Remove Troublesome Software that Just Won't Go Away

With the information in this article you can:
- Erase problematic programs from your system
- Fix problems caused by the Windows Installer
- Speed up your system by removing unused applications

With so many freeware and shareware programs available, your PC can become cluttered and slow. It is advisable to uninstall any programs that you never use, especially shareware programs who's trial period has expired, in order to speed up your system. Usually this is very easy; simply remove the program from the Add/Remove Programs control panel. Nine times out of ten this will work correctly, but if the program you are trying to uninstall has become corrupt then the uninstallation routine may fail, and the program will be stuck on your system. Don't worry, there are still plenty of tools you can use to remove the software. This article will tell you how.

Stefan Zasada:

"Removing programs from your system should be as simple as a few mouse clicks. Most of the time uninstall will work fine, but occasionally you may run into problems. If you can't uninstall software in the usual way don't worry, we will show you lots of tips and techniques to remove problem programs in this article."

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Most software can be uninstalled quite simply.

Removing Troublesome Software

The vast majority of software is simple to uninstall. Just select it from the **Add/Remove Programs** list and click **Uninstall**. While this works most of the time there are a number of things that can go wrong and prevent the software from being removed. This can range from incorrect registry settings preventing the uninstallation, to corrupt uninstallers that don't remove all of an application's components.

If the uninstallation routine fails, the software can still be removed.

This article looks at exactly how software is installed, and tells you what to do when the uninstallation routine fails and the software cannot be removed. We have also included several utilities to help you remove troublesome software on the CD accompanying this update.

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A program's developer provides the setup routine to install the program on your system.

Take Control of the Installation Procedure

Usually when you want to install a new application on your computer, you will use an installation program supplied by the software developer. Very often you will install the program by double-clicking on a SETUP.EXE file that you have downloaded or the installer will be run directly from an installation CD. The setup program will take care of copying the applications files into the correct directory (usually C:\Program Files), adding items to the Start menu and desktop, and entering the necessary settings in the registry.

Recent applications use the Windows Installer to manage their setup.

Older applications that you install will most likely have their own custom setup program that manages their installation on your PC. Recent applications that you install will probably use the Windows Installer to manage their setup. The Windows Installer provides a framework for software developers to install their applications on your PC in a uniform way, updating the record of what software is installed in a consistent way.

Uninstalling Software the Correct Way

As mentioned previously, when a program is installed on your system, it adds its own settings to the registry and startup menu, in addition to copying the program's files to the hard drive. Because of all of the changes that installation makes to your system, you cannot just delete the program's files manually and expect it to be uninstalled. There are a couple of ways that you can uninstall a program correctly. Firstly, many programs will put an uninstall option into the program's Start menu item. To uninstall, locate the program's subfolder in the Start menu and choose the uninstall option. If there is no uninstall option in the Start menu, then you can use Windows' Add/Remove Programs control panel to remove the software. To do so, follow these steps:

1. Click **Start > Settings > Control Panel** (**Start > Control Panel** in Windows XP).

2. Double-click **Add/Remove Programs** (**Add or Remove Programs** in Windows XP).

3. Scroll down the list and find the application that you want to uninstall, select it and then in Windows 98/Me choose **Add/Remove**. In Windows 2000/XP choose **Change/Remove** or **Remove**.

4. The application's uninstallation wizard will start. Follow the wizard to complete the application's removal.

5. Close Add/Remove Programs when the uninstallation procedure has completed.

Troubleshooting Uninstallation Problems

There are a variety of problems that can occur when uninstalling software. If certain files belonging to the application are missing, or the registry keys that relate to the application are damaged, then the uninstall procedure can fail and the software will be stuck on your system.

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You cannot just delete the program's files, as its settings will be left in the registry.

A faulty installation routine can prevent you from uninstalling.

Sometimes, if the application's uninstall routine isn't written correctly, the application's files will be removed but its registry settings will remain. If this happens, then the program may still be listed in the Add/Remove Programs control panel, even though the software has been removed. When you try to uninstall, an error will be reported, but the program will remain in the list of installed software.

Ensure you are logged on as an Administrator to remove software.

If you are experiencing errors uninstalling a particular program, make sure that you are logged on as an Administrator (Windows 2000/XP), because if your account doesn't have sufficient privileges you may not be able to execute the uninstallation routine. If you still can't uninstall the program, follow the solutions given in the rest of this article to uninstall your software.

