It’s a new year – 2015! A new year is a good time for new beginnings, new resolutions, new ways to do things and it’s an excellent time to clean up your computer! No, don’t turn it on yet – let’s clean the outside first. It’s a good idea to dust your computer regularly, but very few of us do. To get it nice and clean, start by pulling out from under your desk; disconnecting the cables. (Make sure you know where they go – if you’re unsure, take a picture of the back with your phone, making sure it’s clear enough to help.) It may be tempting, but DON’T get the vacuum cleaner out and go after the computer with it. Vacuum cleaners generate gigantic static charges near their nozzles, and can potentially fry delicate computer equipment. Instead, use a duster/dustcloth to wipe away dust and a shot of compressed air to clear out vents and fans. Now go ahead and hook it back up, untangling any of the cables that have become muddled during the last year or so. This is an excellent time to move USB devices that you rarely unplug (like keyboards and mice) to the ports that are harder to reach, freeing up the others for things like thumb drives. You should also check around the computer case to make sure that airflow isn’t impeded anywhere so the machine can cool itself.

After you get the machine all put back together, go ahead and turn it on. Does the OS splash screen say Windows XP? Time to replace that! Go ahead and call your support specialist and schedule a time to upgrade. You’ll be glad you did.

All right, now that your machine is on, let’s do a little cleanup here. Where do you save your documents? Do you use the default locations (My Documents/Documents for Windows Devices, Documents on MacOS) or something else? It’s probably best to use the defaults; there’s not usually a good reason to have documents stashed away in other places, and it could result in losing them if your computer needs work and the person fixing it doesn’t know about them. Now is a good time to look through your files and decide if you need them still or not. If you have documents you’ve saved but no longer need, you can burn them to a DVD, copy them to a thumb drive or external drive, and then delete them.

You could also take on the task of re-organizing your documents, which can make your life a lot easier. Have you ever spent a lot of time looking for a document that you know you have, but couldn’t find? A little time spent organizing can avoid that. Try grouping your files by topics, by dates or by some other simple system so that you have an idea of where to start looking when you need something. I like to do folders by years; so in my “Training” folder, I have my current year’s documents, and I have subfolders for each past year. When I need to find the training I did for the 2011 SW District secretaries, it’s simple to pull it up. Less time spent hunting for things = more efficient workflow. Being more efficient makes work more fun, and that’s a good thing to look forward to in any year.