

ComputerEdge™ Online — 05/28/10



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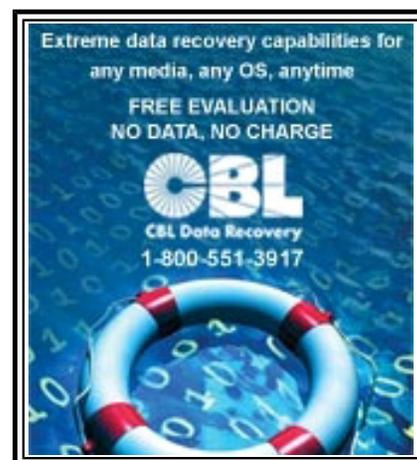
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Digital Dave

“Digital Dave answers your tech questions.” by *Digital Dave*

A reader's flaky hard drive may signal a complete breakdown soon; does an OEM version of Windows 7 64-bit allow you to update your current OS and keep accessory software?; a reader's laptop battery suddenly won't keep a charge for long.

Dear Digital Dave,

My machine is an HP Pavilion a1220n running Windows XP. Over the past few months it has started to "lock up" during the boot process. This may occur with only the wallpaper on the screen, or with the wallpaper and icons displayed, or even with a couple of the icons along the bottom of the screen displayed. It may take one or two reboots before it comes up correctly.

This problem is intermittent with no apparent pattern. Is this just "old age" creeping up or something that might be cured?

Thanks,

Larry

*Larry Hallanger
El Cajon*

Dear Larry,

Most people who have used computers for any number of years have encountered the symptoms you describe at one time or another. Discounting that you may have a computer virus that's causing you problems (which would require all the usual scanning and cleaning with antivirus software), there are natural causes (aging) that could be related to your troubles. In particular, I would suspect that your hard drive is starting to wear out and act up. (There are many other possible causes, but the randomness of your lockups, including during startup, suggests the hardware with the moving parts is dropping bits in the operating system.)

You can run the Check Disk program (chkdsk.exe) by opening the disk drive Properties window. Right-click on the main drive (usually C:) in Windows Explorer (Microsoft key plus E), select Properties, then click "Check Now..." in the Tools tab. This program will scan the entire drive and repair any errors it finds. The problem is that errors in the operating system area of the drive could be causing the problem.

After the drive scan, if the problem persists I'd do a clean Windows install. My experience with XP and older is that the installation "decays" with age as the OS writes more and more errors.

It's just as likely to be hardware, but this would be worth trying before anything that costs money. I would do a clean install rather than a repair.

If you want to attempt a repair, then after the drive is scanned and repaired with Check Disk, the operating system may be checked and repaired. This will require operating system installation discs. You can quickly find instructions for your type of computer by searching the Web on "Windows XP (or Vista, or 7, as appropriate) repair."

The problem with continuing to use a flaky hard drive is that it will most likely get worse over time. Even if you have fixed the problem, the errors will probably return soon. Once I start encountering problems with a drive, I find that the best option is usually to replace it.

If you go through all of the above and continue to see no improvement, then the problem is probably elsewhere, although it's likely to be in hardware such as memory or another bad component. I've seen bad USB ports, network cards, and video cards cause random lockups. At some point, depending upon the age of the computer, it may not be worth your time to continue troubleshooting. (Yes, computer components do get old and start to wear out.) A new computer may be in order.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I have a 64-bit Vista desktop that is about one year old. In the last couple of months, I have had issues with the system freezing or terminating. The incidents were associated with use of non-Windows applications like iTunes or Lexmark printer software, but recently a termination occurred when I was running Windows Movie Maker. Also, I typically "hibernate" my desktop, but following the recent problems, I opted to completely shut down after use. When I restart, the desktop takes 15-20 minutes to load.

Since Vista's rep is somewhat tainted, I have decided to install Windows 7 64-bit. The software I purchased is the OEM system builder pack. Does this software allow you to update your current OS, or do I have to do a clean install? If it is the latter, and I have to "wipe" my entire OS partition, does Microsoft provide free downloads of the accessory software like Windows Movie Maker, Media, Notepad, etc.?

*Manny
San Diego, CA*

Dear Manny,

You purchased the OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) version of Windows 7, which is designed for computer stores and individuals who build their own computers. It is less expensive since it caters to third-party builders of new computers with no preexisting operating systems. Therefore, the OEM version does only a clean install intended for a new hard drive. The OEM version does not do an upgrade from an existing earlier version of Windows.

Also, I believe that it does not save your old programs and data in a windows.old folder as occurs with an upgrade version of Windows 7—although I have not tested this myself. Therefore

any data you want to save, you will need to back up prior to installation of the OEM version. Any programs that you use regularly you will need to reinstall after you have Windows 7 up and running. (In most cases, an upgrade version of Windows 7 can be purchased for slightly less than the OEM version. A previously installed earlier version of Windows XP or Vista at the same or lower level is required to use the upgrade version. Data is saved to the windows.old folder.)

On the positive side, the Windows 7 version of the programs you mention are either included in the installation or available for free download at Windows Live Essentials (download.live.com/). In particular, Windows Movie Maker (not quite the same as the Vista version) and Windows Live Mail (e-mail program for Windows 7) are not included in the installation, but are available for free download.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

Most of the time when I have my Toshiba laptop battery fully charged and then shut it down, the next time I start it, the battery is still almost fully charged. Today, after only a week or two, the battery was fully discharged.

