

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 101. Windows 98 is Watching You

- by Stan Kaplan, WB9RQR
105 Martin Drive
Port Washington, WI 53074-9654
(262) 284-9346
skaplan@mcw.edu

Well, here we go with #101 in the series! If someone had told me back in 1993 when the column was started that I would write over 100, I would never have believed it. Anyway, we are still working with Windows 98. Why? Windows XP will turn out to be the biggest security leak in software history, and it should not be supported. My opinion. But, it will be yours, too, in the future. More on that will be forthcoming in the future.

Your copy of Windows 98 watches what you do. However, don't be upset by that statement, for those observations are to your benefit, and it does not report its findings to Microsoft. Therefore, this process is a Good Thing, not a Bad Thing. I am speaking of a program generically called Applog, specifically, CVTAPLOG.EXE, a 76kb program in your Windows folder. At least I think that is the heart of Applog, because there is precious little information on this program, or even the workings of Applog itself. Most of my information comes from a discussion of how Norton Speed Disk works with Applog, which can be found on the Symantec web site.

Applog keeps information on the application files you run, such as Word, Netscape, Notepad or any other program that is designed to interact with you, the human user. You can find that information recorded in a series of files kept in the C:\Windows\Applog folder. However, if you open one of the files found there, it will contain largely meaningless strings of hexadecimal numbers. More informative are the file names themselves. Peruse the file names in that folder and you will see all your applications, a unique mix specific to your machine and the way you work.

Applog records the application programs you run most often, including how many times you run them. It also records the files that those applications load, such as a letter loaded by Word. It even records the order in which those files are loaded. Applog starts recording this information the first day you use the computer, and it continues to log this usage as time goes on. After a few days or weeks of use, it has a sorted list of what you use most often and what files those applications need. That information is very valuable in improving the performance of your computer. Let me construct a scenario to help explain this.

Suppose you are a new user of Microsoft Word, and whenever you start to write something in Word, you often call on the Office Assistant to gather information from the Help file. After you do that a few times, Applog will load the Word Help file whenever Word itself is loaded, and before you or the Word program ask for it! In this way, Applog improves the performance of your application by anticipating what you will need, even before you need it. This is much like a memory cache (see #63, Cache as Cache Can), but at a more global level. It is nifty and it works very well, indeed.

There is another significant benefit. When you run the Disk Defragmenter (or Norton Utilities Speed Disk), the program uses the Applog files to determine a sort order for where the various programs and files are placed on the hard drive. It puts those files and programs that you use most often nearer to the start of the disk (the outside edge of the platter), and those you use least often nearer to the hub. The net result is twofold. First, the programs you use most often are loaded more quickly. Second, the read/write heads need to move less to find the files you

need, and so the wear and tear on your hard drive is reduced. Everything works faster and wears out slower – an ideal goal.

If you use a disk defragmenter that does not use Applog, no meaningful sort order is used and your system performance may well degrade. Both Norton Speed Disk and the Disk Defragmenter that comes with Windows 98 do use Applog. As a matter of fact, the Norton Utilities group wrote the Defragmenter that comes with Windows 98. If you open this program with a disk editor, it is easy to find their signature embedded in the code. Microsoft Corporation must have commissioned them to provide this utility program for Windows 98.

You say you have never defragmented your disk? Do it! Click **Start**, select **Programs**, then **Accessories**, then **System Tools**, then **Disk Defragmenter** and let it go to work. If this is your first time, you will see a significant increase in performance when you are done. Do it weekly. Of course, if you have Norton, run SpeedDisk in place of disk Defragmenter. It is far superior to the watered down program that comes with Windows.

Finally, let me put in a pitch for the First 100. The entire collection (100 articles) is now available on CD-ROM. They are recorded in Adobe Acrobat (*.pdf) format, and a copy of the latest Adobe reader is present on the disk, as well. Most important, in addition to a usual Table of Contents, all the articles are searchable. That is, you can use the Adobe reader software to search all 100 articles for any that refer to DIMM, or cache, or DSHD, or memory, or any other term of your choice. This search is fast, and the articles pop up with your search terms highlighted. The CD-ROM costs \$15, postpaid, and the proceeds will benefit ARES/RACES in our state. Send your check payable to me at the address noted on the top of this column. Happy computing!