**Fourth Edition**

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# COMPUTER GUIDE

All the help you need to answer your most common computer questions

Help

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**Disclaimer**

# Introduction

This book is based on material published in the weekly "*Q & A*" column in the computer section of *The Age, Sydney Morning Herald* and *The West Australian*. Also included are comprehensive articles written for the Melbourne PC User Group's award-winning magazine, *PC Update*, which can be visited online at: www.melbpc.org.au/pcupdate/

This book is aimed at everyone interested in personal computing, from beginners to reasonably advanced users, covering such broad fields as:

- Hints, tips and problem-solving
- Understanding e-mail
- Clear and simple explanations on optimising computer performance
- A tutorial section giving tips on:
    o digital imaging and scanning
    o detailed steps for putting your LP collection on CDs
    o how to improve your productivity with Word and Excel
- Guide to upgrading your computer and some zero-cost improvements you can make
- Backups and security

Some unsolicited reader's comments:
- *The piece by George Skarbek was the clearest exposition of a complex question that I have ever read.*
- *I have regarded your column, for ages now, as the most useful and remarkably excellent example of the genre in any newspaper I've ever seen.*
- *It's easy to understand why your reputation is wide spread.*
- *An essential, must have book*!

This helpful book includes some answers which are really hard to track down anywhere else. Provides answers to many annoying problems which arise unexpectedly, and enables readers to fix these themselves.

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# WINDOWS

## What is Windows?

*I have been using a computer for many years and have been asked by my husband, an intelligent but not computer literate person, "What is Windows"? and I have not been able to give a good answer. Can you help?*

Windows is a graphics based operating environment from Microsoft. Windows 3.0 was integrated with DOS (Disk Operating System) while Windows 95 and later incorporates DOS. The operating system is the fundamental software that makes it possible for you to use peripheral devices such as a hard disk, keyboard or monitor. It is also responsible for controlling the computer, keeping track of files, and for loading and running programs such as word processors or games.

One of the main advantages of Windows over DOS is that it provides a graphical user interface (called a GUI) which allows manipulation of objects using a mouse and clicking on images rather than having to know precise DOS commands and type them. Learning is much easier. Another big advantage is that Windows allows several tasks to be run simultaneously. For example, while downloading files from the Internet you can be working on a spreadsheet and printing a document and at the same time the anti-virus, anti-spyware and firewall can be active and monitoring any unwanted activity.

## Should I upgrade to Windows 7?

> *I have a good computer running XP with 2 GB of RAM and plenty of disk space and it should be capable of running Windows 7. Should I upgrade?*

In my opinion, you should not even consider this option unless you have some special reason. For most users the operating system is not important. What is far more important to most users are the applications they use. The more common applications are word-processing, mail, financial records, anti-virus and similar software, photo and/or video editing, possibly games etc., as well as being able to access all your existing hardware. When you upgrade your operating system these applications do not change but in some cases they may not run with Windows 7. Generally they will not run faster and in some cases they may run slower but the differences will not be noticeable. Also there will be some new learning required.

One of the advantages of Windows 7 is that it is more secure and boots a few seconds faster than XP. It has many useful shortcut keys that can improve productivity for keyboard users. It has a very good and fast search capability that allows you to find not only files but words inside documents very quickly. Like Vista it has an improved visual display called Aero which you can use if your video card is of an adequate standard. Security, diagnostics and searching have been improved, and most of the bundled applications such as *WordPad, Paint, Recorder, Calculator* and others have also been improved. The *Media Centre* and the *Windows Media Player* in particular has been noticeably improved to handle many new formats. Networking and network diagnostics have been improved.

There is no mail client in Windows 7 so you will have to download a mail reader and import your existing mail and address book. There is a free download of *Windows Mail* which has a number of improvements over *Outlook Express* that it has replaced.

Although there is a free program to test if your computer is ready for Windows 7 that you can download from the Microsoft site, I have a report of one computer that was passed as completely ready but had some problem areas after Windows 7 was installed.

There is no upgrade path from XP to Windows 7, only from Vista, so XP users will have to perform a clean install and then re-install all software and then their data.

**So, before any upgrade, consider just what you will gain and what you may lose, beside time and money.**

If your version of Windows XP is reasonably stable then staying with it saves spending money. Also there are many free programs that can provide good searching of your files such as *Google Desktop*. Few users use programs such as *WordPad, Paint, Recorder, Calculator* as there are much better free alternatives. The money spent on an upgrade may be better spent on a faster CPU or more RAM, which will noticeably improve the performance of your existing system or could be put towards the next computer. Also in a variety of benchmark tests on relatively new and older hardware showed that Windows XP was often faster than Windows 7.

If you find that an important program for your needs, for example, a genealogy program will not run on Windows 7 then there is work-around. A solution to this is to download the free Microsoft program, Virtual PC, and install whatever Microsoft operating system your program needs and then run your program there. Virtual PC is not that hard to use for anyone who has a bit of computer knowledge. There is a full version of XP with SP-3 that can be installed on Windows 7 Professional or Ultimate. No reboot is required to run XP as the Virtual PC is started just as another application such as Word.

Another drawback is that some older hardware such as scanners may not work and purchasing new items will add to the cost of the upgrade.

However, when you are purchasing a new computer, I recommend that you purchase one that has Windows 7 installed as there is no point in purchasing a superseded operating system

## Upgrade from Windows XP to Windows 8?

> *Our trusty desktop computer runs on Windows XP Pro. I noticed recently a supplier offering Windows 8 upgrade for $48. Do you think that this is a sensible purchase?*

Generally I do not advise users to upgrade the operating system as there is very little to be gained and a bit to lose apart from the time and cost in performing the upgrade. For most users the operating system is not important but your applications are what is important. Upgrading the operating system will not make your applications faster. You will not receive mail faster, Word will not run any better etc. Also some hardware such as older printers, scanners may not work and additional costs will be involved. Some very old programs, including some games that you may have had for a couple of decades may not work.  But upgrading to Windows 8 will involve a lot of learning as well as possibly having to purchase some new hardware. As the learning may be hard, for example, there is not start button and some users have not found how to shut it down for days, you may consider the free program, *Classic Shell*, from www.classicshell.net

However, at some point there will come a time when some applications that you need will not run on an old operating system and an upgrade will be required. Windows XP has now been superseded by four generations and some security vulnerabilities in XP may not be fully addressed.  Windows 8 is considerably more secure, boots faster and will run on old computers that run XP.

