How to control startup programs, Part 1
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*Stump the PC Club is a free tech-advice column written by members of the **North Orange County Computer Club**, which has been in existence since 1976. Visit the club's site at noccc.org. And don't forget to stop by the Gadgetress' home for the PC Club, at ocregister.com/link/pcclub, to find out how to ask a question and read past answers.*

QUESTION: In a recent Stump the PC Club column, reference was made to "controlling the programs that run at startup." Please address this serious issue. I know my computer loads lots of applications upon starting up, but how to know which I can safely avoid and how to do block them from loading? Also, I have several icons in the notification bar of programs I do not want to be running. One of them is the "Safely Remove Hardware" icon.

PC CLUB: This is a serious issue as you have suggested and was covered only briefly in the previous article, "Speed up a slow computer in 4 steps," (see http://bit.ly/N8thE). This article will now cover the topic in detail and the information will be spread over two weeks. Therefore, this will be Part 1 of a two-part answer with Part 2 appearing next week.

Since startup programs play such a vital role in impacting our PC's performance, the ability to control them should be in everyone's arsenal. Controlling startup programs is a three-step process as follows:

1. Identifying all of the programs that start up when your system boots.
2. Determining if they're critical and if you need them or not.
3. Having the ability to enable or disable them.

Before we discuss these steps let's cover some basics.

Startup programs show up on our PCs from several sources. These sources include programs that get installed such as Microsoft Office, anti-virus programs, utilities and the Windows operating system itself. These tend to build up over

time to the point where our PC starts to groan under the strain. The symptoms can include longer boot times and slower performance.

These startup programs place icons in such places as the Startup Menu, the Quick Launch toolbar or the System Notification Area. However, many startup programs place icons in none of these locations and simply start up without any obvious indication at all.

The "Safely Remove Hardware" icon referred to in your question is part of Windows and should be left alone. Its main purpose is to let you unplug external devices including hard drives from your PC without any loss of data. Other icons placed there by Windows include the speaker volume control and a battery status indicator on notebook PCs. Most PCs also have an icon in the System Notification area for their anti-virus software.

When you examine your PC to look for startup programs, you have to look at your Startup menu by clicking Start, All Programs, Startup as a first step. Other sources include several Windows Registry locations including the following

- HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run
- HKEY_CURRENT_USER\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run

These Registry locations can be examined by clicking Start, Run and entering "regedit" (without the quotes) in the box labeled Open and then clicking OK. If there is no Run command available you can also press the Windows logo key and tap the R key. It is one thing to take a peek at the Registry but another thing to make changes unless you are an expert. You will be shown how to control startup programs without using the Registry in Part Two of this article.

I share your feelings that programs should only startup when you need them. Unfortunately, programs such as Microsoft Office, QuickTime, iTunes and several Adobe programs, to name a few, violate this all of the time. The Microsoft OSA (Office Startup Assistant), for example, is claimed by Microsoft to improve the Microsoft Office behavior. Even though this may be true, it does this at the expense of all other non-Microsoft programs.

See **Part 2** in the next installment of Controlling Startup Programs for details on the three steps for controlling them. *~Ed Schwartz, NOCCC member. View his blog at* *www.edwardns.com/*