Any idea why/how this happens?

*Larry
Aurora, Colorado*

Dear Larry,

Laptop batteries are one of the most frustrating parts of the laptop computer. When a battery is going bad, there is almost never any kind of notice. My guess is that even if your battery charges again, it will not run your computer on battery power for long. While battery technology has improved, no battery will last forever.

Most of today's laptops use lithium-ion batteries. These types of batteries do not last as long as they should in laptops because of the way we use our laptops. The life of lithium-ion is dependent upon a couple of factors. Unfortunately, the way we use our portable computers is not conducive to extending that life.

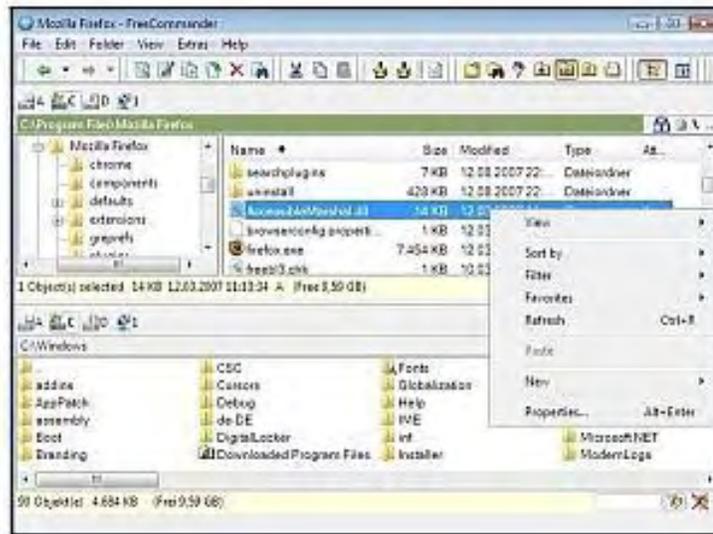
First of all, if we leave our laptop plugged in most of the time with the battery in it, the charge will always be at 100 percent. The optimal charge for long Li-ion battery life is about 50 percent. But no laptop is designed to keep the battery charge at 50 percent. That wouldn't make any sense from the perspective of running the computer on battery power. Therefore we sacrifice longevity by keeping the battery fully charged.

Next, heat is the number-one enemy of Li-ion battery life. Plugged into a running laptop, the battery is encountering a reasonable amount of heat. The best way to extend the life of your battery is, whenever you don't need it, drain it to 50 percent, take it out of your computer and put it into the refrigerator. When you know that you're going on a trip and will need the battery power, charge it up and put it back into the laptop.

Laptops that sit at home plugged in with the battery in it have the shortest battery life. Those computers that are continually on the move and with battery power being used regularly generally will live and last longer. If you fall into the former category and don't want to lose the battery backup by removing it to the refrigerator, you'll find that you need to buy a new battery more often.

Digital Dave

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Alternatives to Windows Explorer

“Free, feature-filled file managers to replace Windows Explorer.” by Michael J. Ross

Windows Explorer's deficiencies can be a surefire source of frustration and wasted time. But don't worry: Software developers have created dozens of programs designed to replace this venerable Microsoft program.

For most people running Microsoft Windows on their PCs, one of the more frequently used applications is Windows Explorer, the default file manager for the operating system. It is a relatively capable application for finding, moving, deleting and renaming files and folders. Yet like so many other applets built into the Windows operating system, it provides just enough functionality to be usable for most tasks, but it also has just enough limitations to prove very frustrating for some tasks. That's not to say that it isn't used on a daily basis by countless computer users the world over. However, even though it does the basic jobs flawlessly, there are lots of additional features that it is lacking.

Imagine that you have two files, and for some reason you need to know which one is larger. Let's say that Windows Explorer indicates that both files are "1 KB" (one kilobyte). So they appear to be the same size. But they might not be. The first one could consist of exactly 1,024 bytes in total, while the second one could consist of only three bytes (which is the smallest size possible on a Windows file system, because at a minimum, a file must contain a carriage return, a line feed character, and an end-of-file character). Windows Explorer rounds up to the nearest kilobyte, and provides you no option to change the file size reporting so that it will display file sizes in bytes instead of kilobytes.

Here's another example to consider: If you have two different folders containing what should be identical files, but you aren't completely certain, then you would want to compare them, to see if

they have the exact same filenames, file sizes and file contents. Or perhaps you know that there should be some differences in the files, and you want to see which ones are larger and which ones have been modified most recently. Obviously, it would be wonderful to be able to fire up Windows Explorer and split the screen into two separate panels, one for each folder, so you can quickly eyeball the differences between the two. That was a feature available way back in Windows 3.1, but was sadly dropped in later versions. Even if it were still present, you would be able to compare only last-modification dates, not the exact file sizes, as explained in the previous paragraph.

