

Soluto Anti-Frustration Software Improves Boot Time by Ira Wilsker

WEBSITES:

<http://www.soluto.com>

<http://blog.soluto.com>

<http://www.soluto.com/About/Media-Kit>

In several past columns I have written about utilities that can speed up the computer boot process. As cluttered as it was, my old XP machine could take up to five minutes to boot; my newer Windows 7-64 machine boots in under two minutes, considering the multilayered security that is installed on it. Traditionally, the ways of speeding the boot process on a PC was to defrag the hard drive, and clean up the programs in the startup that load when the computer is first turned on. When someone tells me that his computer takes forever to boot, my typical responses are "is your hard drive defragged" (defragmented), and "how many little icons do you have on your task bar adjacent to your clock?". There are several excellent startup managers available (including Windows 'msconfig' feature), both independent utilities and components of utility suites, that can easily control what programs load at boot. Simply unchecking unwanted and unnecessary programs at boot is an accepted way of improving boot time. Likewise, there are several excellent defragmentation utilities available, including the simple one built into Windows, that can do a credible job; by defragging the hard drive, it does not have to work as hard when reading files and data, thus providing some improvement in load times.

While these two methods are well accepted and proven to speed up the boot process, a new concept in utilities was recently released that goes an extra step in controlling the boot process using a software "genome" and community experiences to determine what is loading in the computer at boot, how long each item takes to load, displays what is required or optional to load at boot, and gives the user control of what loads and when it loads during the boot process. Wanted, but low priority items, can be set to load after the computer has fully booted, and is sitting idle, thus not degrading the boot process. Unwanted items can be stopped from automatically loading, but set to load upon demand. The process may sound complex, but it is very simple with the information provided by this new utility, "Soluto Anti-Frustration Software (beta)".

Available as a free download from www.soluto.com, this software is a "beta" or pre-release version, which by definition, is not a highly refined final "release" version. My 18 month old "new" computer booted very quickly when new, but now that I have a lot of security software and other utilities loading at boot, it was taking between a minute and a half, and two minutes to boot. After I downloaded and installed Soluto, and rebooted the computer such that Soluto could measure and analyze my boot process, my first modification of my boot process improved my boot time by almost 25%! Subsequent refinements of my boot process with Soluto, and input from the "community" have helped me to shave off about another 10% of my boot time.

After being installed, Soluto monitors what loads at each boot. During the boot process, the bottom left corner of the desktop turns up like the corner of a page and displays each item as it is loading, while displaying the elapsed time to boot the computer. Information is gathered during the boot process, and added to what has been gathered at previous boots, to provide the data that is analyzed by the program. The data that is collected is anonymously added to the Soluto PC Genome, where the community can input recommendations that will assist the user in determining what can be controlled at boot. According to Soluto, " This anonymous technical data is gathered and sent to Soluto's PC Genome, a one of a kind knowledge base containing statistical insights about PC software and hardware behavior, as well as remedies to alleviate PC usage frustrations. By putting this information into the light, the PC Genome will help consumers and vendors alike. Soluto employs another set of innovative algorithms to determine which remedies will have a positive impact on each Soluto user's unique PC system. These remedies are then shared with other relevant Soluto users." Soluto has found that by pausing when specific items load in the boot process, and reconfiguring some of the applications, boot time and overall behavior of the computer can improve dramatically. Soluto can also determine those programs that degrade computer performance, and provide the "frustrated" user with possible solutions to reduce or eliminate the source of frustration.

Soluto places a small icon on the task bar that looks somewhat like a smiley-face, and opens displaying the Soluto functions. By opening Soluto anytime after the computer has booted, the first screen called the "Boot Page" displays "Potentially Removable" items in an orange font, along with the boot time and sequence for each. By moving the cursor over any of the "Potentially Removable" items, a brief description of the software is displayed (if it is in the Genome). By moving over the "more" on the display, a recommendation may be shown, as well as a pie chart of what other users of that software have done. The user is given the option to "Pause" or "Delay" the item in subsequent boots. "Pause" prevents the item from being loaded at boot, but the program can still be loaded upon demand; "Delay" postpones the selected program from automatically loading until the computer is otherwise idle, which means that it will not slow the initial boot process. Since Soluto (beta) has just been released, the genome is still in its infancy, and does not yet contain a comprehensive database of software. The user can easily click on the pencil icon "edit" and open a Wiki which enables the user to "fill in the blanks" about an item, which will then be verified, and added to the Genome. As more users complete the Wiki, the Genome database will become more complete. As the Genome improves through this community input, all of the users can benefit by the dissemination of the information.

The grey section of the main screen "Boot Page" in Soluto displays the "Required - cannot be removed" items that load at boot, in their boot sequence and with their boot time displayed. While most of the items shown are valid Windows components, with an explanation of what each does along with its boot time, some of the items are non-Microsoft files, and lack detailed descriptions. When I first used Soluto, the components of my MagicJack VoIP service (internet based telephone service) were listed as "Required", and could not be paused or delayed; I opened the Wiki and explained what they were, and then commented that I thought that these particular components should be moved to the "Potentially removable" section where their boot process could be better managed. As the Genome grows and improves, items like this will be better sorted into the appropriate category.

The blue section on the "Boot Page" shows the items that were "Paused" or "Delayed" at boot, and how much time was saved by not loading those items. Clicking on any blue item gives the user the choice of changing the status to boot, "Pause" or "Delay", which will be implemented the next time the computer is booted.

An interesting choice on the Soluto icon is "My PC just frustrated me", which opens the Soluto window, and analyzes the running processes, and tries to determine which program is causing the slowdown. Any information found during the "frustration" analysis is anonymously added to the Genome where it will be comingled with other data and potential solutions may be determined. If a solution to the "frustration" exists, it looks like it will be displayed to the user. When I clicked on the "Frustration" menu item, Soluto identified the beta version of a new security product that I am testing as the potential source of "frustration" but could not yet show any remedy to my "frustration".

While Soluto is still in the "beta" stage of development, I found it a very useful and worthwhile utility to improve PC performance, particularly in the boot process, and for resolving potential "frustrations". Users should give Soluto Anti-Frustration Software a try. In my limited experience with it, I would give it my recommendation, as well as a rating of "two thumbs up".