Tune-Up Tips To Keep Your PC In Tip-Top Shape

(NAPSA)—You wouldn't expect top performance from your car without an occasional tune-up. The same is true for your PC. Here are a few tips from HP on how to keep it in tip top shape.

Maintenance Is Key

Cleaning your PC with compressed air helps ensure proper ventilation, which reduces heat and keeps your PC running smoothly. For desktop PCs, shut down the PC, disconnect the power cord, momentarily press the power button to discharge the capacitors, then open the PC case to blow out the dust.

Clean Up and Defragment Your Hard Drive

Make the most of the storage space on your hard drive by removing old programs and unused desktop and shortcut icons. To delete the software programs, use Control Panel, "Add/Remove Programs" (Windows XP) or Control Panel "Programs" (Vista).

Make sure to empty your PC's Recycle Bin after the removal has taken place and delete the backlog of Internet tracking cookies and offline Internet files from Internet Explorer. For unused shortcut icons, simply delete them or turn them off with a swift mouse click for faster PC starts. Next, look at individual files, pictures and MP3s on your computer and delete any duplicate and unused files.

Make room for new programs and current files by performing a Disk Cleanup. Disk Cleanup, a handy tool that comes with Windows XP and Windows Vista, allows you to easily sort through and delete unused and temporary files, freeing space on your hard drive and speeding up its operation. Then, use the Windows Disk Defragmenter to help increase your hard drive efficiency by consolidat-

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ing fragmented files and folders on your computer's hard disk. While you can use your PC during the process, it will slow down other applications, so utilize the Disk Defragmenter when you don't need to work on your PC.

Update Your System

Installing new software and driver updates can add functionality and improve the performance of your PC. Make sure all Windows Updates are installed. Updates are normally published the second Tuesday of every month by Microsoft. You can manually check for Windows system updates by clicking on Start, All Programs, and Windows Update.

Don't Forget to Back It Up

Save your photos, music and valuable information from a system crash or virus by simply saving them to a USB flash drive, CD or DVD. Regularly backing up important files will help save you from losing potentially irreplaceable personal data. A full backup of your PC's hard drive is recommended to help protect your operating system and all your important files. A partial backup will help protect only

selected files and applications. Full system backups can be automated to run daily, weekly or continuously. A good rule of thumb is to back up files once a week. Backing up your PC is easy using the Automatic File Backup software included with Windows Vista. The set up "wizard" walks you through the process of creating and scheduling regular backups with your preferred storage destination—hard drive, DVD writer or online archive.

Prevent Viruses Before They Strike

Make sure your anti-virus software is current by performing the required updates—at least once a week—to keep the virus definition files current. Run a complete scan weekly after updating your virus definition files to help protect your computer from potentially harmful viruses. Never install a new anti-virus application without completely uninstalling the old anti-virus software first. Make sure you are not physically connected to the Internet while doing this. Most new anti-virus programs include Firewall protection but if not, make sure Windows Firewall is enabled.

Create a Tune-Up Calendar

Examples of great "tune-up" times throughout the year include:

• January/New Year's—good point in the year to "refresh" your computer and start over.

• Spring—spring-cleaning applies to your computer, too!

• Going back to school—when students enter college with a new PC—and winter holidays can offer a good opportunity to set up and learn how to maintain computers.

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