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Windows Drivers – Some Experience Required

Bob Woods, Webmaster, Under the Computer Hood User Group

www.uchug.org

webmasters \*\* uchug.org

Having retired after 20 years from the US Navy Submarine Service, I spent the next 22 years with Northrup Grumman in the IT department. I spent the first few years as a Windows desktop support technician and later as a server analyst keeping 120 Windows servers built, patched, and online. So, I am used to operating system issues and how to resolve most of the common problems.

I was recently reminded that what may be business as usual for me may not be easy for others. I recently replaced an Acer laptop with a newer unit. The Acer specs included a nice 14" touch screen, Intel i7 CPU, 12 GB of ram, a 250 GB solid-state drive, Wi-Fi, and Bluetooth. Wi-Fi was 802.11g, so it was only capable of the 2.4 GHz band, but I used a USB dongle to get the 5 GHz band for better wireless throughput. The OS was Windows 10, but it did not have the TPM 2.0 required for Windows 11. I decided to donate it to UCHUG for the 2022 Christmas Raffle.

To get it ready, I blew out the OS and installed a fresh copy of Windows 10 but did not configure it. It was at the point where you input a new user account and start the configuration. When you purchase a new PC or laptop, the manufacturer has already installed the correct drivers for the hardware. This ensures the purchaser has no issues straight out of the box. Over time you may even update the operating system to a new version. Since the drivers were already installed in the previous operating system, there should be a smooth transition to the new OS, with updates automatically applied to the drivers as needed. Easy peasy lemon squeezy.

However, what if you must completely blow out the OS and do a fresh installation? Chances are you will get the lemon squeezy without the easy part. This is because Microsoft cannot keep pace with the many manufacturers' hardware changes and drivers. Microsoft instead depends on the PC manufacturers to keep drivers for system hardware available online for download. Even going into the Windows device manager and clicking the automatic driver update option doesn't always get positive results. It sometimes requires going to support at Dell for Dell, Acer for Acer, HP for HP, etc., to get the drivers.

This was the case with the Acer. The new owners finished the installation, and Windows authenticated with Microsoft. But, there was an issue with Bluetooth not working. The Bluetooth chipset driver was either not installed or incorrect. The owners tried to resolve the issue but were unsuccessful. I received an email outlining the issue. I had not checked the Acer specs other than to note that the chipset was Broadcom. I sent an email response with a link to the Acer support site to download the driver. A few days later, I received word that they tried to download the driver, but nothing seemed to happen, and Bluetooth still didn't work.

I then started to check hardware specs and the format of the drivers on the Acer support site. Acer had used Intel and Broadcom chipsets for Wi-Fi and Bluetooth for the Acer V5 series laptops. I knew from the model specs that a Broadcom driver was required. I also found that the drivers were executable (.exe files) but stored in zip format. Unless extracted, the .exe file would not run properly. I sent another email about the correct driver to download and how to extract and run it. Not knowing the experience level of the owners, I also noted that the application Driver Easy (<https://www.drivereasy.com/> ) might be an easier way to go. Microsoft recognizes Driver Easy as a safe and reliable way to update drivers. A free version will scan your drivers, list those out of date, missing, or not working, and download the correct drivers. With the free version of Driver Easy, a manual installation of the downloaded drivers is required. The site has a good set of instructions on manually installing the downloaded drivers (<https://www.drivereasy.com/manual-update/> ). To get a completely automated update and installation experience requires purchasing the pro version for $29.95.

I forwarded that info to the owners to decide how they wanted to proceed. As of writing this article, I have not heard back if they were successful at getting the Bluetooth issue resolved. If they still have issues, I will give them some help.