Currently the upgrade from XP to Windows 8 operating system is not expensive and may be worth considering, but the upgrade will not keep any of your programs, only your data so you will have to re-install all your software, set up your e-mail account(s), reconfigure and apply any patches to the software that you install, download and install upgrades etc. Also I would do a full backup just in case before starting.

In my opinion Windows 8 is more suited for the tablets with touch screens than it is for a desktop computer. Also the number of apps available for Windows 8 is tiny compared to the number available for the Apple or for the Android operating system, but the number of apps available should increase rapidly.

If your current computer is getting old and you are planning to purchase a new computer in the next 12 months then it may be better to wait and to purchase Windows 8 with the new computer.

> ➤ **Tip**: *In Windows XP, to logon to as a user who is not shown on your logon screen at the point where your name and picture appear press Ctrl + Delete key twice to bring up a screen where you can select the name such as Administrator.*

## Removing the annoying Startup password

*Having been elevated to guru status by replacing the faulty CPU in a friend's computer, I was brought back to earth by his question: "Why do I have to click my user name every time to get into Windows XP.  I am the only user, and I don't use a password."  It's something that has annoyed me also.  We both have the XP home version with SP2.  Can you help?*

You must disable the Guest account and ensure that you have no other accounts apart from the hidden Admin account. Highlight the user name that you wish to use then clear the "Users must enter a user name and password to use this computer". If that does not help see:
http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;en-us;315231

Note that in some cases to clear "Users must enter a user name and password to use this computer" you must click on Start, Run, and type:

*Figure 1*

`control userpasswords2`. See Figure 1

> ➢ **_Tip_**_: To bring up the Find window press the Windows key and F._

## Windows shortcuts for natural keyboard keys

*What does the Windows key do?*

A Windows keyboard has one or two keys marked with the Windows logo, known as the WIN key. Many users with Windows do not make much use of the extra key(s).
These keys will improve your productivity:

- Pressing the Win key + e will launch Explorer (my most used combination)
- Win + f will launch the Find File program
- Win + r will open the Run dialogue window
- Win + m will minimise all open programs
- Shift + Win + m will undo the minimise all
- Win + Pause/Break will show the System Properties
- Win + L will log off or switch the current user
- In Vista and Win 7, Win + g will cycle through Sidebar gadgets
- Win + Tab will cycle through programs on the taskbar with 3-D effects. (Pressing Alt + Tab will give the normal display as in XP.

> ➢ **_Tip:_** _You do not need to have extra shortcuts cluttering your screen for Windows Explorer and for Find Files if you have a new Windows keyboard._

## How to do screen dumps from Windows

*I have noticed that the 'print screen' key on my keyboard doesn't work on my configuration for Windows applications such as Office. Can this problem be fixed?*

In Windows, pressing the PrintScreen key dumps the image of the full screen to a buffer. Pressing Alt + PrintScreen dumps only the active window to a buffer. This is useful if you have a small window open and wish to print only that.

To print the image from the buffer, you must paste it into any program that accepts images. You can use *WordPad* or *Paint*, which come free with Windows, or with your favourite word processor. To paste the image into an existing or new file, press Ctrl + v or from the menu select Edit, Paste. Then you can print it in the normal way that you print a document.

> ➢ *Tip: When you are using Explorer or any other Windows product to mark a selection of files if you hold the Ctrl key down while clicking, you can add further filenames without losing the earlier selections.*

## How do I make Explorer start where I want it to start?

*Is it possible to tailor Windows Explorer so that whenever you open Explorer it will also open at the same folder? Now every time I open up Explorer I have to navigate my way through to the desired folder.*

You can do this by creating an appropriate shortcut. Right-click on the Desktop, select New, Shortcut and in the Command line, enter
`C:\Windows\Explorer.exe /n,/e, "C:\My Documents"`.
Note that the quotes are required when the folder name contains a space. In this case it is the My Documents folder.

If you wish to highlight a particular file within that folder then enter its filename, for example:
`C:\Windows\Explorer.exe  /select,c:\windows\sol.exe`. In this case the game *Solitaire* will be highlighted. Note that the file must already exist.

To open at the root directory of a drive, type:
`C:\Windows\Explorer.exe /n,/e,/root,,/select,C:\`
Perhaps even better for keyboard users is to just press the Windows key + e.

> ➢ ***Tip:*** *cAPS lOCK problem in* Word*? To correct, select that text and then press Shift + F3 up to three times to cycle through the various case change options.*

## Computer is slowing down

> *Lately my computer is really slow - when I am typing, all of a sudden a wait symbol will come on and I can still continue typing but the letters would not appear on the screen immediately. The letters will appear after a delay of a 1 or 2 seconds. If I am not typing, the wait symbol comes on and I cannot do anything until that symbol disappear - takes 1-2 seconds to disappear. It is irritating because the wait symbol comes on very often.*

This is most likely being caused by some program or process that is running in the background and is either taking up a lot of CPU usage or is waiting for some hardware event. The problem is to find what it is running, to stop that process and then to prevent it from starting automatically in the future.

To identify the culprit press Alt + Ctrl + Del (or Ctrl + Shift + Esc) to bring up Task Manager, click on the Processes tab and then click on the CPU heading twice to sort by CPU usage. Look at the processes at the head of the list when the system is slow to find out what is causing the problem.

