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Dave McClure • Apr. 21, 2009

The keyboard of your computer is filthy.

Even if it doesn't have that familiar brown-to-black border around each key. Even if you are the one person in a billion who never eats or drinks anything at your workstation. Even if you are the cleanest, most obsessive neat freak on the planet. Over time, tiny bits of human skin, hair, dust, and some stuff you don't even know about, have collected under, between and on the keys of your computer keyboard (and mouse!).

What can you do? Obviously, clean your keyboard and mouse on a regular basis. But before you rush off to stick these electronic devices in the office dishwasher, there are three rules to follow:

1. Get a spare keyboard. It doesn't hurt to have one, and just in case something goes horribly wrong you will need to have something to use while the original keyboard dries out.
2. Turn the computer off. Never, ever perform maintenance on a computer while it is running unless you truly enjoy trying to restore all of your data from a backup copy.
3. Do a simple cleaning every week. This will reduce the frequency with which a deeper cleaning will be needed. For a simple cleaning, turn the keyboard upside down and shake it gently. Wipe down the keys with a cloth and a little bit of rubbing alcohol. You can also use a disposable wipe with rubbing alcohol, but it is best to avoid soap as this will make the keys sticky. Clean between the keys with a swab dipped in rubbing alcohol. Let the computer sit for 10 minutes before resuming work.

Okay, so how do you deep-clean the keyboard? Note that this is an overnight or

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top from the base. This usually requires the flat edge of a screwdriver or butter knife. Pry the case open.

Oh, no! You opened the case! You have now violated the warranty, and ... well, who cares? Just remember where the screws go, and how to reassemble the parts. When was the last time you submitted a keyboard for repair under warranty, anyway?

Okay, once you have pried the top key assembly off, it is time to be a little careful. Lift out the electronics and the dome switch, and wipe out the base underneath with a cloth dipped in rubbing alcohol. Place the electronics and dome switch panel back as they were. Let them sit until time to reassemble.

Now take the top key assembly and run it through the dishwasher. Yes, on the top rack. No, it won't hurt anything. If the heated drying cycle of your dishwasher melts the keyboard, you are using equipment that is way too cheap and you needed a new keyboard anyway. When the assembly is dry, place it on a towel and let it sit overnight.

The next day, place the key assembly back on top of the base and gently squeeze until it clicks back together. Replace the screws in the base of the case. Plug the keyboard back in, and power up the computer.

Oops! Three or four keys don't work and the Caps Lock light won't go out! You rushed the job. It has to dry overnight. The whole thing. Now you have no other option but to use your backup spare keyboard and wait for a week or so (praying that you didn't fry the electronics in the keyboard by using it wet).

For most people, this process will be simple, painless and relatively fast. If you have an IT or admin person who is adept at this process, you might simply ask them to handle this chore on a regular basis for all of the computers in the office.

Oh, and the mouse? Easier to clean. Simply wipe it down with a cloth dipped in

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imagine.

And voila! A clean keyboard.

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