Tools to Help You Remove Problem Applications

If the uninstallation routine doesn't work properly, or other errors prevent you from uninstalling software on your system, don't worry. There are many tools available that can help you manage the installation and uninstallation of software. These range from programs that take a snapshot of the system state before and after you install an application so that you can revert back to your previous settings if you decide to uninstall it, to programs that allow you to remove a program's files and registry settings manually from your PC. The CD accompanying this update contains four such programs, which are summarised in the following table:

Name	Description	Licence
Total Uninstall 2 (98/Me/2000/XP)	Create a snapshot of your PC before and after you install a new software application, and undo the changes made by the application if you want to uninstall it. (A link to this software is available on the CD with this update.)	Freeware

Name	Description	Licence
Easy Uninstaller (98/Me/2000/XP)	Displays full details of every application installed on your PC, allows you to you to uninstall multiple programs simultaneously and remove entries from the Add/Remove Program list.	Freeware
UninstallAbility (98/Me/2000/XP)	Backs up the part of the registry that contains the details of all installed applications on your system and restores the registry if it becomes corrupt and prevents you from uninstalling an application. (A link to this software is provided on the CD that accompanies this update.)	Freeware
Ashampoo UnInstaller Platinum Suite (98/Me/2000/XP)	Provides a suite of tools to manage installation and uninstallation of software on your system. Allows you to manually uninstall programs and settings from the registry if the uninstallation routine doesn't work.	Shareware

Total Uninstall 2

Total Uninstall allows you to create a snapshot of your PC before you install an application, which you can then use to revert your PC back to its previous state if you want to uninstall the application but its uninstaller isn't working. This has the obvious advantage over creating a System Restore point before installing on Windows Me/XP systems, as reverting back to the restore point will undo all changes made since the software was installed, rather than simply removing the application.

Create a snapshot of your PC before and after installing software.

Also, the uninstallation routine that comes with a program sometimes does not remove all of the files and registry settings that a program has created on your computer. By reverting back to a previous snapshot you are more likely to remove all of the files that a program has installed. To use Total Uninstall to create a snapshot of your system before

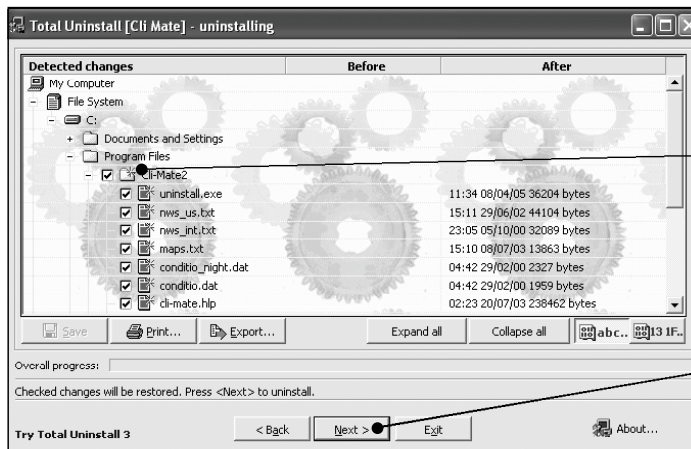*Uninstall doesn't always remove all of the program's files.*

installing a program, follow these steps:

1. Start Total Uninstall via **Start** > **Programs** (**All Programs** in Windows XP) > **Total Uninstall** > **Total Uninstall**.

2. In the **Install a new application** field, enter the name of the program that you are going to install, then click **Next**.

3. Click **Next** again. Total Uninstall will scan the state of your system. This may take a few minutes.

4. After the scan has completed, click **Browse**. Select the installer of the program that you want to install (this is usually called SETUP.EXE) and click **Open**.

5. Click **Next**. The install procedure for the program that you want to install will run. Follow the wizard until the software is installed.

6. After the wizard has completed, click **Next**. Total Uninstall will take another snapshot of your system's state.

7. Click **Exit** to close the program.

A link to Total Uninstall 2 is available on the CD that accompanies this update.

Your software is now installed and Total Uninstall will have a record of the changes that it has made to your system. Should you decide to uninstall the program, you should be able to do it via Add/Remove Programs in the Control Panel. If you find this doesn't work, then you can use Total Uninstall to remove the program by following these steps:

Total Uninstall will record the changes to your system.

1. Start Total Uninstall via **Start** > **Programs** (**All Programs** in Windows XP) > **Total Uninstall** > **Total Uninstall**.