After identifying the program or process click on Start, Run and type `Msconfig` and look in the Startup tab to remove the tick for that item. After

using Msconfig just ignore the warning message that will appear after a reboot and tick "Do not display configuration warning again".

Note that removing the tick will not un-install the programs but just prevents them from starting automatically. You can start them manually later.

There is a great freeware program, *Startup Inspector*, which accomplishes this task much better than Msconfig. It works similar to the Msconfig program, in that you can untick items that you do not want to run at Windows startup.  See Figure 2. However, it has the added benefit of a key stating which ones are not required and can be removed, or are required by the system and should not be removed. Pressing the Consult button will interrogate their database and for many commonly used files this will give a description of what the file is and what is used for. You can download it from:
www.windowsstartup.com/startupinspector.php
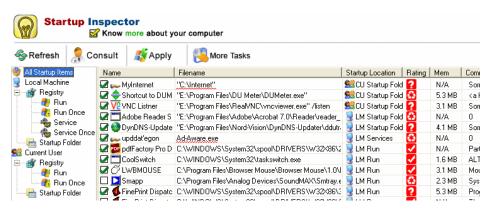


*Figure 2*

You should also remove other programs from starting when the computer is booting if they are not programs that you use each day. This means that when you open that program it may take a couple of seconds longer to load. However, this is much better than having to lose a few seconds on every re-boot.

Knowing what programs are essential unfortunately requires a lot of experience in computers. For Windows to run you do not need any of them, as none are critical, but some should always be left to start automatically. I recommend that

you always allow your anti-virus to start. If you have a firewall then it should also start automatically.

To find which particular programs are needed can be hard to guess if you do not have *Startup Inspector*, but there are several sites that list most programs. One site is www.answersthatwork.com/Tasklist_pages/tasklist.htm where you can check your programs. The *Ultimate Troubleshooter* is another program also available from www.answersthatwork.com that automatically identifies unnecessary programs and instructs how to remove them.

## How do I make my program always open in full screen?

Right-click on the shortcut and click on Properties, then Shortcut, and in the Run dialogue box select Maximized.

## Fixing a stopped print job

> *I'm trying to delete a document in the queue of my printer, but I can't. It writes "deleting", but it never finishes, I've tried to cancel the same from the field of my printer but it doesn't disappear, restarting my computer, restarting the document, turning off the printer, unplugging the cables, still I can't. What else can I do? It doesn't allow other documents to print!*

When you print the data does not go directly to the printer but is spooled to your hard drive and then sent to the printer as a background job. This allows you to keep working while jobs are being printed.

Occasionally a job becomes corrupted and just sits in the print queue but can never be printed and all other print jobs just wait in the queue. Unfortunately trying to cancel such a job fails because the spooling sub-system has that file open but cannot print it and you cannot delete it. What needs to be done is to stop the print spooler, delete all the pending jobs and then start printing again.

There are several ways to achieve this. One is to start in Safe Mode, as the print spooler will not be started. Using Windows Explorer navigates to the folder c:\system32\spool\printers and delete all the files there and reboot.

However, there are easier ways. From Control Panel click on Administrative Tools then click on Services and scroll down to Print Spooler and right-click on it and then left-click on Stop and leave this window open. Now press the Windows key + e to navigate to c:\system32\spool\printers folder and delete all files there as these are the old print jobs. Now start the print spooler by right-clicking on Print Spooler in the open Services window and select Start.

If this problem happens regularly then you can create a small BAT file with a shortcut on the desktop so in the future you can just click on it to clear the stalled print queue. The contents of the bat file are:

```
net stop spooler
del /F C:\system32\spool\printers\*.*
net start spooler
pause
exit
```

Type these lines in Notepad and save as "FixPrintJob.bat". Note that the quotes are essential as Notepad save files by default as .txt. Finally create a shortcut to this file.

> ➢ *Tip: Fastest way to add items to your Start Menu is to drag and drop your file, folder, or shortcut on the "Start" button.*

## Which is the CPU hog?

*I have often used the task manager to identify processes which are CPU hogs, or at least figure out what programs are keeping the machine busy. But I have a current case where I have a service running inside one of a number of instances of SVCHOST and I would like to positively identify which service is the culprit. I can see*

*the PID will uniquely identify it but how do I make the connection between the PID and the application which has spawned the process?*

The Svchost.exe is a generic host process name for services that run from dynamic-link libraries (DLLs) and it can be responsible for a number of processes. Fortunately there is a very good free program that can identify the actual application. It is *Process Explorer,* which can be downloaded from www.microsoft.com/technet/sysinternals/utilities/ProcessExplorer.mspx.     See Figure 3.
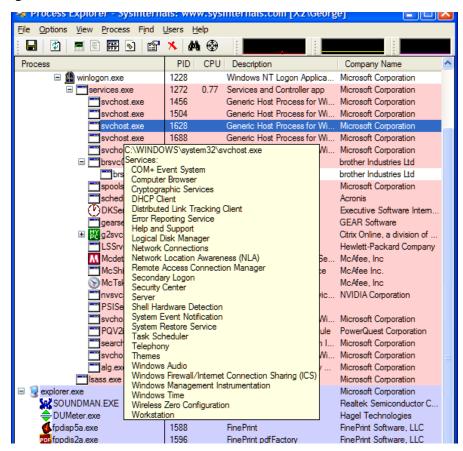


*Figure 3*

> ➢ **Tip**: *To have your frequently used programs readily available you can put them in the Taskbar by dragging a shortcut next to Start as shown below.*
>
> 
>
> *Windows XP Home does not have this feature enabled by default and you must right-click on the Taskbar and select Properties/ Quick Launch to enable this.*

## In Windows, mine are the only programs in the menu

> *I have purchased a new computer that has Windows XP and have added some programs that I can see under Start, Programs but when my wife logs on under her name, she cannot see these Program entries. How can I fix this?*

The easiest way to fix the current problem, assuming you have administrator privileges, is to right-click on the Start menu, select Explore and click on Programs. This is the start menu that only you can see, and no one else, and it should be in \Documents and Settings\username\Start Menu\Programs. Ensure that the Explorer window does not fill the entire screen and move it to one side. Next, right-click on the Start menu again but this time select Explore All Users. This will allow you to drag shortcuts from your open individual Programs menu to the All Users menu, and then everyone should be able to see them.

