

THE COMPUTER CORNER

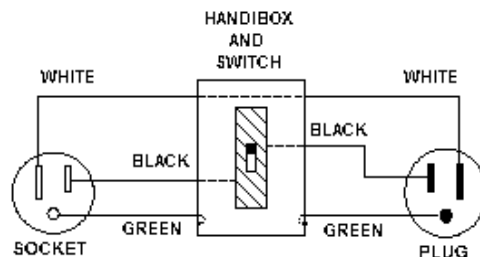
No. 198. A Remote Switch For Your Desk

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Here is an idea that I have been using for years to solve part of the problem of the tangle of wires and powerstrips under my computer desk.

The problem is partially a functional one, best explained by what I do when I want to turn on my computer. Almost all wires and cables are neatly tucked out of sight on the floor at the back of my desk, near the wall. The solution allows me to flip one switch, mounted in a handibox attached to the leg of my desk near the floor. That turns on the monitor, the power cube that supplies the speakers, the desk lamp, and it supplies power to the computer (though the computer does not start yet). Then I press the on/off switch on the front of the computer and it begins the boot process. Those two switches start everything.

Well, you say, I can do that with my surge suppressor power strip. Yes, you can. But invariably, all power strips have the switch mounted at the end of the strip where the power cord enters. Now that might be good engineering practice – turn the power on and off right where the electrical cable enters the strip. But it sure does make for a mess under the desk, because the strip and every plug that plugs into it has to be close enough so that you can reach the switch, which makes it and the cords visible and a mess. Wouldn't it be nice to have a remote switch to do all that? A single detached switch that controls the power strip itself? Then you can stow the power strip and all associated cables away under the back part of the desk. So, here is how you can do that.



Buy a three-wire plug (it plugs in the wall), a socket (the powerstrip plugs into it), a metal handibox with switch plate, a standard SPST 15 amp switch and a few feet of three-wire power cord (AWG 16 or larger). (Those of you who are clever will use a computer power cord cut in two to provide the socket, the plug and the wire). Connect as shown. The white wire simply goes through the box without connecting to anything inside. The two green wires enter the box and are bonded to the inside of the box with a machine screw, star washer and nut. Be sure there is a good electrical bond between both green wires and the metal of the handibox. When wiring the plug and socket, just remember this: the black wire goes to the gold or brass-colored screw, and the white wire goes to the silver-colored screw. Of course, the green wire goes to the green screw. Be sure to get this correct, for safety!

Now, mount the handibox to a conveniently reached leg of your desk. If you have a wood desk, simply screw it to a leg before you wire the switch. If your desk is metal or if you don't want to use screws, run a plastic cable tie or two through the holes in the back of the handibox and use them to anchor the assembly to the leg. Now plug the power strip into the socket and the plug into the wall. Neatly dress the power cords coming from the handibox back, out of sight, and tuck away the power strip and all other wires. Voila! Happy computing!

This article was modified from #114, first published in April 2004.