Any PC veteran could provide other examples—both hypothetical and ones they have actually experienced—in which Windows Explorer's deficiencies proved to be a surefire source of frustration and wasted time. As a result, software developers have created dozens of programs designed to replace this venerable Microsoft program—not just providing the baseline features found within Windows Explorer, but adding so many more. The majority of Windows users probably won't try to seek out these alternatives, because they don't realize that Windows Explorer can be replaced. In this article, we will explore some of the free file managers.

A43

This first candidate may have a name that sounds like it came from Star Wars, but in terms of program price and footprint, this application is very much down to earth. A43 (www.alterion.us/a43/) is, like all of the programs we will examine, free of charge, and yet quite capable. The Web page mentions that it offers an integrated text editor (no more fiddling with Windows Notepad!), file zipping and unzipping, file search (much better than Windows' native search), program quick launch, buttons for accessing favorite folders, and no installation required. That last feature is something that makes this program a great option for a USB thumb drive, because all of the program settings are stored on the removable media, which means that you can plug it into any PC and immediately start using A43, without having to install A43 on the computer's hard drive. In addition, it does not write changes to your Windows Registry, which, if it is anything like most, is already bloated enough.

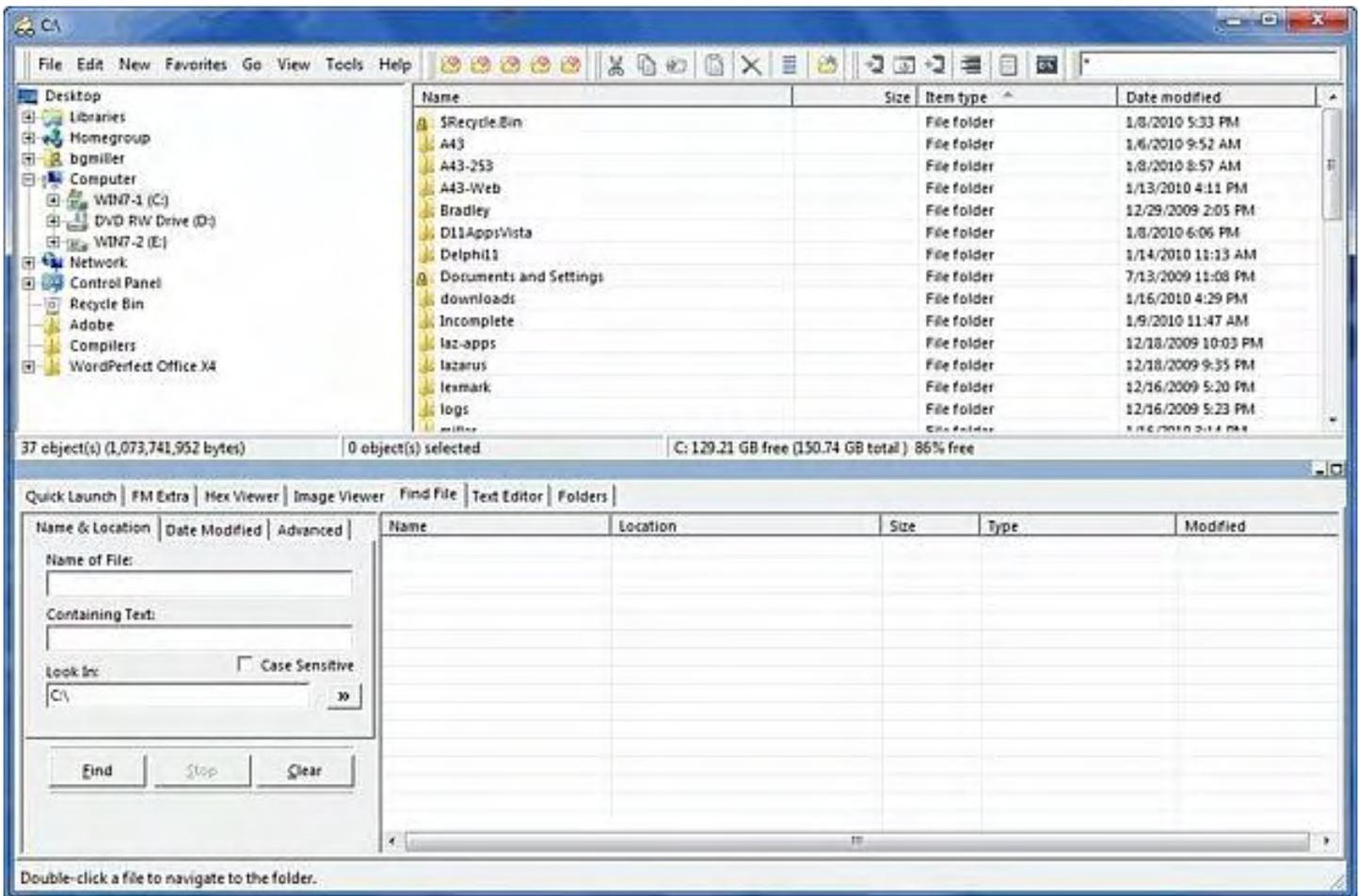


Figure 1. A43 interface.