For future reference, ensure that your account is as Administrator, and install new software under that account because all programs installed under the local Administrator account should usually be installed for All Users.

## I hate cAPS LOCK

> *I hate cAPS LOCK. I mean I rEALLY HATE CAPS LOCK. Is it possible to put the caps lock on by, for example, pressing the SHIFT and the caps lock, or the CTRL*

> *+ caps lock.  This would stop the accidental pressing of it. As you may remember the keyboard is based on the typewriter keyboard and the CAPS LOCK on the typewriter had to be pushed quite hard to engage it.*

I agree with you as on occasions I make this error. However some Microsoft programmers must have had the same problem because there is a feature that you may find helpful. You can modify Windows to make a sound each time the Caps Lock button is hit.
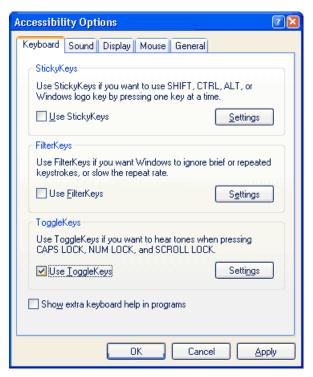


*Figure 4*

Do this by clicking on Start, Settings, Control Panel, Accessibility Options and on the Keyboard tab click the ToggleKeys check box. In Windows 7 this is under Ease of Access Centre and Make the Keyboard easier to use. Now when you press Caps Lock it will make a sound, and when you press it again to turn it off it will make a different sound. With this enabled the accidental press immediately becomes noticeable. See Figure 4 for the Accessibility Options screen.

If the Accessibility Options option is missing then you can add it by opening Control Panel, click on Add/Remove programs, click the Windows Setup tab and ensure that the Accessibility Options box is ticked. Then Windows will make this available for you.

Note that this uses the internal tiny speaker and not the sound card and therefore the volume cannot be adjusted. Some computers may not have this internal speaker.

> ➤ **Tip:** *To set the clock, right-click on the time in the bottom right-hand corner of the Task Bar and select Adjust Date/Time.*

## What causes random hard disk activity?

*Each time I use my PC I notice that at random the hard disk LED light flashes (and I can also hear the disk operating). This slows down whatever I am working on. The problem is not peculiar to any one particular program that I am running. It sometimes happens when I am in Explorer, on the Internet, activating the start menu, running a game etc. Do you have any answers?*

When your computer is idle, Windows performs various housekeeping activities. One activity that can cause mysterious disk activity is the compacting of the virtual memory swap file after one minute of inactivity. This is done to conserve disk space. The Windows swap file is dynamic, so it can shrink or grow based on the operations performed on the system and also on available disk space. A dynamic swap file is usually the most efficient way to use resources.

Another reason is that Windows performs several other useful functions in the background, but usually only after the computer has been idle for some time. These activities can cause quite considerable and sustained disk activity. Windows checks for low disk space, can defragment the hard disks using Defrag to improve disk performance, and regularly runs Scandisk which is a disk analysis and repair program. Scandisk can automatically fix problems in the following areas: file allocation table; long filenames; file system structure (lost clusters, cross-linked files); directory tree structure and some others. Disk indexing to allow you to rapidly locate files is another such service that can run in the background as files are downloaded or modified. Other programs, such as *Google Desktop*, can also run in the background.

Generally these are beneficial programs that should be allowed to run.

## How can I stop my print job?

*I use Word, Publisher and an HP Inkjet printer. How does one cancel a print job after the printing has started? The only way to stop printing is to turn the printer off but on turning the printer back on the printer keeps printing out pages with hieroglyphics. I go to Print File and select the print job and try and delete it which does not work (even though it says it is deleting). Even turning off the computer and printer does not always eliminate the problem even after restarting although the printer dialogue states no print jobs are pending.*

The correct way to delete print jobs is to click on the printer icon that normally appears in the bottom right-hand corner during printing, display the print queue and cancel the printing. When you print a document the print job is spooled to disk so that you can continue working and not be held up by a slow printer because the operating system is able to continue the printing in the background. The reason why the printing continues after the computer is restarted is that the print job is still in the spool folder on the hard disk and when you turn the computer back on it looks in that folder, finds the job and duly prints it.

As you have discovered, when you cancel the print job it is possible that the printer keeps going. This is because the printer also has an internal memory and it may contain many pages in this buffer. Switching the printer off or hitting its reset button (only a few printers have a reset) will flush the printer's buffer.

As to the hieroglyphics, these are caused because starting a print job in midstream and means that the printer has not received the correct initialisation and is printing raw data. If anyone has ever looked at, say, a JPG file with *Notepad*, you will then see these pages of hieroglyphics and not the image that you may have been expecting.

> ➤ **Tip**: *To Hibernate quickly, create this one line shortcut:*`%windir%\System32\rundll32.exe powrprof.dll,SetSuspendState`   *then just give the shortcut a meaningful name. When you double-click on this new icon Windows XP or Vista will go to sleep.*

## Changing the registered user in Windows

> *I recently bought a second-hand laptop. My problem is that if I double-click the System icon in Control Panel, under the General tab, the name of the previous owner in the System Properties window is shown as the registered user for the unit. Since I am the legal owner of the machine, how I can replace the previous owner's name with mine? I am using Windows 98.*

This can be achieved by using Regedit. Note that Regedit is a powerful tool and you should use it carefully, as it does no error checking. Do not alter any other setting unless you are absolutely sure of what you are doing.

