

A LOOK INSIDE YOUR COMPUTER

There are some surprising reasons why you SHOULD know what's under the hood of your computer, even if you're not a techie. And also, some software tools that will let you “x-ray” your PC, so you can see what's inside without touching a screwdriver.

What's Going On Inside Your PC?

If you need to call tech support, you may be stuck when a rep asks for the make and model of your video card, or the type of RAM that's installed. If you want to buy a memory upgrade, you'll need to know what sort of RAM memory is already in your PC to get the compatible kind.

If you ask for help with an unknown problem in any online forum, the first responses you get will probably be along the lines of, “What's under your hood?” If you are selling or buying a used computer, it's important to have a list of what's inside of it.

Microsoft Windows includes a “System Information” utility that displays information about many devices and processes on a PC. But it's limited; often, it won't tell you what you need to know, and the report it generates is not very friendly. Fortunately, there are more helpful system information utilities out there. Here are some examples that are free and powerful, yet easy on novices.

[Speccy](#) (hyperlink) from Pirisoft gives you detailed info on every piece of hardware in your PC, including but not limited to CPU, Motherboard, RAM, Graphics Cards, Hard Disks, Optical Drives, and Audio support. Speccy also reads temperature sensors built into motherboards and hard drives, giving you a means to check for overheating problems that may be damaging your components or limiting performance.

Speccy can save and reload snapshots of your system info in XML, text, or INI files for printing and other uses. The free version of Speccy should work for you.

[Belarc Advisor](#) (hyperlink) does a lot more than just inventory hardware, although it does a fine job of that. It also inventories all of the software on your PC, and can tell you if security patches are up to date. It even shows software license codes, which is handy if tech support asks for them. Here's another good reason to have those license codes handy... If you've bought a new computer (or you're

recovering from a hard drive crash) you can easily re-install all the software you've purchased, without having to buy another copy, or beg the software vendor to send you the license info.

The Advisor displays the status of your network, including users and devices connected to it. If you've ever wondered if anyone is secretly tapping into your wifi, this will give you peace of mind (or cold chills). Belarc Advisor is very simple to use, and is privacy sensitive. It does not transmit any info about your system over the Internet; the report generated is a local HTML file displayed in your Web browser.

[HWiNFO](#) (hyperlink) is another freebie that offers comprehensive hardware analysis, monitoring, failure prediction and reporting for PCs running Windows 95 through Windows 10.

[HW Monitor](#) (hyperlink) from CPUID focuses on voltages, temperatures and fan speed monitoring. There's a free CLASSIC version, and a PRO version (\$24) that provides monitoring of sensors for remote PCs or Android devices.

And finally, there's **[SIW \(System Information Monitor\)](#) (hyperlink)** which promises to tell you "Everything you ever wanted to know about your computer but were afraid to ask." That includes details on your operating system, software licenses, installed programs, running processes and drivers, autoruns and scheduled tasks, passwords, databases, and security certificates. SIW costs \$20 but there is a [free 14-day trial](#).

You may not need to know what's going on inside of your PC very often. But when you do, it's good to have one of these system information utilities handy. You can run reports from both Speccy and Belarc Advisor and then save them on a backup drive or email them to yourself for future handy reference. A printed copy might be a good idea too.