In terms of the examples mentioned earlier, A43 unfortunately does not apparently allow one to specify that file sizes be given in bytes, but does support a dual-pane view (using the non-obvious View > Splitter > Open/Close Splitter > FM Extra). Nonetheless, it has additional capabilities that Windows Explorer users can only dream of: narrow the list of files displayed by using edit masking (e.g., w* to only see files beginning with the letter W); modify the date and time stamp of a single file or a group of files all at once; map folders to virtual drives; view files in hexadecimal format (handy for programmers who want to locate some text in an executable); and view images within the application, without having to start a separate dedicated application.

To install the program, simply unzip the downloaded file into the folder of your choice. At that point, you may want to create a shortcut to the executable file, A43.exe. As of this writing, the current stable version is 2.53, but the 3.0 beta 4 version is available for testing. The project welcomes donations, and currently has a forum (www.alterion.us/a43/forum) in which users can post questions and feature suggestions to the developer of A43.

ExplorerXP

Among people who appreciate the advantages of shareware, ExplorerXP (www.explorerxp.com/) is one of the favorite choices for file and folder management, partly because it is free for noncommercial use, but more so because of its many features, several of which are listed on the home page: multiple folders can be open at once, each in its own tab; toolbar access to all the major Windows folders (My Computer, Recycle Bin, My Documents and the Desktop); drag and

drop with Windows Explorer; rename multiple files at once; display folder sizes and folder size cache; merge and split files; advanced move and copy of files and folders; support for Unicode and USB devices; recursive deletion of files and folders that match patterns; organizing folders into groups; and configurable keyboard shortcuts.

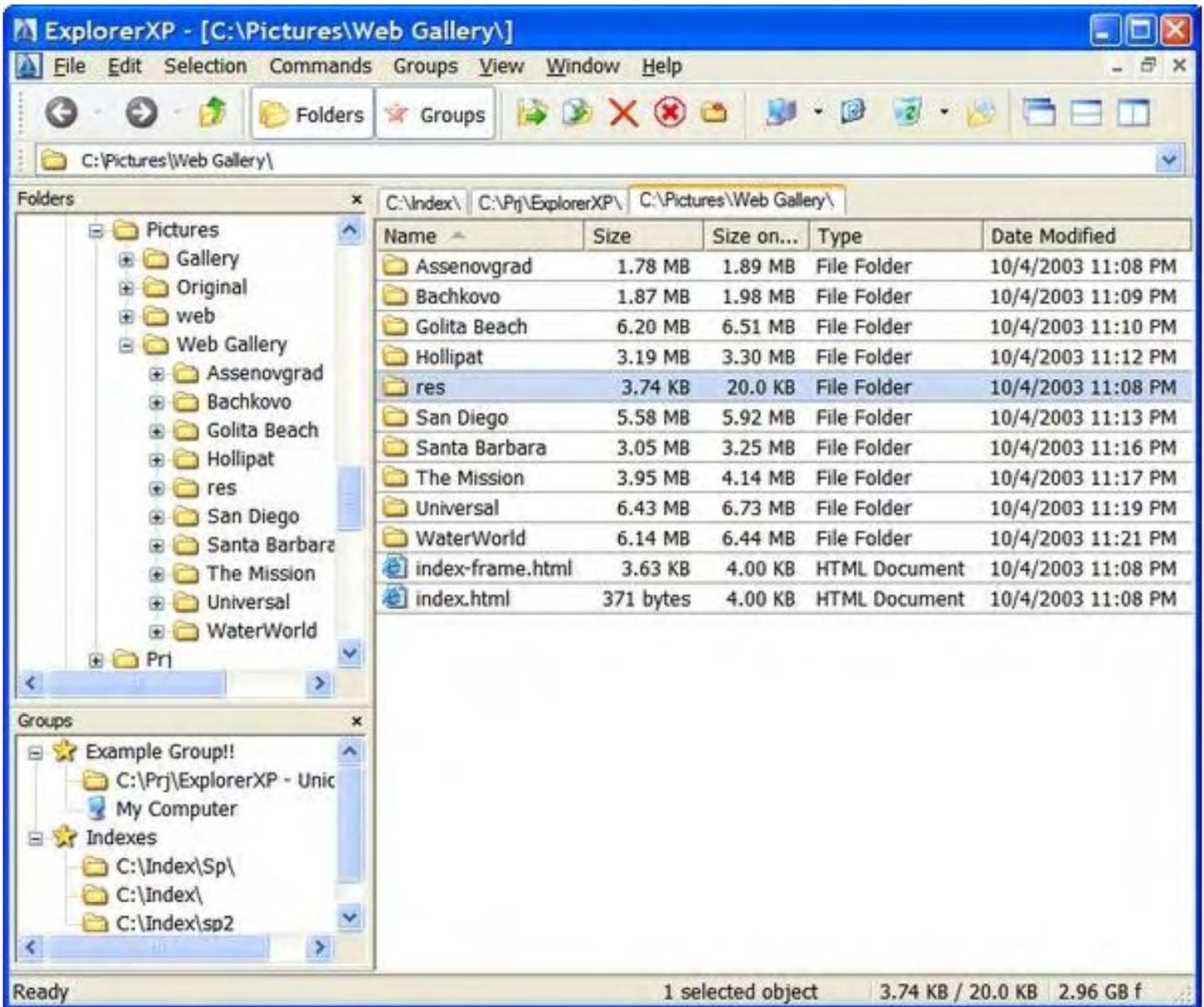


Figure 2. ExplorerXP interface.