To edit the registry. click on Start, Run, then type `Regedit,` then Click on HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\        Microsoft\        Windows\ CurrentVersion and you will notice on the right-hand side a field called RegisteredOwner and one called RegisteredOrganization.

Double-click on the word RegisteredOwner and you will see an Edit String dialogue box appear which will allow you to alter the name. If required you can change the RegisteredOrganization as well. See Figure 5 for Windows XP RegisteredOwner location in the Registry.
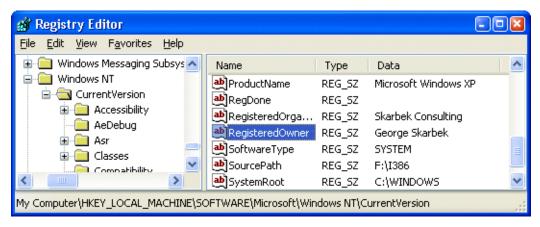
*Figure 5*

> ➤ *Tip: To shut down the computer quickly, create a shortcut on the desktop by right-clicking and selecting New, Shortcut and add the following line: %windir%\System32\shutdown.exe -s -t 0. When you double-click on this icon Windows XP or Vista is gone.*

## What is a Beta version?

*Could you tell me what the differences are between beta versions and the other types?*

The beta version is a pre-release version of a program, or a program update circulated by software manufacturers to allow wider testing of the software than is possible in their labs. No software manufacturer can have access to all types of computers, operating systems, printers, etc on which to test software. You cannot

buy beta versions. They are initially given to experienced users of the current versions of the software for extensive testing to find and report bugs and sometimes to the general public before the final version is released.

## How do I remove file associations?

*I recently uninstalled Paint Shop Pro to free up some hard disk space, as it was an application that I hardly ever used. Since uninstalling, I cannot view any jpg files as the system associates them with Paint Shop Pro and it cannot find the application.*

*Figure 6*

This is a frequently asked question and I feel that Microsoft could have made the removal of association of file types somewhat easier.

To reassociate a file type, do the following:
- Click to highlight the wanted file.
- Hold the Shift key and right-click on your selected file.
- Select Open With then choose the required program.
- Check the Always use the selected program, as shown in Figure 6.

> ➢ **Tip:** *To restart Windows create this shortcut:* `%windir%\system32\shutdown.exe -r -t 01`. *When you double-click on this icon Windows XP or Vista will re-boot.*

# Removing remnants of unwanted programs

*When clicking the mouse on the Start menu, Programs or on some icons on the desktop, a choice of options becomes available and one of the choices is a program I deleted. The choice for that program is still available. When releasing the mouse button a window pops up "Program not found". Can you help me remove these unwanted options?*

The programs that appear when you select Start, Programs are controlled by a separate menu and not by what Explorer shows. To remove unwanted entries do the following:

- right-click near the right-hand side of the task bar on the empty space,
- select Properties on the screen that pops up,
- select the Start Menu Programs tab,
- select Remove...
- then click on the program that you wish not to appear, select Remove and close the windows.

Now that program will not appear in the "Programs" list.

To remove the icon on the desktop, just click once on the icon and then press the Delete key. This will delete the shortcut but not the actual program. Note that when you delete the programs, the shortcut is not deleted.

# How to show full file details in Windows programs

*While editing any file (Notepad, WordPad, Word, Excel) it doesn't show the file's extension. How can I fix this?*

You can set this in an unlikely place, namely Windows Explorer. Open Explorer then select Tools, Folder Options, then click on the View tab, and make sure that the box labelled "Hide extensions for known file types" is NOT ticked. Now you will be able to see the full file name.

In the same display, another box that helps significantly in identifying the file when you are editing files many sub-folders deep using Windows Explorer is the "Display the full address path in the title bar". Also you can customise the right-hand side to show the file details that you prefer - you do not have to stick with the Windows defaults. See Figure 7 for a sample.
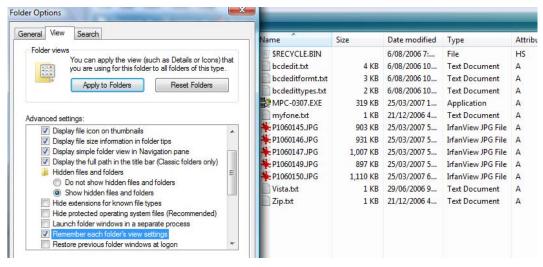


*Figure 7*

> ➤ *Tip: When you have Windows Explorer open, pressing the F3 key will immediately bring up the Find dialogue box. This is handy if you don't have the Windows key on your keyboard.*

> ➢ *If you use a folder regularly for dragging and dropping files then in XP and Vista you can create a shortcut to that folder and move it to the Quick Launch toolbar, next to the Start button. If there is not adequate room then right-click on the Taskbar and remove the tick from Lock the Taskbar. If the Quick Launch toolbar does not appear then right-click on the Taskbar and under Toolbars click on Quick Launch.*

## How to eliminate a Windows Startup error

*Every time I start my computer now I get a message saying: "Cannot find the file 'AM.exe' (or one of its components). Make sure that the path and file name are correct and that all required libraries are available." Also; "could not load or run 'AM.exe' specified in the win.ini file. Make sure the file exists on your computer or remove the references in the win.ini file".    I cannot find any of these files and am about to commit 'hari kiri' on the computer's behalf!*

This error is being caused by Windows trying to reference a program that has been deleted or moved to some other location but some reference to it in the Startup sequence is left behind.

You have two choices, the best option is find what is requesting that file and remove that reference or program from the Startup, as it is not working anyway. Otherwise find what program requests that file and find and install the file into the appropriate folder.