2. Select **Uninstall or view changes of a monitored application**.

3. Select the program that you want to uninstall from the list, then click **Next**.

4. Click **Next** to uninstall the program.

5. Click **Yes**, then click **Exit**.

Uninstalling software with Total Uninstall

Total Uninstall displays a list of all of the changes made by an application.

Click **Next** to uninstall.

Easy Uninstaller

Easy Uninstaller displays a list of all of the software installed on your computer, and gives details of the software's publisher and home page where available. It allows you to uninstall multiple programs at once, which is useful if you have installed a lot of shareware for testing purposes and decided that you want to remove it all.

Remove multiple applications with Easy Uninstaller.

Easy Uninstall also allows you to remove phantom registry settings from the installed program list, that is remove programs from the uninstalled program list that are actually no longer installed on your PC. If you have entries in Add/Remove Programs that are not actually installed on your PC anymore you can remove them as follows:

You can also remove phantom registry entries.

1. Start Total Uninstaller via **Start** > **Programs (All Programs** in Windows XP) > **Easy Uninstaller** > **Easy Uninstaller.**

2. Tick the name of the program(s) that are still listed in Add/Remove Programs even though they have been removed.

3. Click **Delete Entry From List**, then click **OK** > **Yes** > **OK**.

4. The entry will now be removed from the Add/Remove Programs list. Click **Exit** to close the program.

Easy Uninstaller is available on the CD that accompanies this update.

UninstallAbility

Installed software settings are stored in the registry.

Windows stores all of the information about the installed applications in the registry. If these registry settings become corrupt, then you will either see an error message when you try to uninstall, or the program won't even be listed in the uninstall program list, even though it is still installed.

Backup your installed programs' registry settings.

UninstallAbility makes regular backups of the part of the registry that stores information about the installed software. If you are having problems removing a program, you can try restoring a backup of your registry to repair any corrupt settings. A link to this software is available on the CD that accompanies this update. To backup your registry, follow these steps:

1. Start UninstallAbility via **Start > Programs (All Programs** in Windows XP) **> UninstallAbility > UninstallAbility.**

2. Click **Next**, then select **I would like to create a backup of my uninstall list.**

3. Click **Next**, then click **Backup.**

4. After the backup has been created, click **Finish** then click **Exit.**

A link to UninstallAbility is available on the CD that accompanies this update.

If you have trouble uninstalling programs from your system, you can restore the uninstall registry settings from a backup by following these steps:

1. Start UninstallAbility via **Start > Programs (All Programs** in Windows XP) **> UninstallAbility > UninstallAbility.**

2. Click **Next.**

If the entire list of programs has disappeared in Add/Remove Programs, then follow these steps:

1. Select **My uninstall list is gone!** and click **Next.**

2. Select the backup that you want to restore and click **Next.**

3. Click **Restore > Yes > OK.**

4. The backup should now be restored.
    Click **Finish** > **Exit**.

If you are only having problems uninstalling one of your programs, restore that programs registry entries from the backup by following these steps.

1. Select **Some programs disappeared from my uninstall list!** and click Next.

2. Place a tick next to the program that you are having problems with and click **Next**.

3. Click **Restore** > **Yes** > **OK**.

4. The backup should now be restored.
    Click **Finish** > **Exit**.

With the registry settings restored you should now be able to uninstall the program using Add/Remove Programs as described in section S 30/3.

Ashampoo UnInstaller Platinum Suite

If a program's uninstall routine has become corrupt or been deleted, you will not be able to remove it from Add/Remove Programs, and will see an error message every time you try. The only way to get it off your system is to delete the files it uses and remove its entries from the registry. Note: this should be seen as a last resort due to the fact that you may delete registry settings/files that are required.

A corrupt uninstall routine will prevent you from removing a program.

Ashampoo UnInstaller Platinum Suite provides an interactive assistant to simplify the task of manually removing software, and minimises the damage that can be done when editing the registry. To manually remove a program using Ashampoo UnInstaller Platinum Suite follow these steps:

Ashampoo UnInstaller helps you to manually uninstall software.