This program has an attractive interface—more comprehensible and easily navigable than that of A43. It does include an option to open a DOS command prompt within the selected folder, but unfortunately there does not appear to be any way to customize that in order to execute a Windows batch file of your own (the way that you can do with a Windows Explorer shortcut in the Start menu).

Installation is a snap, and the program runs equally fast. Yet there are a couple blemishes: Most Windows users quickly learn that the + (plus) icon is displayed in front of any folder name to indicate that it contains subfolders, which can be displayed by clicking the +. For some reason, ExplorerXP displays them in front of all folder names, even those with no subfolders, which can

be a bit disconcerting.

As with so many shareware programs, including A43, ExplorerXP offers very meager help information—namely, just a table listing the keyboard shortcuts. But that is less of a problem with ExplorerXP, because the menu items and toolbar icons are generally easier to understand, and all of the latter category provide useful tool tips.

CubicExplorer

Judging by their file last-modified dates, both A43 and ExplorerXP have not been updated for years. That does not imply that they are inadequate, but they would not be your best choice if you are looking for a program that is enjoying current fixes and enhancements. If that is what you seek, then consider CubicExplorer (www.cubicreality.com/), which benefits from continual improvements, as well as explanatory blog entries on the Web site.

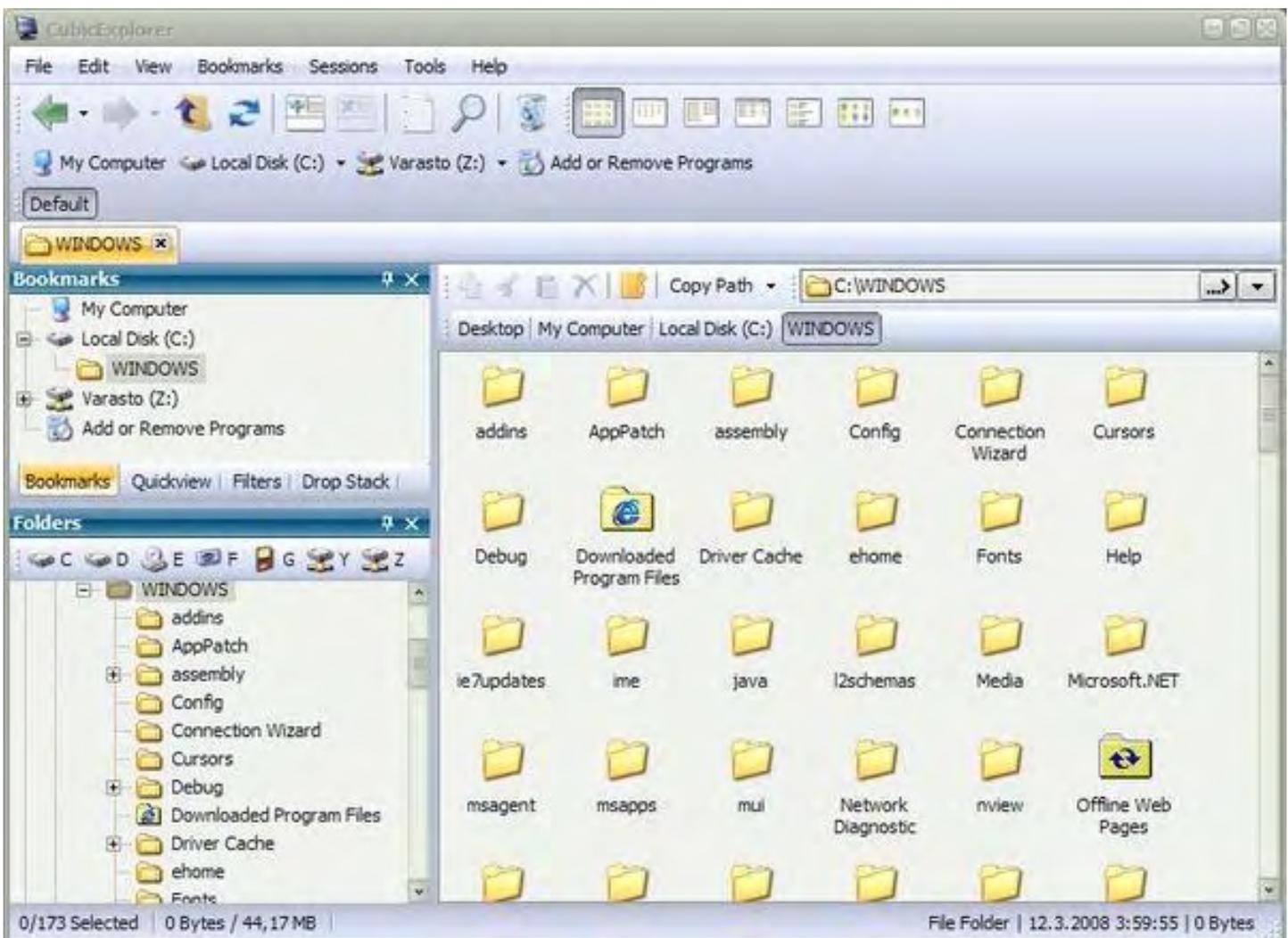


Figure 3. CubicExplorer interface.