Click on Start, Run, type `Msconfig` and press Enter. When that program starts click on the Startup tab and you will see a screen similar to the one shown in Figure 8.  All the programs that are started, or are attempting to start, are shown. Just remove the tick from the program causing the problem and you will not see that error message again.
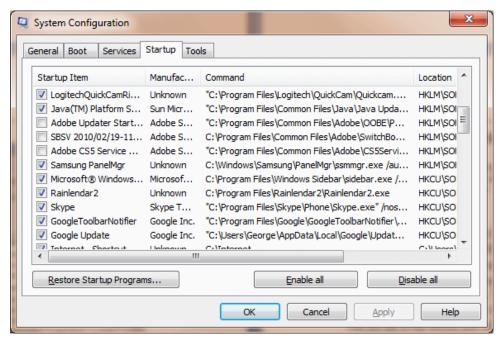
*Figure 8*

> ➢ **Tip:** *Often it is desirable to do a screen dump of a small open window, but not of the entire desktop behind it. Just press Alt + PrintScreen to copy the active window into the buffer. This can save a lot of time in cutting and pasting to extract the information from the full screen dump.*

# Removing names of deleted programs

*In the Add/Remove dialogue box in Windows Control Panel I can still see programs that have been deleted. The names of those programs are still visible. How can I get rid of them?*

Your problem was caused by deleting the programs themselves rather than deleting them via the Add/Remove programs option found under Control Panel. Using the Add/Remove programs option is the preferred way to delete unwanted programs because many programs add files to the Windows and/or to the System folders plus registry entries. When you manually delete these programs, the other files remain behind, filling the hard disk. (A program's uninstall software often can do an even better job of removal than the Windows Add/Remove option.)

According to Microsoft, removing an unwanted entry in the Add/Remove programs table is a major exercise and not recommended. Yet Microsoft has released a program called *TweakUI*, a part of the *Powertoys* suite of programs that have been developed by Microsoft programmers to fill in gaps in Windows functionality. *TweakUI* will do the job. Read the 'readme.txt' file as to how to install these programs after clicking on the *Powertoys* program. For XP users See: www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/powertoys/xppowertoys.mspx

If you cannot obtain *Powertoys*, in many cases deleting a few lines in the Registry will get rid of that unwanted entry. To modify the Registry double-click Regedit in the Windows folder then click on Edit, Find and type in the program name. Whenever a reference to it is found, delete that entry and continue searching (press F3) and delete all entries. This should eliminate that entry in your Add/Remove programs dialogue box. A worthwhile safety feature would be to create a Restore Point first.

If you are not confident about performing the above steps then do not feel concerned about leaving a reference in the Registry to a program that is no longer there. I believe that there is no real need for concern as the overheads in having the odd spurious entry are minuscule.

# Registry cleaners

> *Recently I downloaded one of these free registry cleaners. It told me that I had 165 errors in my registry. Could you tell me a good cleaner and where I can purchase it as I don't want to give my credit card number over the Internet?*

A few hundred errors in a typical registry that has 500,000+ entries is of no concern. These errors probably refer to programs that have been removed and most likely will not cause any problems.

Some free Registry analysing programs give these potentially alarming reports hoping you will purchase their product. If your system is stable I suggest that you do not purchase a registry cleaner program. There is a very small risk that a registry cleaner program may even cause problems that currently do not exist. Microsoft had a free registry cleaner program but it was removed from their website some years ago without stating any reasons.

It could be that even Microsoft cannot give a 100% guarantee that it works perfectly in all situations. In their knowledge base there is an article referring to a problem caused by one particular registry cleaner that prevented Windows from starting, and also references to erroneous listings generated by other programs.

Having given a lot of reasons why you should not purchase a registry cleaner, I ran one such program on my test computer after it reported several hundred errors. I checked several dozen manually to find they were all referring to either removed or obsolete programs. My registry file was about 70 MB when exported and came to over 12,000 pages of text when opened in Word. After running the program it stated that all problems were fixed. The size of the registry was reduced by a small fraction of 1%. Running benchmarks before and after showed no difference in performance.

In the case of registry cleaners, I would apply the old saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" but I am happy to hear from readers who have other views on this matter.

> ➢ *Tip: To create a shortcut quickly, press Ctrl + Shift and drag the desired file to the desktop.*

## How much memory is too much?

*Is there any point at which too much memory is possible, and is being wasted or not used?*

There is an old saying dating from the late eighties that states you can never have too much money or too much memory. However, the cost/benefit ratio concerns most of us. How much memory you require is determined by the applications you run under Windows and the number of them that you run simultaneously. The performance improvement from more memory is achieved because Windows does not have to write to a disk swap file. Windows will run best with a lot of memory.

Accessing data from memory is thousands of time faster than from disk. When Windows is low in physical memory it will write part of the current memory to the swap file on the hard disk. This swapping of physical memory to disk makes more resources available to Windows but at the expense of performance. At the time of writing, 4 GB probably represents the best cost/benefit ratio, although 8 GB may be considered, only if you are running the 64 bit version of Windows, as memory is cheap. However, as the price of memory drops or you use more simultaneous programs, more memory will give better performance.

Many of the smaller programs in Windows will not give better performance with more memory. With programs such as word processors or spreadsheets there will be little improvement if you mainly work with small files. When working with large documents with large graphics, a 512 MB system would result in much more swapping to disk and the computer will run noticeably faster with 2 or 4 GB. Programs that manipulate large graphic files may continue to show some performance improvement with memory over 2 GB. If you are planning to run video editing software then you should consider at least 4 GB.

Additional memory can be used to increase the disk cache size, which will improve disk access for all programs. All versions of Windows use a good dynamic cache. If you are not sure about the memory requirements of the programs that you wish to run, add memory to 2 GB and observe the disk activity by watching the light on the computer front panel. If you notice a lot of activity when in Windows, this means that a lot of swapping is occurring, and additional memory will reduce much of this time consuming activity.

For video editing of High Definition files, 4 GB is the absolute minimum and if you are running a 64 bit version of Windows then you should consider 8 GB. Note that when Adobe's Premire Pro CS5 was released it would only run on a 64 bit operating system.

