VISUAL NEWSLETTER – JULY 2010

COMPUTER RECYCLING

Ontario has implemented a Computer Recycling Program, so used computers, monitors, printers and other consumer electronics can now be dropped off free of charge at most Ontario Recycling Centres.

It should also be noted that since the Recycling Centres do charge a fee for many other materials, you should not mix computers and scrap wood for example in the same load, otherwise you may be billed for the net weight of both materials even though one is free.

Future Shop, Best Buy and other retailers are also participating, but call before you go there to drop anything off to confirm that they do in fact accept them. We will also recycle older computers for you as part of a regular visit. Just have them somewhat organized and ready to go and we will do the rest.

Similarly, Home Depot and other stores have begun Recycling Programs for regular batteries and compact fluorescent lights. Hopefully this will divert large amounts of valuable and potentially hazardous wastes from landfills and ultimately our environment.

This recycling program is being paid for by the Environmental Disposal Fees that you are now paying whenever you purchase a new computer, monitor, printer, keyboard, mouse, etc. As long as the goods are actually being recycled properly I don't mind the fees, but hopefully they don't end up in a landfill like a lot of plastic bottles did at the beginning of the regular blue box recycling program.

Since these items do contain large amounts of valuable metals and other materials, one would hope that viable companies will form to process the items once they are delivered to them effectively free of charge. At some point efficiencies may permit reducing disposal charges as the material acquires some value.

COMPUTER UPGRADES

Before disposing of that older but still useable computer, some thought might be given to upgrading or tuning up the old one. There are several ways in which an older computer slows down over time. Some issues can be compensated for, bringing its performance to a level at least close to that of a newer model.

Computers have evolved somewhat in the last 5-10 years but not as much as most people think. Pure processing power has peaked at around 3.2 Gigahertz. My original Pentium IV in 2001 was 1.6 Gigahertz. Other performance improvements have been made, most recently the advent of Dual Core and Quad Core processors, but for many operations the basic speed of the processor is still a constraint.

Microsoft Windows XP itself is partially at fault since the current version, including all of the service packs and patches, is much more complicated than it was when it was first released back in 2001. An older computer may have been equipped with as little as 128 or 256 mb of Ram Memory which was sufficient when Windows was smaller and less complex, but is now too little to run Windows efficiently.

By upgrading the available Ram to a minimum of 512 mb, preferably to 1 gb, you can regain a substantial amount of the computer's original performance and extend its effective life. The cost of memory upgrades is typically $50. but this can vary with the type of chip required. Older computers can easily accept newer LCD monitors but new video cards, usually $50. may be required for full wide screen support.

Removing unnecessary programs & stopping the automated start up of programs that you only occasionally use can aid performance. Cleaning up all temporary files, registry entries and defragmenting your hard drives can also speed things up and make your computer more than usable for the immediate future.