Years ago, CubicExplorer (CE) was not receiving high marks from industry pundits or users, but now it is turning heads, largely because of its extensive feature list: a clean interface, tabbed browsing, file search with file masking patterns, image gallery and previews, bookmarks, free disk space labels, thumbnails, a built-in text editor, empty Recycle Bin button, multilingual support, toolbar customization, direct access to Windows display settings, native video playback,

and many themes to choose from to change its appearance.

FreeCommander

Of all the freeware and shareware file utilities for Windows, FreeCommander (www.freecommander.com/) may have the most impressive list of capabilities: move, copy, delete (even secure wiping) and rename files and folders; rename multiple files; tabbed interface; dual-panel viewing (horizontal and vertical); tree view for each panel (optional); file filters for display; built-in file viewer (in text, binary, hexadecimal, and image format); archive handling (ZIP, CAB, RAR formats); file viewer in archive files; nested archive handling; file searching (inside archives, too); uploading and downloading of files using FTP; access to system folders, Control Panel, desktop and Start Menu; file properties and context menu; file splitting; folder sizes; folder comparison and synchronization; modification of file timestamps and attributes; favorite folders and programs; user-defined columns for detailed view; DOS command line; multiple language support; and many more.

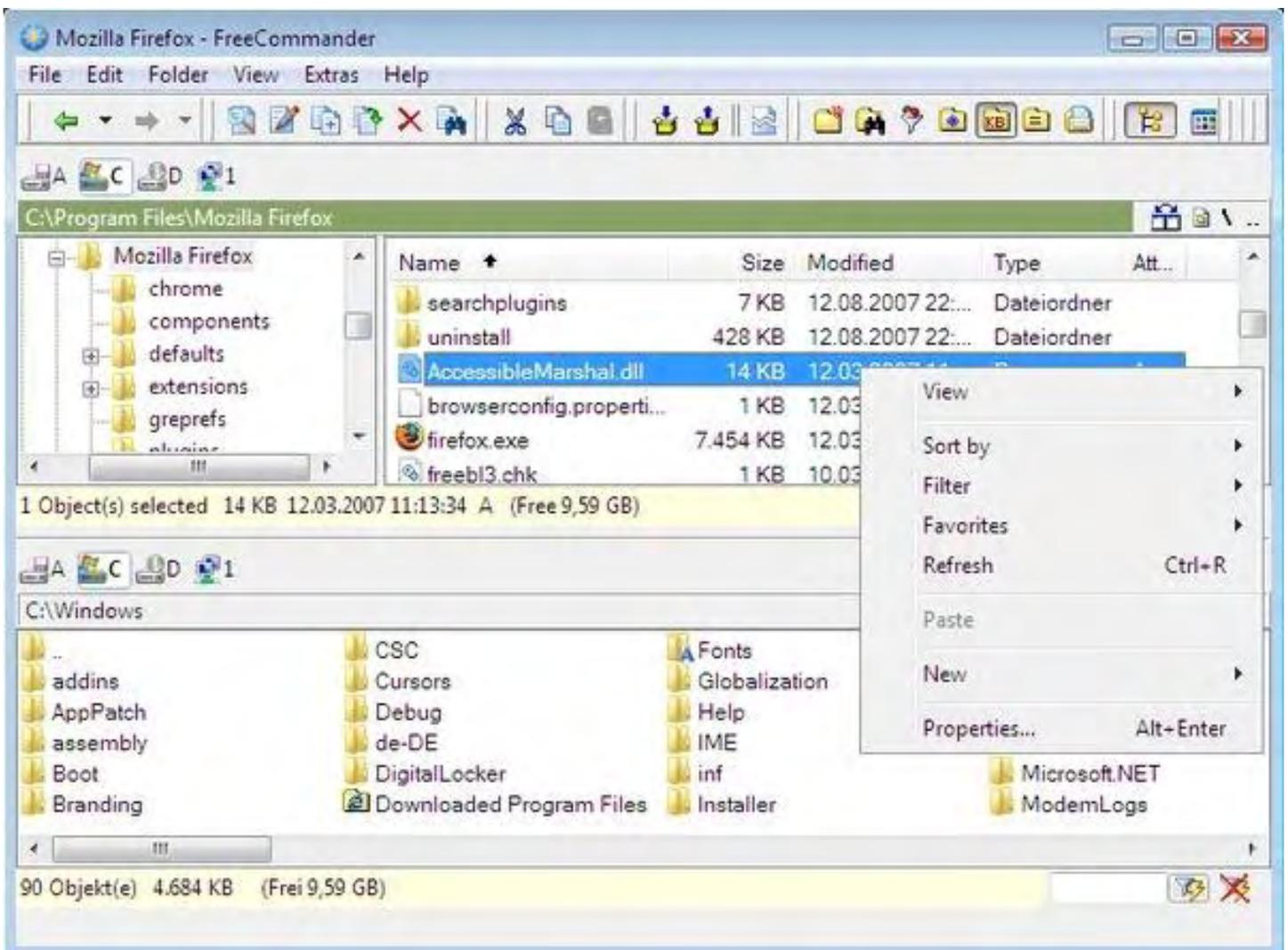


Figure 4. FreeCommander interface.