There may be an additional charge for installation of extra RAM in your new computer after delivery. If you intend to install it yourself later, read the motherboard manual to determine the type of memory required. Before installing it, make sure that you discharge static electricity from your body by touching an earthed metal object such as the inside of your computer or the frame of a metal desk-lamp before removing the memory from its protective packaging. The front of the case is usually plastic and will not discharge static electricity. Only then should you handle the chips. The classic "electric shock" can destroy the chip, even one shock too small for you to feel.

## Can I delete the $Uninstall files?

> *I have Windows XP and do all the updates as they come up but in the windows folder I see there are a great number of uninstall files relating to the updates highlighted in blue. Can I delete these or must they stay?*

This is a good question but regrettably I do not have a definitive answer. I have managed to speak to a senior Microsoft developer who works in the operating system division working on Windows. His advice was that they should not be deleted.

However, I have investigated what is in these folders and found many older files that have been updated several times. As a test I deleted a number of them and all is still stable. I feel that if I have to go to a distant prior restore point there may be problems, so I decided not to push too far in this area.

So my advice is: If you have a lot of free disk space left, leave these files. If you are short of disk space or you are having problems with backup, such as not being able to fit everything on a DVD, and if you are missing out by a little bit, then you could start deleting files that are over one year old. I did this as an experiment and there were no problems of any type.

> ➢ *Tip: Scrolling through web pages in the browser can be done in many ways but I find pressing the space bar the easiest and most convenient. Press Shift + Space bar to scroll back.*

## Printing thumbnails

> *Is there any way of printing a list of files in thumbnail view in a folder containing only graphic files? You used to be able to do this but I don't seem to be able to do it in XP. I have a large number of graphic files in various folders, and wanted to print them out. I have looked at a freeware programme called PrintFolder 1.2 from No Nonsense Software, but it only prints a list out, and not the actual graphic. They may update their programme to enable this some time in the future. But in the meantime, do you know of any such programme?*

In Windows XP there is the *Photo Print Wizard*. To use this facility open your folder and switch to Thumbnail view. Select the images that you wish to print or press Ctrl + a to select all and then click on File, Print. This will start the Photo Print Wizard and then you will have a choice of layouts including one option - Contact Sheet Prints - which produces up to 35 images and their filenames on an A4 sheet of paper.

However, there are many programs that can achieve this. In my opinion one of the best is the excellent free program *IrfanView* from www.irfanview.com.

In *IrfanView* you have to select Thumbnails from the File menu and select the images that you want or Ctrl + a for all. From the File menu click on "Create contact sheet from selected thumbnails". You will have many options as to the number of rows and columns, heading, option to print file names, and much more.

> ➢ *Tip: To bypass the automatic start of a program when you insert a new CD, hold the Shift key down until the CD light goes out.*

## How can I utilise my entire RAM?

*I am having trouble with my RAM which I recently upgraded. My problem is that it doesn't feel like my computer is running any faster and when I do a systems check with Norton Utilities it says that only 60% is being utilised. What I can do to get optimum performance out of my RAM?*

You probably are getting optimum performance. Your perception that the computer is not running any faster may be correct depending on what program you run. If you usually run only one application, for example *WordPad* which does not place large demands on memory and will happily run in 16 MB, then adding more memory will not make any difference to performance.

The fact that a systems check shows that only 60% of your memory is being utilised at a given point in time means that you can open other programs without causing any degradation to the programs that were running at that time.

I tested the effects of RAM size by measuring how long it took to perform tasks such as replacing several hundred occurrences of a phrase in a 300 page Word document. I then doubled the memory and it took 1.1 seconds both times. The

extra RAM made no difference because the full document was in memory. However, with less memory and having multiple files and programs open, the loading time of Word itself was slower and resulted in far more disk activity as the programs were being paged in and out of memory to the hard disk.

Windows has good memory management algorithms and will allow you to make full use of the extra memory as you open more files. It will not fill its memory immediately on loading because it would have to page out programs and therefore slow things down as you start opening applications.

> ➢ *Tip: In a large* Word *document press Ctrl + g to go directly to a specified page, heading, section or other selected item.*

## My scrolling is way too fast

> *Is it possible to slow down the scrolling pages in Word when using the mouse? I did not have this problem on my old computer, but I have a 3 GHz Pentium and it is really starting to frustrate me. Resorting to shift selection is troublesome, but essential. Is this scrolling problem due to the speed of the new computer, or is it some setting that I must adjust?*

Unfortunately there is no adjustment of which I am aware. The only reliable way that I have found to overcome this problem is to use the keyboard when highlighting the text. First, click on the point from where you wish to highlight (or press F8), then hold the shift key down and use the down arrow to select the text. You can also use the Page Down key to move in larger increments while holding down the shift key. (Note that this method of selection also works with the up arrow or the left and right arrows.)

Another method involves using the mouse. This will achieve the same result but does not highlight as you go. To try this, click on the beginning of the text to be

selected, use the mouse and scroll bar to bring the end of the desired text into view, and then hold the shift key down and click on the last letter of the text to be selected. This will highlight all the intermediate text and works just as well whether the text is all on the one page or extends over many pages or screens.

> ➤ *Tip Have you set security on* Internet Explorer *Content Advisor and forgotten the password? Use the Registry Editor, Regedit, to remove it. Search for the word "ratings" (no quotes). It should be in HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\ Windows\CurrentVersion\Policies\Ratings. In the right-hand window right-click on the Key value and Delete. After a reboot you will be able to disable the Content Advisor by entering a new password.*

## Making Windows Explorer remember my preferences

*I take and look at lots of digital images. I have Win XP Home. I would like folders to always open with thumbnail views but it seems to vary although mostly a filmstrip view comes up. Is there some way I can set things up so image folders always open with the thumbnail view?*

Start by opening Windows Explorer and then set your View to Thumbnails. Next you must click on Tools, Folder Options and then click on the View Tab. Now you can make any other adjustments you require, and then click on Apply to All Folders. This will remember the settings for the future.

