Ventilation during the Hot Spells

As I write, it is July and we've already had a few hot, airless days. We live on a plateau so there's normally some breeze but there are times when things are pretty still. In more sheltered spots, heat build-up can be a real problem for a PC than contains 'performance components'.

This is one of the worst times for your computer, whether it be a desk model or a laptop. The important thing is to ensure adequate ventilation.

But how do you know if it's overheating? Some machines have alarms that will sound when preset temperatures are exceeded. And there are programs that will monitor internal temperatures and I have found these very useful in guiding me to potential trouble spots.

If your machine overheats regularly, it may help to install additional ventilation. Modern fans are relatively quiet and can be controlled to operate only when required.

It pays to act sooner rather than later as an overheated processor can be costly to replace and a dead hard disc drive may result in major data loss and further costs in reconfiguring the system.

Ideas for Data Security

I am a great believer in duplicating important files to ensure they are never lost. It's a personal matter which files are important enough to warrant this treatment but with the low cost of portable storage, there is now little excuse for losing valuable information.

For example, if you buy a small, high-capacity USB disc drive, you can quickly copy immense amounts of data to it and then simply unplug it and take with you when you leave your machine.

At the extreme end, it is possible to make a complete copy of your entire installation so that it can be simply 'rebuilt' in the event that the hard disc is corrupted. You can then restore your operating system, the programs and your personal data to exactly the state it was in originally.

You'll be glad you did it if the unthinkable happens!

Power Supply and Telephone Connections

The electrical supply to your computer varies in quality and stability from area to area. In the main, rural areas suffer more from power irregularities that urban areas but there's always a risk, particularly during storms.

Computers have power supplies of varying quality and these offer varying degrees of protection to the delicate electronics inside the computer. Invariably, though, if the power is cut to a desk (rather than laptop) machine, your run the risk of losing data.

Uninterruptible Power Supplies (UPS) provide a second level of defence and can deliver greater reliability to your equipment. Think of them as an additional bit of insurance.

Telephone Connections

The connection into your modem/router (Livebox for Orange customers) is the single biggest cause of system failure, particularly during storms.

Surge arresters are available and are now being supplied by Orange with their new Liveboxes. These can also be retrofitted to any system and, considering their low cost, are a worthwhile investment.

High Security Computing

Is data security important to you?

Would it matter if others could view your private files?

Do you store sensitive business information on your computer?

Would you prefer your personal information on the computer to be more secure?

Supposing your laptop went missing. Does it contain information that you'd rather not share?

If the answer to any of the above is "Yes", then you might wish to consider more robust security.

Windows passwords are easily compromised so the average PC is open to casual abuse, should it fall into the wrong hands.

But it is possible to secure the entire machine, on the hard disc drive, so that a password is necessary before it will be accessible. This type of security will protect you from almost any threat.

Alternatively, you may feel confident to secure just certain areas of the PC's hard disc, where you can store sensitive files. Many people now choose to secure their memory sticks as they are so easy to lose. It's cheap and easy to secure these portable memory devices so that any loss would pose no threat to your privacy.

And the good news is that much of the software is completely free.

Viruses, Ad-Ware, Trojans and other 'Mal-ware'

We hear about these threats on the news and they are real. When we buy a new system, we are usually provided with, say, 90 days' use of proprietary products. Thereafter, we are usually encouraged to extend the cover by paying some money. And why not? We need protection.

Equally, we can uninstall all the limited licenses and reinstall some free software. As a private user, there is no obligation to upgrade to the 'pay versions' and the free ones do a very good job.

I have been particularly impressed with the Avira antivirus 'freeby', especially as the latest version (V9) now encompasses Ad-Ware, Trojan and other Mal-ware protection.

I have also partnered this with the free Malwarebytes program that I run manually whenever I feel I need extra assurance of a clean system.