Admittedly, a laundry list of features does not necessarily mean that a particular application is the best one for you in the long run. But that's one of the great things about free software: You can try it, at no risk, with no time limits. If you later find a superior replacement, you may have lost a

few hours trying out your first choice (and perhaps a few nerves as well, if it proved quite unsatisfactory); but at least you didn't lose any money.

Windows Explorer hasn't changed much over the years. Now you have the opportunity to make a change, and switch to a better file manager.

Michael J. Ross is a Web developer (www.ross.ws), writer, and freelance editor. He creates Web sites that help entrepreneurs turn their ideas into profitable online businesses.

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Windows 7 Utilities: Power Alternatives

“Alternative utilities for the old Windows standbys.” by Pete Choppin

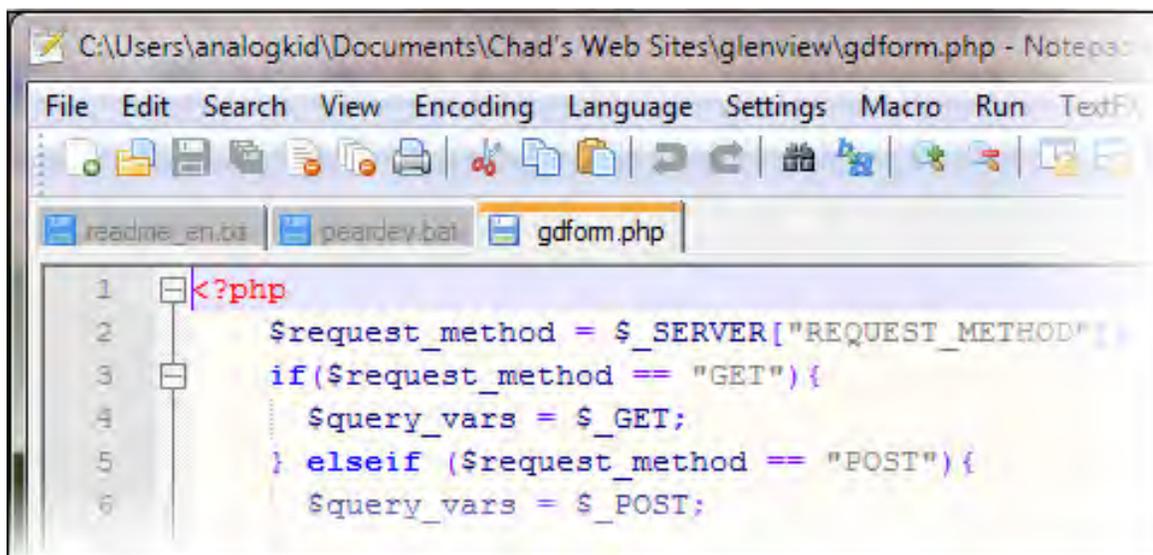
Even with all Windows 7's built-in utilities, there are still many tools and tweaks that can enhance this already outstanding version of the Windows operating system.



Believe it or not, Windows 7 has been officially on the market for seven months, and it has generally had very positive reception. Microsoft has packed this OS with tons of great features. But even with all the built-in utilities, there are still many tools and tweaks that can enhance this already outstanding version of the Windows operating system.

If you are looking for alternative utilities for some of the old Windows standbys, here are some to consider.

Notepad++



Windows 7 Built-in: Notepad
Alternative: Notepad++

Imagine Notepad with tabs, HTML and other programming languages, with code and markup collapsibility and

```

} elseif ($request_method == "POST") {
    $query_vars = $_POST;

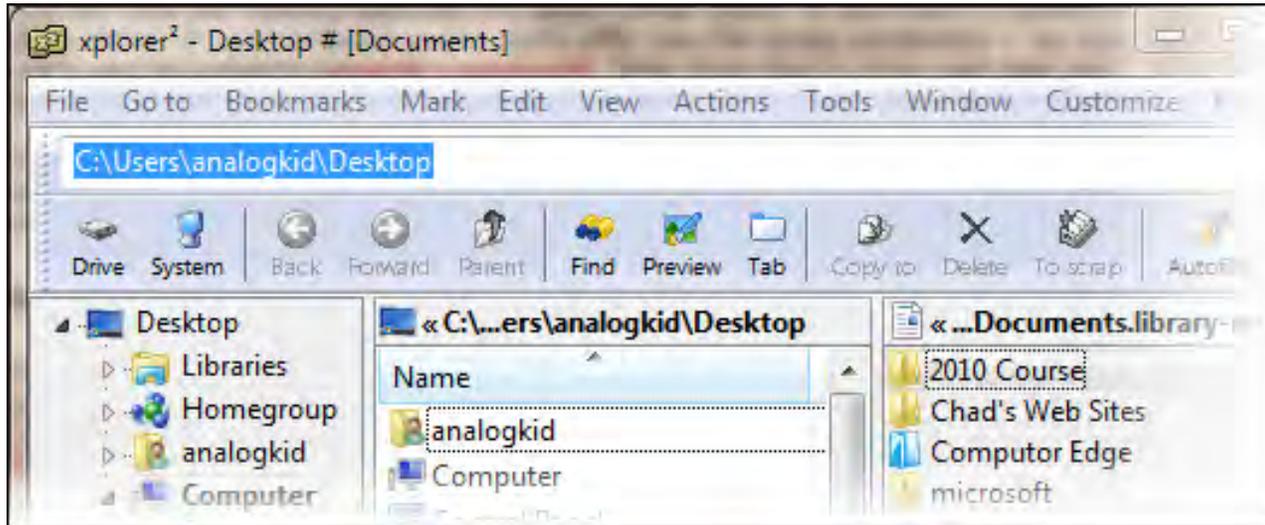
```

