The 15 Biggest Computer Mistakes Drycleaners Make
and how you can avoid them

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Computers in your dry cleaning or laundry store are an essential part of doing business these days. They are a necessary evil that help you run your business effectively, but are a source of frustration when they aren't working right.

Like a car that needs oil and regular maintenance, a computer has internal moving parts that need attention once in a while too. A dry cleaning operation generates lots of dust and residue. The fans in a computer almost act like a vacuum and a lot of the dust and garment residue that comes off during cleaning will end up in your computer. So, maintenence is a must.

Drycleaners and laundries are one of the last holdouts for computerization. It might be fear of computers, it might be the "*keeping the money under the mattress*" accounting philosophy, or it might be the "*I've been doing it the manual way since President Nixon was in office*" mentality. A lot of our dry cleaning friends come from the old country where computers were just a new way for the government to keep track of the money we make to tax us accordingly.

When it comes to using computers, the Fear Factor is real. The people that make computers like to come up with confusing names like *"RAM", or "CPU"* to confuse and attempt to amaze us with their brilliance and smarts. Then the computer programmers take the confusing computer hardware and add their own confusing wording for their computer software like "*right click on the C: drive until you find the destination folder*".

Well, with a small amount of work on your part you can avoid most of the common computer problems. Read the following tips to keep your computer and dry cleaning / laundry operation running smooth.

#1 Make A Plan

Your computer might break. If it does, have a plan in place to operate until it's fixed.

Computers are made by humans and anything made by humans can, and will break. They have moving parts that are susceptible to wear and tear. In case of computer failure have a plan in place to get it fixed fast, have backup parts, and manual ticket writing in place before it happens.

#2 Insufficient Insurance

Insurance can be cheap piece of mind.

A lot of dry cleaners forget to insure their computer equipment. Or they under-insure it. A deductable of $2000 means you are going to have to come up with up to $2000 to replace a stolen computer. Make sure you have "contents" coverage with a deductable of $250 or less to cover the contents in your store (that includes your computer).

#3 Fear Not, the Computer

The computer is just a tool that helps you get your work done. Don't fear it any more than a T.V.

Chances are you've uttered these words: "I'm not comuter literate" or something to that effect. I'll bet you don't know how a T.V. works inside but you can change the channel, turn up the volume, etc. And those remote controls they make these days are like a control pad for a moon launch they are so confusing. Well, treat your computer with the same thought process. If your software is
written correctly, all you have to know is how to press a button or two to make it work. You don't have to be a computer scientist and you definately don't have to fear your computer.

#4 Save Your Data

Your customers, orders, payments and other critical data should be saved at least every day.

Computers do break. Fires happen. Breakins, and burglaries are not uncommon. If you have a current backup of your critical data you can have your store computer back in operation in no time.

#5 Take Data Off Premise

Ok, you backup everyday, now take it home with you once in awhile.

Even if you save your data every day it does no good if your store burns down or it is stolen during a breakin. So, take a copy home or put it in a safe, off site, place on a regular basis.

#6 Secure Your Internet

A common way to slow down your computer is to have it connect to untrusted web sites.

Internet connections are a necessary part of today's modern computer systems. Just make sure that your employees (especially night time) can not download or even access the internet without your approval.

#7 Clean Your Computer

Your computer acts like a big vacuum. Clean it once in awhile to make it work longer.

The fans in your comuter suck air in from the back and blow it out the front. Most of the dust and debris in your store that is sucked in at the back of the computer gets stuck on the fans that cool it. Pop off the cover, buy some compressed air from Sams or Costco and blow out the dust every month or so. If you aren't comfortable
taking off the cover, ask a local computer tech to do it for you. It should'nt cost more that about $35 to have it done by a local tech.

#8 Leave the Drawer Open

Leave the cash drawer open at night so potential theives can see there is no money in it.

Dry cleaners get broken into all the time. Most of the time the cash drawer is the target because they can see it thru the window and it's closed leading them to believe there is treasure inside. Take the money out and leave the drawer open so they can see it is a waste of time to break in.

#9 Battery Backup

If you have frequent power outages or power problems it can hurt your computer.

Some areas of the country have power outages on a regular basis. When that happens your computer not only crashes suddenly, it has the possiblity of corrupting your valuable data. Buy a $60 UPS battery backup from Sams Club or Costco like the APC Back-UPS NS 600. Go to:
`http://www.samsclub.com/shopping/navi-gate.do?dest=5&item=441401`
It will keep your computer powered on for up to about 15 minutes when local power goes out.

#10 Keep Software Current

When software vendors find problems, they fix them so keep your dry cleaner software up to date.

Nothing is more frustrating for a drycleaner running a computer system than to have to update their software. But, it is a necessary evil that must be done much like changing the oil in your car. Don't think of it as a problem, but as a solution to help prevent future problems.

#11 Tighten Up Security

Make sure even your most trusted workers aren't your unwanted partner.

Go ahead, ask any fellow dry cleaner to tell you a story about theft from a trusted worker or family member. Almost every one of us has experienced it. So, to avoid having a partner you don't want or need, make sure your security is turned on and tuned to keep unwanted personnel from changing or deleting orders, payments, etc.

#12 Camera's Stop Theft

Even just a sign about video surviellence can deter theft and stop losses.

Cameras are another way to increase security at your store and can even hook to your computer. You can actually view transactions over the internet from home or remote office.

#13 Protect Against Viruses

If you don't take precautions you might have a virus on your computer that will destroy data.

Can your employees load a floppy disk or CD Rom into your dry cleaning computer? If so, you are highly susceptable to computer viruses that are brought in with school work, playing games, etc. Lock your computer down so outside programs can not be loaded.

#14 Date/Time Mistakes

Your computers date and time can be wrong, check it often.

The clock in your computer is controlled by a tiny watch battery much like the one in your wrist watch. The battery should last for 3 to 5 years. After that time pay special attention every morning at startup of your store that the date and/or time is correct. Make sure the AM/PM setting is correct also. Protect against workers changing the clock by setting security on it.

#15 Don't Overpay

Computer parts for dry cleaner computers aren't special, so don't overpay to replace them.

Ok, your computer has been working great for the last 10 years and suddenly it breaks. First, thank your lucky stars that it worked for 10 years. Computers are designed to work from 3 to 5 years before the parts stop working. Luckily, you save your data everyday so after you buy a new computer you can load your software, and load your data and you are running again. A lot of dry cleaning computer companies want you to think that the printers, touch screens, etc. have to be purchased from them. They usually don't. Just get the model numbers of compatible items and buy them wherever you get a good price. But Remember! Sometimes a higher price with good service is better than the cheapest price with bad service.