

Re: Thinking of reinstalling Windows...

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Your going to regret asking this:

A better idea is to post some detail on what is wrong, so we can try to help you with that instead.

...but you asked for it. So here goes *ahem*:

First, a little background: I've had my PC for a couple of years now and i've made several user accounts in that time. Everything has always worked (with the exception of my disc drives causing system freezes due to Nero software; but for some reason that problem went away of its own accord so..*shrug*). Those accounts created have always been fully functional whether they were limited or administrator accounts. However...

The present day: Lately, I deleted those previous accounts except 1 and created a new limited user account (for my PC inept family). After logging in and importing the files from the deleted accounts I noticed that the picture files (.jpg, .gif etc) were now represented by that icon for file extensions that windows don't recognize (in windows explorer). I then tried to double click and open them; I received the file type association dialogue box asking me to associate a program for these fielt types (in this case; ..jpg). So I selected the Windows picture and fax viewer and ticked the "always open with..." box and hit "OK". The files then opened up with the program – no problem. Here's where things get complicated:

You would think that after going through this process that from then on all ..jpg files would be represented by that picture icon in windows explorer and be refered to as a "JPEG image" and when opened; would automatically open with the Windows picture and fax viewer wouldn't you? No such luck. Instead, the files were still represented by the icon associated for files Windows didn't recognize. My initial reaction was puzzlement but I then thought I could remedie this simply by going to My Computer>Tools>Folder Options>File types and finding the .jpg extension and associating permenantly. Once again I was thwarted. There was no .jpg extension listed! So I created it and set it to open with the Windows Picture and Fax viewer. However I noticed 2 things:

Re: Thinking of reinstalling Windows...

1. After creating the entry and the desktop refreshing – no changes were made and the file type still wasn't recognized
2. After I closed the file association window and re-opened it; it was as if I had never created the .jpg extension. Once again the .jpg extension was missing.

I was confused. I then proceeded to re-create the .jpg extension and associated program to open with. Only this time; before closing the window I clicked the "Advanced button" of the file type window (the one that opens with a window for "Edit File type"). Nothing happened it was as if the button wasn't there. Clicking on it yielded no response. And of course, after closing the window and re-opening it resulted in no .jpg file type listed.

Once again I was confused. I created a test file type called "AAA" and associated a program with it. This time, clicking the "Advanced" button resulted in the "Edit File Type" window coming up as normal. Also, after closing the file type window and re-opening it resulted in the "AAA" file type still being listed and associated with my chosen program. I.e. everything worked appropriately for the "AAA" file type I created. But no matter how many times I did it, I encountered the same cyclical problem described above for the .jpg/.gif etc file type.

Therefore whenever I double-clicked a .jpg/.gif file I would receive the window asking me to associate the file type with a program (the cycle continued).

Despite all this; I was about to encounter something even stranger. In an effort to fix this I deleted the account and created a new administrator account and logged in. This time whenever I double clicked a .jpg/.gif etc file type; it would open with...you guessed it – the Windows picture and Fax viewer! I thought things were finally working. However I noticed several things:

In windows explorer; the files were still relegated the unknown file type icon. Despite the fact that they would open with the appropriate program – Windows couldn't associate the .jpg/.gif etc as a "JPEG image/GIF image" etc.

I then went to take a look at the My Computer>Tools>Folder Options>File types window and sure enough; the .jpg/.gif file types weren't there! And of course, I encountered the same cyclical problem as before.

Possible causes:

The only things I had done recently before creating these new accounts and encountering this exasperating problem were the uninstallation of Microsoft Office 2003, Counterspy (anti-spyware software that suspiciously enough looks to have the identical features of Windows defender (don't ask me which came first because I don't know)) and the testing of various registry 'cleaner' programs. One other event did occur however;

Re: Thinking of reinstalling Windows...

Despite Norton Internet security 2005 catching the "reger.exe" virus and deleting; I was infested with multiple pieces of incredibly annoying spyware (alexa etc etc). This all happened at once. It was if I was hit by a spyware bomb. After evading spyware from the internet for years due to my anti-spyware apps and Norton; it was finally "my turn". At the time of infection I had un-installed counterspy and had Lavasoft Ad-aware and Spybot 1.4 installed. I ran these and despite multiple detections and subsequent deletions of the invading files. The files were always returned and were re-detected seconds later. I.e. scan>detect>delete>scan again>detects same files>delete>cycle repeats.

I was at a loss. Norton couldn't help either because as we know; spyware aren't seen as viruses (mostly) and thus weren't picked up by the Norton anti-virus scans. The only way I was able to remove the infections was through a combination of Counterspy (which I re-installed) and the multiple registry cleaning software I had downloaded (all registry cleaners on the market pickup different things so I thought I'd cover my bases using multiple apps – in the end I came to only use RegSeeker 1.45). My only guess from this is that my registry was critically destabilised by these events.

One more thing– I noticed a bug in Counterspy that occurs for limited user accounts. If you have Counteroy 1.5 installed and attempt to login into a limited user account – the startup processes fail to load and you receive an error message (some generic thing I forget exactly the text). Shortly after the user account crashes to login screen. However, this error is avoided if you logon as an administrator. My guess is that the developers of Counterspy rushed the production of the 1.5 version in an attempt to beat Windows defender to the market. Just my 2 cents.

It's unlikely that these events are the source of my file association problem but I thought I'd mention it.

Additional remedie steps taken:

1. sfc /scannow off the xp disc
2. The attempted application of downloadable stable registry entries as suggested by this newsgroup. However I now encountered a new type of error when attempting to merge these stable reg entries into my registry. I would receive a "Cannot import "file": Error accessing the registry". However – as a test – I was able to merge these reg keys into my last remaining old user account "Registry entries merged successfully". This led me to believe that the error may be due to a corrupted ntuser.dat file and thus a corrupted Default user profile that all new user accounts copy off from. One thing didn't make sense however;

The hkey_classes_root reg hive had different registry entries for the .jpg file type between the new user accounts and the old working account. I've since learned that the hkey_classes_root reg hive is actually assembled as thus:

/quote

Re: Thinking of reinstalling Windows...

The HKCR hive itself does not really exist, it's a combination of HKLM\SOFTWARE\Classes (default settings) and HKCU\Software\Classes (user settings) while HKCU\Software\Classes is dominant if the values of identical settings differ. Therefore, HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT is both system *and* user related.

/quote

This made things much more complicated for me as I now no longer could simply merge good registry entries from the old working account to the hkey_classes_root reg hive in the new account and hope to remediate the problem. Not that I could anyway seeing as I still would receive the "Cannot import "file": Error accessing the registry" error.

The only other things I have noticed is that this problem also effects the default administrator only accessible through safe mode.

So there you have it; the scenario in full. Hopefully you have better luck in ascertaining the source of the problem than I did. My suspicion is that i'll have to do a full reformat and re-install of the OS *sigh*. Does anyone know a good driver backup program? >.<

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