Game points

How to fix your gaming gear

BY BRENDAN HILLIARD

For gamers, it's all about playing. But sometimes things don't go as planned. Justin Eaton, the writer and administrator for two successful gaming websites, PSP-Vault.com and PSPFanboy.com, offers some tips for getting your gear working before plunking down the cash to replace those expensive goodies.

→ Check the warranty. Manufacturers typically offer warranties against product defects. "Most companies offer at least a year of basic parts or labor if something were to go wrong with the console," he says. "They'll usually give you a refurbished system, unless you've had many issues with them – then you can request a new console."

→ Buy a disc cleaner. Wiping discs with a lint-free cloth helps when the console isn't reading the game. Radial disc cleaners can be too abrasive.

→ Triple check batteries and cables. "For a handheld, you can sometimes buy a replacement battery or charger," Eaton says. For consoles, "Try using different video or power cables to be sure."

→ Avoid dust and damage. Protect your console from extreme temperatures and properly store it and your games. "If the console gets dusty, the fan can't push the hot air out," Eaton says. "Also, make sure your games are in their proper cases to reduce scratching."

MATTHEW SCHWERIN

RX for your PC

JAZMIN GIRÓN

What to try before you call the pros

BY AUSTIN JOHNSON

If your PC is sluggish or acting funny, try these tips before you call the Geek Squad.

→ Defragment your hard drive. Over time, files accumulate on your hard drive, especially if you are a regular Internet user. These include software updates, downloads, games and backup files. "Defragging" puts related files together, making it quicker and easier for your computer to access them. To defrag, close all programs and click "disk defragmenter"(located under "accessories" and "system tools" in the start menu.

→ Power cycle your modem. Your modem's cache also gets cluttered with useless files. Power cycling the modem cleans out the cache, allowing information to go from the modem to your computer more quickly. To do this, reboot the modem by unplugging the power cord, waiting about 15 seconds, and plugging it back in.

→ Get some spyware/virus protection. Spyware and viruses are the scourges of the Internet. Free virus protection/spyware-eliminating software, such as Lavasoft's Ad-aware and Spybot Search & Destroy, will scan your hard drive for malicious bugs and spyware and dispose of them.

→ Dust off the inside. A clean PC is a happy PC. If your have trouble restarting, or hear a strange whirring sound coming from the case, you may have a dust problem. If the PC becomes too dusty, it can overheat and shut down. Unscrew and remove your PC's side panel and blast the insides with a can of compressed air. Make sure there's no dust near the fan. Then close up your PC, and boot it up.

→ Decide whether to upgrade. Many newer programs require some pretty serious hardware to run efficiently. If some programs are running slower than others, check the system requirements (listed on the box) and compare them to what you have. If you have less than the minimum requirement for the specified software, then it's time to upgrade.