

Windows talks, but it won't listen to him

January 28 2009, By Steve Alexander

Q. I installed Windows on a new PC hard drive, but failed to activate the software with Microsoft's online service in the required time. Now, when I try to access music, Windows asks me if I want to activate. When I try to comply, Windows says it's already activated, then again prompts me to activate. What can I do to get around this annoying condition?

A. Windows senses that your computer has undergone a substantial hardware change, and, as a result, is reacting as if you had installed the operating system on a different PC. Rather than wait to be prompted to activate Windows, try these methods:

You can activate Windows Vista by clicking the Start button, choosing Computer and clicking on Properties. Then choose "Click Here to Activate Windows Now."

For Windows XP, click Start, click on All Programs and click on Accessories. Then click on System Tools and click "Activate Windows."

If you're still unable to activate Windows, you may need to reinstall it.

Readers generally agreed with my recent suggestion for fixing a broadband Internet connection that fails periodically. (I suggested unplugging both the modem and the wireless router, then plugging in the modem first, then the router.) But readers said that was only a temporary fix, and offered stories about repairing the underlying causes of Internet

outages.

Gregory Ludvigsen of St. Paul, Minn., learned earlier this month that his broadband connection was failing because his Actiontec DSL modem from his cable company and his privately purchased Netgear wireless router were competing for the same Internet address. (These "IP addresses" are the Internet equivalents of the house numbers the post office uses to deliver your mail.) The cable company referred him to Netgear, which e-mailed him instructions for resetting the router's IP address. He hasn't had to reboot his Internet connection since.

Steve Gonnella of Brooklyn Park, Minn., said his broadband Internet connection failed at random intervals, but the problem turned out to be caused by minor house electrical fluctuations that affected only his DSL modem. The problem was solved when his power company replaced a transformer on a nearby pole. But for insurance he now uses an uninterruptible power source, or UPS. (A UPS unit relies on a transformer to boost weak power from a wall socket, or on a battery to replace the wall socket during a blackout.) He also hasn't had any further problems.

(Steve Alexander covers technology for the Star Tribune. E-mail your technology questions to steve.j.alexander@gmail.com or write Tech Q&A, 425 Portland Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55488-0002. Please include a full name, city and phone number.)

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Citation: Windows talks, but it won't listen to him (2009, January 28) retrieved 9 April 2024
from <https://phys.org/news/2009-01-windows-wont.html>

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