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When your computer hardware appears to power up, but the Windows XP operating system won't boot properly, you have to begin with a trouble shooting expedition that includes getting into the operating system, determining the problem, and then fixing it. To help you get started on this expedition, here are some tips that help you deal with the problem when Windows XP won't boot.

TIP 1: Use a Windows startup disk

One of the first things you should reach for when trouble shooting a Windows XP boot problem is a Windows startup disk. This floppy disk can come in handy if the problem is being caused when either the startup record for the active partition or the files that the operating system uses to start Windows have become corrupted. To create a Windows startup disk, insert a floppy disk into the drive of a similarly configured, working Windows XP system, launch MyComputer, right-click the floppy disk icon, and select the Format command from the context menu. When you see the Format dialog box, leave all the default settings as they are and click the Start button. Once the format operation is complete, close the Format dialog box to return to My Computer, double-click the drive C icon to access the root directory, and copy the following three files to the floppy disk: After you create the Windows startup disk, insert it into the floppy drive on the afflicted system and press [Ctrl][Alt][Delete] to reboot the computer. When you boot from the Windows startup disk, the computer will bypass the active partition and boot files on the hard disk and attempt to start Windows XP normally.

TIP 2 : Use System Restore

Another tool that might be helpful when Windows XP won't boot is System Restore. System Restore runs in the background as a service and continually monitors system-critical components for changes. When it detects an impending change, System Restore immediately makes backup copies, called restore points, of these critical components before the change occurs. In addition, System Restore is configured by default to create restore points every 24 hours. To use System Restore, first restart the computer by pressing [Ctrl][Alt][Delete]. When you see the message Please select the operating system to start or hear the single beep, press [F8] to display the Windows Advanced Options menu. Now, select the Safe Mode item from the menu and press [Enter]. Once Windows XP boots into Safe mode, click the Start button, access the All Programs | Accessories | System Tools menu, and select System Restore. Because you're running in Safe mode, the only option on the opening screen of the System Restore wizard is Restore My Computer To An Earlier Time, and it's selected by default, so just click Next. Then, follow along with the wizard to select a restore point and begin the restoration procedure.

TIP 3: Use Recovery Console

When a Windows XP boot problem is severe, you'll need to use a more drastic approach. The Windows XP CD is bootable and will provide you with access to a tool called Recovery Console. To boot from the Windows XP CD, insert it into the CD-ROM drive on the problem system and press [Ctrl][Alt][Delete] to reboot the computer. Once the system begins booting from the CD, simply follow the prompts that will allow the loading of the basic files needed to run Setup.

TIP 4 : Fix a Corrupt Boot

As the Windows XP operating system begins to load, the Ntldr program refers to the Boot.ini file to

determine where the operating system files reside and which options to enable as the operating system continues to load. So if there's a problem rooted in the Boot.ini file, it can render Windows XP incapable of booting correctly. If you suspect that Windows XP won't boot because Boot.ini has been corrupted, you can use the special Recovery Console version of the Bootcfg tool to fix it. Of course, you must first boot the system with the Windows XP CD and access the Recovery Console as described in tip 3.

TIP 5 : Fix a corrupt partition boot sector

The partition boot sector is a small section of the hard disk partition that contains information about the operating system's filesystem, as well as a very small machine language program that is crucial in assisting the operating system as it loads. If you suspect that Windows XP won't boot because the partition boot sector has been corrupted, you can use a special Recovery Console tool called Fixboot to fix it. Start by booting the system with the Windows XP CD and accessing the Recovery Console as described in Tip 3.

TIP 6 : Fix a Corrupt Master Boot Record

The master boot record occupies the first sector on the hard disk and is responsible for initiating the Windows boot procedure. The master boot record contains the partition table for the disk as well as a small program called the master boot code, which is responsible for locating the active, or bootable, partition, in the partition table. Once this occurs, the partition boot sector takes over and begins loading Windows. If the master boot record is corrupt, the partition boot sector can't do its job and Windows won't boot. If you suspect Windows XP won't boot because the master boot record has been corrupted, you can use the Recovery Console tool Fixmbr to fix it. First, boot the system with the Windows XP CD and access the Recovery Console as described in tip 3.

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