1. Start Ashampoo UnInstaller Platinum Suite via **Start** > **Programs** (**All Programs** in Windows XP) > **Ashampoo** > **Ashampoo UnInstaller Platinum Suite** > **Ashampoo UnInstaller Platinum Suite**.
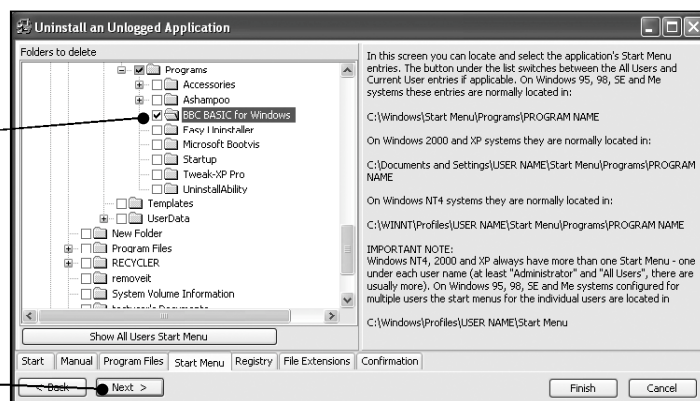
Ashampoo UnInstaller Platinum Suite is on the CD that accompanies this update.

2. Click **OK** to use the shareware version of the program.

3. Select **File > Change Mode > Switch to Expert Mode**.

4. Double-click **Remove an Unlogged Application**.

5. Click the **Manual** tab, then click **Next**.

6. The contents of the Program Files directory is displayed. Locate the program that you wish to remove and place a tick next to it. Click **Next**.

7. The Start menu entries are displayed. Locate the program that you want to remove and place a tick next to it. Click **Next**.

8. The list of program registry settings is displayed. Locate the ones that relate to the program that you are removing and place a tick next to them. Click **Next**.

9. A list of file extensions is displayed. If the program you are uninstalling uses it's own extensions for the files associated with it select them from the list (note: if you are unsure it is best to skip this step). Click **Next**.

10. A confirmation screen is shown listing the changes that will be made. Click **Delete Selected Items**, then close the wizard.

Select the settings for the program that you want to remove.

Click **Next** to work through the wizard.

Manually uninstalling with Ashampoo UnInstaller Platinum Suite

The majority of the settings associated with the program you have uninstalled are now removed. If the program was started automatically at startup then you will need to disable the startup setting too, or Windows will display an error message every time you start the system. Windows 98/Me/XP users can do this with the System Configuration Utility (this is not available in Windows 2000). To do this follow these steps:

1. Click **Start** > **Run**, type **msconfig** and click **OK**.

2. Click **Startup.** Locate the program that you have uninstalled from the list, and untick it.

3. Click **OK**. Windows will now not try to run the uninstalled program at startup.

You may also need to remove the programs entry from the Add/Remove Programs list using Easy Uninstaller as described on page S 30/7.

Using the Windows Installer Cleanup Utility

Microsoft provide the Windows Installer Cleanup Utility to help troubleshoot uninstall problems with programs installed using the Windows Installer (for example, Microsoft Office). You will find a link to the Windows Installer Cleanup Utility on the CD accompanying this update. The utility will not allow you to fix problems with applications that were not installed with Windows Installer.

The cleanup utility will allow you to remove the Windows Installer database settings for an application that is misbehaving (it will not remove any of the files associated with the program). Problems can occur with the database settings because of any of the following:

- Your computer's registry has become corrupt.
- There are multiple copies of the setup program running at the same time.

You may need to manually remove the program's startup settings.

Windows Installer Cleanup Utility will remove settings created by Windows Installer.

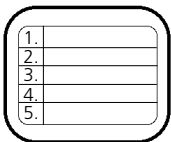*There are a number of ways the installation settings can become corrupt.*

- You have accidentally changed a setting in the registry that is used by Windows Installer.

- The installation of a program using Windows Installer is interrupted before it is complete.

With the installation information removed you can re-install the program to fix the problem. To use the Windows Installer Cleanup Utility to remove a troublesome program's installation settings, follow these steps:

Once the installation settings have been removed, re-install the original application.

1. Start Windows Installer Cleanup Utility from **Start** > **Programs** (**All Programs** in Windows XP) > **Windows Install Clean Up**.

2. Select the program you are having problems with and click **Remove**.

3. A warning dialogue will be displayed. Click **OK**.

4. Once the program's settings have been removed, click **Exit** to close the Cleanup Utility.

Now that the program's settings have been remove from the Windows Installer database, re-install the problem application from its original CD or setup program to replace all of the missing settings.

Uninstalling software from your system is a necessary procedure to keep your system in good working order, and remove the 'bloat' caused by having lots of unused applications lying around. Normally, you can do this using the Add/Remove Programs control panel, but occasionally this will not work due to corrupt registry settings or broken uninstall programs. If this is the case, it doesn't mean that the program has to stay on your system forever – this article has shown you the software tools and techniques needed to remove even the most stubborn applications.