

WHY REBOOTING IS A GOOD IDEA

Rebooting is the source of frustration for techs and callers alike in the support world, and it seems as if there are two sides lined up. The users know they are going to be asked to reboot, and line up to defend against that request in an attempt to keep their computer on. The techs, on the other hand, attempt to get the users to reboot their computer before any further troubleshooting can occur.

Sounds like some sort of game, rather than a tech support scenario. And a little silly to boot (ha ha), from both sides. Take this scenario... imagine you've taken your car into your mechanic to have it worked on, yet steadfastly refuse to turn off the engine so that the mechanic can look under the hood. What are the chances that mechanic will be able to solve your problem, in a manner that is efficient for the mechanic and satisfactory for you?

The problem resides in the fact that no one ever mentions why a reboot is necessary. Well, it's mostly because "it just does," but there are other reasons as well.

- If your computer is frozen, rebooting will "unfreeze it." Sounds simple enough, though the main argument against this philosophy is the belief that rebooting will cause a user to lose work. The reality is, if the computer is frozen, it's already decided if the work is saved, lost, or recoverable. Rebooting is not going to change that, one way or the other. You won't lose work by rebooting that you haven't lost already.
- If your programs are freezing, but your computer hasn't frozen yet, rebooting will make them run properly again. Often time's programs generate fatal errors, for a variety of reasons. When this happens, the programs may close out on their own, or "hang" and have to be closed manually, and frequently will not restart again. Rebooting frees up resources that were previously lost, allowing programs to function normally.
- Rebooting frees up resources. Your programs are eating up your memory, temporary hard drive space, and other valuable resources. Nothing to panic about, that's their job. But, there is only a finite amount of resources your computer has. When they run out, your computer slows down until it finally halts altogether. Rebooting "refreshes" those resources, and allows you to continue working at an optimal speed.
- Rebooting fixes problems. When you reboot, your computer performs a series of diagnostic checks and often fixes problems without you knowing. So if your computer is acting strange, often rebooting fixes the error.

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- Sometimes, it just does. We don't know why, maybe it's some mystical mojo, but sometimes rebooting fixes things for reasons we don't know, or just haven't pinpointed.
- It helps in troubleshooting. Finally, rebooting helps us troubleshoot the problem, and answers one of our first questions: is the problem something that's repeatable. A onetime problem, like a program freezing, would not refreeze after rebooting. It may even go away forever. But we don't know the answer until we attempt to recreate the problem, which means starting from the beginning: when you turn on your computer.

Of course, the multitude of things that happen and are fixed by rebooting cannot be boiled down to a list of six bullet points, but you get the picture. So when we ask you to reboot, be assured that we are not simply trying to do things by the book, or to give you a pat, standardized answer, but are instead employing the first of many tools to assist us in troubleshooting and ultimately solving your question.

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