

Re: Please Help!! Boot Failure!!

Source:

<http://www.tech-archive.net/Archive/WinXP/microsoft.public.windowsxp.general/2004-05/8644.html>

From: cquirke (MVP Win9x) (*cquirkenews_at_nospam.mvps.org*)

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On Fri, 7 May 2004 11:58:12 -0700, "Ian Young" was stricken!

I've read ahead, and the rest of this thread is so {qwertyuiop} **
that I'd rather start from back here.

(** Mum said if can't say anything nice...)

>When I start my computer I get the following message;

>Windows could not start because the following file is

>missing or corrupt;

>|windows\system32\config\system

That's the system registry. You are in deep doo-doo !!

>You can attempt to repair this file by starting windows

>setup using the original setup cd-rom.

>Select 'r' at the first screen to start repair.

Massively bad idea. "Eject, Buckaroo, EJECT!!" **

(** Obscure movie reference)

>Then the screen turns blue with 'Windows Setup' in the

>top left corner underlined twice.

>But this is as far as I can get!

You are lucky.

>The computer appears to freeze and I can't get to

>run the recovery console.

Back all the way out; there's more at stake than you think...

Is my data safe? Prolly NOT

Is it safe to run Windows? NO

Is it safe to write to the HD? NO

Is it safe to spin the HD? Maybe NOT

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Is it safe to turn on the PC? Maybe (fans?)

What follows is an uber-cautious approach that has the best chance of fewest casualties. It's geeky, so if it looks intimidating, get a tech buddy to help. I'd split the process into two tracks...

- 1) Evacuate data from HD, test HD, test file system, exclude malware
- 2) Check PC construction, reduction-test hardware, check RAM

...and only then bring them together towards running Windows again

So step one is to open the case and get the hard drive out.

The HD is then dropped into a known-good PC for track (1) – do not run Windows on the host PC until you know it is safe to do so – while the rest of the PC undergoes track (2). You will see elements of the advice that followed in other posts in what follows, but all in good time. We want to minimise the risks that too-early Windows can pose.

This is heavy-duty maintenance, where the role of Windows is by necessity limited. See <http://cquirke.mvps.org/whatmos.htm> at this point, in order to save me a small book of typing; thank you.

Start by downloading the required tools as above, depending on what your stricken PC's file system was. If NTFS, pull down ReadNTFS from www.NTFS.com and resign yourself to loss of LFNs. If FATxx, smile with relief and pull down Odi's LFN Tools from wherever that is (see "whatmos.htm" URL) as well as DOS-based antivirus from www.x.com where "x" is f-prot, nod32 or sophos.

Either way, pull down HD diagnostic from your HD vendor's site, a RAM checker from www.x.com where "x" is memtest86 and/or simmtester, and a partition manager from www.bootitng.com

All of this is done from the known-good PC, of course. Make sure you have a way of running that PC from a Win9x DOS mode, as we will use that as a maintenance OS in what follows on both this and the stricken PC. Make whatever non-HD boot disk you like; I'd recommend diskette.

Finally, create a directory on the host to receive your HD's data, on a FATxx volume so you can write to it from DOS mode and virus check it as well. You don't want to put your host at risk!

Track 1:

Unplug the host PC from mains, add your hard drive as the sole device on the secondary xIDE channel. Plug in but at this point stay out of Windows; boot DOS mode instead. Familiarise yourself with where everything is, i.e. what paths to use to your stricken HD (I will use "D:" here) and when you will dump to (I will use "C:\BADHD")

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The first thing we will do is "cherry-pick" your most important data off the stricken HD. You will need to know where this data is, using 8.3 name syntax like C:\DOCUME~1\Blah\Blah\Blah. Yuk, I know.

If file system is NTFS, use ReadNTFS to see the stricken HD. Navigate in and copy off your crucial subtrees.

If FAT32, go for broke with this Odi's LFN Tools command:

```
LCopy D:\* C:\BADHD /A /S
```

The latter – which requires FATxx to work – will potentially give you everything off the entire HD, LFNs and all. If there are bad sectors, you will see this on screen, but the process won't stop, bog down for a wekk on retries, or abort. If lots of bad sectors, press Ctl-C to abort and zoom in to the crucials as you had to do in the NTFS case.

Having got off the crucials, we now try to get the whole shebang via a partition-level image, using Boot It New Generation (BING). Bing boots off diskette and first wants to install itself; cancel that, and it will let you into "partition maintenance mode", which is where you want to be. Highlight your stricken HD, and then each volume on that it turn. Choose image copy, and save the image into the host's C:\BADHD in CDR-sized (640M) chunks.

BING image transfer can take a long time – several days, if it hits bad sectors. The first bad sector will cause it to stop and warn you that what you get may be damaged; you have to hang around to click through that. Thereafter it will grind on. If the HD dies during these days of spin time, you end up with nothing; hence the cherry-picking phase that preceded this attempt!

Now that your data is safe, you can determine:

- whether the HD is physically intact (HD vendor's diags)
- whether file system is OK (Scandisk for FATxx, Chkdsk for NTFS)
- whether there is malware present (the DOS-based av we downloaded)

If NTFS, you can boot up the host's Windows NT at this point, disable SR on your stricken HD (else it will kill your HD's SR data!) and copy off the data that way, which preserves LFNs.

Track 2:

While all the above is going on, on another bench, you tackle the rest of the stricken PC. First, with it unplugged from the mains, you check the construction for loose/shorting wires, disconnected or stuck fans, loose metal objects, and gooey dust that may be shorting out chip's solder pads (esp. around the processor fan's downdraft area). Look out for bulging motherboard caps too.

Now try booting up the PC to CMOS setup, and if that works, look at the voltages and temperatures if there's a facility to do so.

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Visually check that all fans are running, too.

If you can't get into CMOS, then you have to strip test the system, just as another post suggested. The difference is that we won't allow the Windows installation on the stricken HD to sniff the reduced hardware, which might otherwise bring down the wrath of Windows Product Activation – like we don't have enough to worry about already.

Once everything's bolted together and working (or you've identified and pulled out the vrot card that stopped this from happening), boot into SIMMTester or (IMO better) MemTest86, and leave that running while you grind away at Track 1.

Re-entry

By now, Track 2 has resulted in a working PC with good RAM that doesn't overheat or spontaneously reboot due to bad PSU or whatever. Track 1 has resulted in a physically good HD (either yours, or the replacement for it if it was bad) that contains your file set on it, on a known-good file system and that is known to be free of at least the traditional malware that av deign to look for and fix.

Now, for the first time, it's safe to try and get our fair-weather-friend Windows OS back in the saddle and working. No matter how badly what follows messes up (I might try a System Restore first, who knows it might work) you can fall back to that whole-HD partition level image you backed up in Track 1.

When all is done, you may want to keep the maintenance tools you used for next time. Some are free, and some are to paid for if you keep and re-use them. If they saved your ass, you may want to "say thanks" :-)

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> Certainty may be your biggest weakness
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