Web browser errors could be due to hardware overheating

March 17th, 2009, 12:32 pm · Post a Comment · posted by Tamara Chuang, a.k.a. The Gadgetress

 *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. Questions may be edited for space.*

QUESTION: My Internet browser stops working after about 10 minutes. When I launch Firefox, My Yahoo homepage loads, I check e-mail and visit other Web sties. But after about 10 minutes, my browser becomes unstable and can no longer find the servers it needs. Even when I try to get back to my home page, I get page-load errors: "Firefox can't find the server at www.yahoo.com" or "The browser could not find the host server for the provided address."

When the browser is working and I am searching for something, I can't click any of the results and get to the Web site. The browser doesn't redirect to that address. It always goes to some third-party site or directory. I have the same problem with Internet Explorer. I have also tried reloading an older version of Firefox but that didn't solve the problem. By the way, I don't think my Internet connection with AT&T is the problem. We do have a wireless network set up and everything is working great. A laptop that is on the same network has no problems surfing the Web. I can't figure out what happened to the PC. Can you help? ~ Gary

PC CLUB: Gary, it is always possible that you have been infected with some kind of malware program. But it sounds like it may be a classic hardware heat problem. The kind where something fails after the system has been on for a little while and some part gets too warm. It sometimes occurs from simply using a particular circuit of the computer.

The fact that the wireless laptop continues to operate normally isolates the problem to the desktop and one possibility with the router. Assuming that you have an up-to-date anti-malware program, here are some things to try.

1. Plug the desktop into a different port on the router.

2. After running your browser for 5 minutes, turn off the computer and let it cool for at least 15-30 minutes. Turn the computer back on and see if you can operate the browser OK for another 5 minutes and repeat the sequence. If that works, try opening the case and place a good size fan to blow air into it. If your motherboard uses a separate Ethernet controller chip, and you can locate it, placing a plastic baggy containing crushed ice against the chip is best.

3. Go to Control Panel> System> Hardware Tab> Device Manager> Network adapters (click image below to enlarge). Expand the category by clicking on the plus sign. Right click on the adapter name and click on disable. Install and use a different Ethernet controller in your system. That can be a card that plugs into your motherboard or a USB port adapter. Either type of adapter can be for a wired or wireless connection, the point is to bypass the hardware you are currently using. If you have a friend that uses a USB Wi-Fi adapter, ask to borrow it long enough to make the test. If the test works, you have your solution.
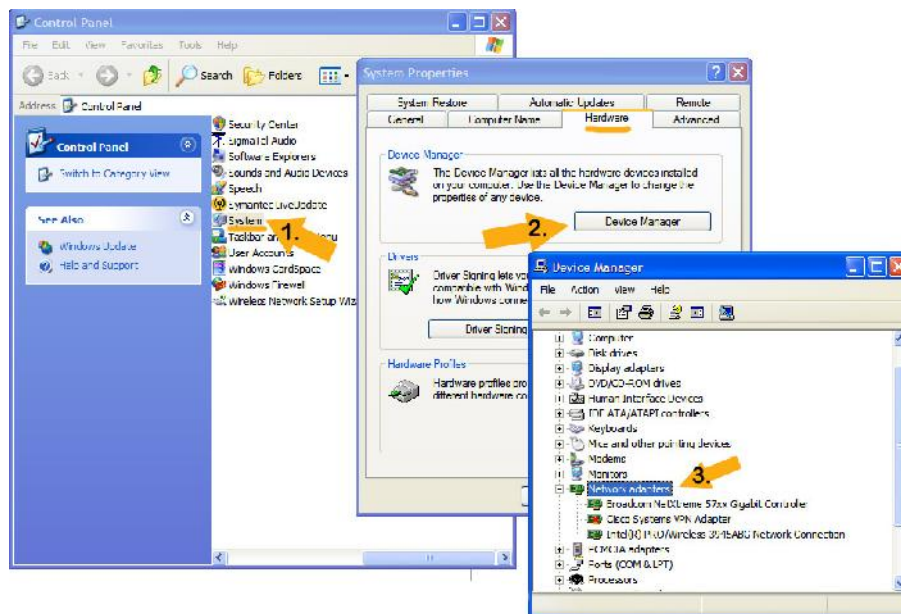
4. If the hardware test fails to solve the problem, malware is the likely cause. Try one of the specialty programs like Spybot Search and Destroy or Ad-Aware. Both are available on www.download.com. Pick one or more of the free online scans that you can find with a Google search on this list of keywords (without the quotation marks): "online antivirus OR security scan." ~ *Jim Sanders, President, NOCCC*