

Updating Drivers

What exactly are drivers?

Most hardware (such as the motherboard, sound card, graphics card, keyboard, mouse, printer, etc...) has a piece of software that goes along with it. This software (called a driver) tells the operating system how to use (or interface with) the hardware. Manufacturers frequently release updated drivers that have new functionality. For instance, a new modem driver might allow you to connect to the Internet slightly faster. A new graphics card driver might support higher screen resolutions. Etc... For this reason, updating your drivers now and then is a good idea. *Also, if you ever have a problem with your printer, updating (and therefore re-installing) the printer driver frequently fixes the problem.*

Updating drivers is a three step process:

1. Find the correct driver for your hardware
2. Download it to your computer
3. Install it

Each specific piece of hardware has its own unique driver. Thus, the hardest part of finding, downloading, and installing drivers, is to figure out exactly which one you need. Finding drivers is one of the rare situations when having a major-brand-name computer is an advantage. If you have a Dell, Dell has all the drivers for your model in one place, and so on for HP, Compaq, Sony, Gateway, etc...

Here's where to start:

Dell: <http://support.dell.com/support/downloads/index.aspx>

HP: <http://welcome.hp.com/country/us/en/support.html>

Compaq: <http://h18000.www1.hp.com/support/files/>

Sony: <http://esupport.sony.com/>

Gateway: <http://support.gateway.com/support/drivers/dlcenter.asp>

eMachines: http://www.emachines.com/support/product_support.html

Epson: <http://www.epson.com/cgi-bin/Store/support/SupportIndex.jsp>

Canon: <http://www.usa.canon.com/html/download/>

Lexmark: <http://downloads.lexmark.com/cgi-perl/downloads.cgi>

If your manufacturer isn't on the list, try searching Google for "(manufacturer) drivers".

If you still can't find the driver for your hardware, find out the exact model name or number of the part you need a driver for. This will probably be in your owner's manual. Otherwise, go to Start > Control Panel > System > Hardware > Device Manager. This lists all the hardware on your computer. Once you have the model name/number, search Google for "(model name/number) driver".

Drivers come in different packages, so to speak. If your driver comes as a .exe file, simply double-click it to install it. If your driver comes as a .zip file, you'll need to unzip (decompress) the file. Windows XP has a built in unzipping utility. If you have Windows ME, 2000 or 98, you'll need to download a free unzipping program such as WinZip. With XP, simply double-click the zipped file and then click Extract All Files on the left. Unzip the files to a location you can easily remember. I use "C:\unzipped\". Once you have the file unzipped, open the .exe file if present to install it. If there isn't a .exe file present, you'll need to install the driver manually. This isn't very hard to do. Go back to the Device Manager (Start > Control Panel > System > Hardware > Device Manager.) Right-click on your device and then click Update Driver. Click No, not this time, Next. Click Install from list or specific location, Next. Check the box for Include this location in the search, and click Browse. Browse to the location of the driver you just downloaded. If you unzipped the driver, browse to the location of the unzipped files. Click OK, then Next. Follow the on-screen directions.