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COMPUTER NOISE OFTEN IS AN OVERLOOKED PROBLEM

Stop, hey, what's that sound?

If it's a dull roar or a high-pitched wail, it could be coming from your personal **computer**. Lend an ear in a quiet room and you may be surprised to realize just how loud your PC can be. Despite the volume, many **computer** users have simply become accustomed to the sound.

If that's all there was to it, there would be no problem. Why worry about **noise** that you don't even notice?

But chronic **noise** can go beyond mere annoyance to a health hazard. Study after scientific study has shown that routine exposure to **noise** can ruin concentration, cut productivity, raise blood pressure and more.

Mike Chin, a free-lance technical writer in Vancouver, British Columbia, realized the extent of the problem a couple of years ago when he acquired a new PC for his home network.

``It made so much **noise** that I knew after one week that I couldn't live with it," Chin said. ``It just made so much **noise** it was driving me crazy."

The experience sent Chin on a quest to learn what was making the **computer** so noisy and what could be done about.

He got good at it. Today, he's editor and publisher of SilentPCReview.com, a website dedicated to ``reviews, tips, techniques and methods for reducing or eliminating **noise** from **computers**."

Chin says much of the **noise** can be traced to internal PC fans that are used to keep components cool. Personal **computers** can have as many as four such fans venting the **computer** case and blowing air on the microprocessor, the motherboard and video card.

Those fans usually whir away at thousands of revolutions per minute, generating **noise** from their motors and from the sheer volume of air being whooshed around. What's more, the fans are typically attached directly to the **computer**'s metal chassis, which can resonate from the vibrations.

Nor are fans the only problem. **Computer** hard drives hold revolving platters that spin thousands of times a minute, sometimes emitting a high-pitched wail. The ``heads" that read data from the hard drive make a clacking **noise** as they travel across the surface of the disc. Still more **noise** is generated by motors that

power floppy-disc drives, CD-ROM drives and the like.

Together, the motors, fans and drives of a particularly noisy **computer** can reach dozens of decibels.

Making **computers** quieter is no easy task for the average consumer, but it can be done, Chin says. Detailed advice on various approaches -- like installing rubber gaskets between the fans and chassis, and cutting back on power to lessen the heat inside the PC -- is available on SilentPCReview.com (www.silentpcreview.com).

``What you want is a safe operating temperature for the things that get hot," Chin said. ``The difference between safe and very cool is **noise**."

A far better solution, Chin admits, would be for **computer** makers to focus on the **noise** problem during the design and manufacturing stages.

He advocates reporting **noise** ratings with such other statistics as processor speed, RAM and hard-drive space so consumers can compare models.

Mainstream PC makers have been largely silent on the **noise** issue, but many small, independent companies are touting the quiet nature of their products to a growing audience of interested customers.

``I still can't believe that the **computer** makers are still more or less ignoring the problem," Chin said. ``But companies that make specifically quiet **computers** are popping up all over the place."

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