

INSTALLING PROGRAMS

A question that we frequently get asked is if we can save the programs that are installed in Windows when we are doing a wipe and reload, erasing your hard drive and reinstalling Windows.

We cannot save most programs when we do a wipe and reload because programs actually become part of Windows when they are installed. When we do a reload, the programs have to be reinstalled from scratch. This does not affect the user data in any way. For example, if you had Microsoft Word on your PC, and you needed a reload, we would save all of your Word documents, wipe the drive, and reload Windows. We would then reinstall Word, and then finally replace your Word documents back where they belong, in My Documents.

What happens when a program is installed that makes it “part” of Windows? First, the installation program usually decompresses a bunch of files to a temporary directory on the hard drive. Then it goes about copying files to the main program location, usually under C:\Program Files. It will also copy files to various other windows folders like C:\Windows, and C:\Windows\System, plus many others.

The installation program’s next step is to enter all the registry keys necessary to make the program function correctly in Windows. This is the phase that can most adversely affect Windows, because the more keys it adds, the worse your Windows will end up running, because they end up taking up more active memory. Some of these keys even instruct Windows to start services and programs during the next reboot, which will also take more memory.

Next, the installation program can add shortcuts to the StartUp folder, which will cause other resident programs to run the next time we restart the PC. Finally, shortcuts to the program are usually created in the Start Menu, Quick Launch toolbar or on the Desktop.

Several things should be obvious from this description of the installation process: We can’t save programs because there may be hundreds of components all over to try to save, plus we would have to save them in appropriate places and keep records as to where each piece has to go. Also, installing a new program could conflict with what is already installed on your system. This is why you should always avoid installing more than one program that serves the same purpose; you don’t know if they will end up conflicting, plus you are needlessly adding to the overhead of running your Windows. Why install both Word and WordPerfect? They both do the same job and installing two office suites will really slow down your PC. It’s not that it’s impossible to do; it is just that it is unhealthy for your Windows.

Another important point is that you cannot just delete programs to free up space on your hard drive. Programs must be properly uninstalled so that Windows “forgets” that they were there in the first place. If you just delete the files and folders, Windows will still think the programs are there, and will give you many different kinds of errors, depending on the circumstance.

If you have question or comments, I can always be reached via email sean@intrex.ca or join our forums at <http://intrex.ca> for more in-depth conversations.