: primarily to help you avoid problems that can cause you grief and a whole lot of extra work.



This icon doesn't mean you can forget everything else in the book. Nope; I included it so you can make special note of something you need later. Or it could be a piece of information designed to jog your memory about something you should have picked up earlier in the book. Remember — the remember icon can help you remember what you need to remember.



A few of these icons are thrown into the mix so that the geeks among us feel comfortable. If geekiness scares the bejeebers out of you, ignore anything with this icon. If you really want a moment of technical clarity, you should find anything with this icon very illuminating.

## *Where to Go From Here*

I think the best place to go is to the next page, but it doesn't matter what I think. You can use or abuse this book in any way you see fit. If something on page 153 strikes your fancy, then go for it! You can always return to page 152 (or any other page) at a later time, when the need arises.

You see, that's the really cool thing about cleaning your system and *For Dummies* books — they don't have to be done or read in any particular order. And the sky is the limit in *Cleaning Windows Vista For Dummies*. You can start reading anywhere you like, on any topic you like. When you tire of that topic, move to one that strikes your fancy.

As for me, I still think the best place to start is on the next page. . . .

# Part I

# The Basics of Cleaning Your System

The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave

By Rich Tennant



*In this part . . .*

**D**iscover why you need to clean your system, what you should clean, when you should clean it, what tools to use, and whether you should consider getting a new system.

# Chapter 1

## First Things First: Why You Should Clean

---

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Determining whether your system needs cleaning
  - ▶ Balancing the pros and cons of cleaning
  - ▶ Focusing your cleaning efforts
- 

**M**y system isn't messed up, is it? (What? Me worry?)

Yes, you should worry. Or, you should at least be aware that you may need to worry. Computer systems easily and quickly become untidy and messed up. If you don't clean yours, you run the risk of big problems down the road.

Do I really need to point out the benefits of a clean computer system? (Probably, so I do — a little later in this chapter.) Does someone need to come into your house and point out why you need to pick up your clothes, dust the furniture, wash the dishes, and tend to the dog? Probably not; you know that a clean house is healthful, inviting, and safe.

It's the same with computers. Over time, your computer can become cluttered with unused programs, unknown data, and unwanted visitors. With a little effort, you can clean your system so that it runs at top form, and you can breeze through your work faster and easier than you can on an unclean system. In addition, clean systems are more reliable, less prone to failure, and easier to protect from attack by malicious programs.

Before you can begin cleaning, however, you need to recognize the need to clean and why you should spend the time to do it.

## *Telltale Signs of an Unclean Computer*

How can you know whether your system needs cleaning? I've compiled a list of several sure-fire signs that you need help. (Envision Jeff Foxworthy standing in front of your computer, speaking with his signature twang.)

You know you have a messed-up computer . . .

- ✔ If you have to leave a trail of breadcrumbs so you don't get lost finding your way through the options in your Start menu.
- ✔ If every pop-up on your computer inspects your computer, notices the mess, apologizes for bothering you, and quietly closes on its own.
- ✔ If you try to install a new program, and the installation program automatically reports your system to the Board of Health.
- ✔ If you think "Defragment" is the name of a new rap song by Busta Rhymes (Yo!).
- ✔ If the only way to add more icons to your desktop is to get a larger desktop.
- ✔ If you start the program to balance your checkbook, only to find that your son's illegal copy of *World of Warcraft* ate the last month's worth of transactions.
- ✔ If someone mentions "backup," and chills run up and down your spine.
- ✔ If virus software refuses to install itself on your system for fear of contamination.

Perhaps such observations aren't worthy of Jeff Foxworthy or the Blue Collar Comedy Tour, but this list highlights some good indicators that your computer needs cleaning. The next few sections detail some other obvious signs that you need help.

### *The view from the desktop isn't pretty*

Does your desktop look like the one shown in Figure 1-1? If so, you have problems. Maybe you bought into the old adage that a clean desk is a sign of a sick mind, and in the process lost your ability to effectively use your system. Whatever got you to this point, you need your Windows cleaned. Badly.