Then you can set the other less-used folders to the Details or other view options and these should also be remembered.

> ➤ *Tip: In many cases you can obtain better performance by adding more physical memory. As memory is still becoming cheaper this can be the most cost-efficient way to improve performance.*

## Using Send To option to improve productivity

*I have been using a USB drive to backup selected files and I wonder whether it is possible to add an item to the right click context menu in Windows Explorer so I can send files to the appropriate drive letter?*

To add programs to your SendTo destination, create a shortcut to that program and drag it to the SendTo folder which is found in the XP folder C:\Documents and Settings\UserName\SendTo in Windows XP and in Windows 7 it is C:\Users\UserName\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows. See Figure 9 for a SendTo with a few additions. In Windows 7 and Windows 8 this is in the hidden folder: C:\Users\user name\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows\SendTo.

*Figure 9*
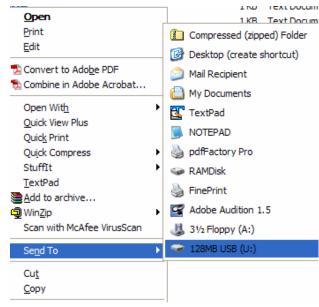
To add a drive, you must first plug in your USB drive. Using Windows Explorer, navigate to C:\Documents and Settings\username\SendTo folder and right-click

on the SendTo on the right-hand side. Then click on File, New, Shortcut and type in the drive letter of your USB drive. I have set U: for my main USB.

I prefer to assign drive letters rather then having Windows assign letters that can subsequently be changed by the addition of another hardware device. To assign a drive letter to your USB drive or CD, open Control Panel and select Administrative Tools, Computer Management, Disk Management. Now when you right-click on the drive you will see a menu to Change Letter. I suggest that the CD should be changed to drive R: or some letter high in the alphabet to ensure that when you add partitions or other devices, the CD letter will remain fixed. Ignore any warning messages when altering the CD drive letter.

## What is an M4A file?

> *Someone sent me an email with an audio file attached. The file is an M4A file and I wish to convert it to a WAV file. Can you suggest an easy way to do this? I have done some research but with little success.*

The M4A (MPEG 4 Audio) is a relatively new successor to the MP3 format that is currently very widely used to compress music. M4A has several advantages over the MP3 format including a better quality and smaller file size. Have a look at: www.m4a.com   for further information on this file format.

Fortunately there are a number of shareware programs that will convert M4A to MP3. See: www.brothersoft.com/downloads/m4a-to-mp3-converter.html for a selection.

## Creating PDF files

> *Are there any inexpensive programs that can convert MS Word, Excel or Project files into PDF format?*

There are many products that can do this. My suggestion is that you try some of the free or low costs PDF writers first. Several good free products that should be

considered are: *PDF995* from [www.pdf995.com](www.pdf995.com), *PDF Creator* from [http://sourceforge.net/projects/pdfcreator](http://sourceforge.net/projects/pdfcreator), C*utePDF* from [www.cutepdf.com/Products/CutePDF/writer.asp](www.cutepdf.com/Products/CutePDF/writer.asp) and *Bullzip PDF Printer* from [www.bullzip.com/products/pdf/info.php#download](www.bullzip.com/products/pdf/info.php#download). These products have been used over an extensive period without any problems.

Another solution to consider is to install the free program called *Open Office* from [www.openoffice.orghttp://www.openoffice.org/dev_docs/features/2.0/](www.openoffice.orghttp://www.openoffice.org/dev_docs/features/2.0/). This program is very comprehensive and is the equivalent of Microsoft *Office*. It can read *Word*, *Excel* and *PowerPoint* files with a very high compatibility, supporting the Microsoft Office 2007 formats such as Docx and Xlsx. Having read in your *Word* file you can then create a PDF file. For corporate functionality there is the Adobe *Distiller*.

If you have *Office 2007* then you can download the free Save as PDF Add PDF creator that will let you save as a PDF file, and has options for printing quality or for the web which results in a smaller file. It produces a device-independent output file that can be viewed and be and printed exactly as the creator has set it, even preserving accurate colour reproduction. *Office 2010* has this inbuilt.

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➢ *Tip: You can quickly go your Temp folder, even if it is hidden, by clicking on Start, Run and type* `%temp%` *and press OK.*

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It would appear that we have reached the limits of what it is possible to achieve with computer technology, although one should be careful with such statements, as they tend to sound pretty silly in five years.

John Von Neumann (ca. 1949)

# INDEX

# About the author

George Skarbek's interest in computers began in 1962, shortly after he completed an Electrical Engineering degree. The first mainframe computer he worked on had ferrite core memory, no monitor, no disks, no printer and no keyboard, as all Input / Output was via punched cards or front panel switches.

Since then, George has been continually involved with the computer industry. He began working on IBM mainframes writing mathematical models, then ran the IT group of a semi-government department consisting of several VAXs and networked PCs. Over the years he has worked on a number of other operating systems and programmed in several computer languages.

His first PC was a Tandy with 4 KB (not MB or GB) of RAM and an audio tape drive for storage. (A floppy drive cost 800 real dollars and hard disks were not available.)

In 1985 he started his own computer consulting company, which was initially involved in database design and programming, but extended to LAN and WAN work as well as general computer problem-solving work. His clients range from banks and government departments to small businesses. He has a wide in-depth knowledge of the industry, in both business software and hardware.

Since 1994 he has been writing a Q & A column for *The Age* until 2009. He also wrote for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *West Australian* for many years. He has also appeared on television news programs for channels 9 and 10 in Melbourne as a computer expert. His first computer book was published in 1996.

George's interests are gliding, photography and bridge.