plug-ins. Notepad+

+ (notepad-plus.sourceforge.net/uk/site.htm), built on the C++ programming language, is a super-enhanced version of the old text editor.

Want to take Notepad++ to other computers? Try Notepad++ Portable (portableapps.com/apps/development/notepadpp_portable). It doesn't actually install anything or write to the Registry, so it will work the same everywhere you go (Windows only).

Xplorer2

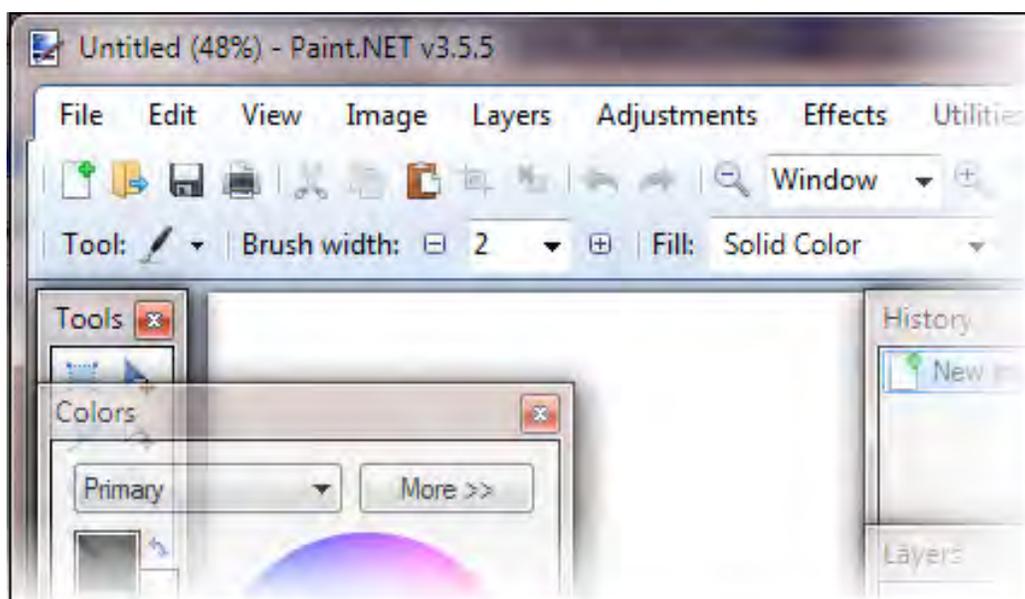


Windows 7
Built in:
Windows
Explorer
Alternative:
Xplorer2

What do
you get
with
Xplorer2
(zabkat.com/x2lite).

htm)? What *don't* you get? Three-panel tabbed interface, the folder set bookmarking and full FTP support to name a few features. This is a very powerful alternative to the standard Windows Explorer. Xplorer2 blows Windows Explorer out of the water for anyone who browses multiple folders, copies, pastes, moves and searches the PC file system frequently. Using Xplorer2's tabbed, dual-pane interface, keyboard shortcuts and killer advanced features, you're in total control of your PC's files.

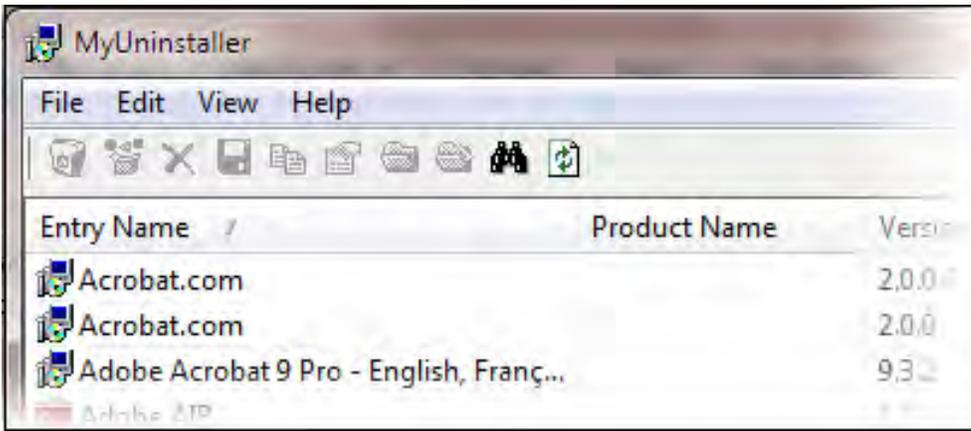
Paint.NET



Windows 7 Built in: Paint
Alternative: Paint.NET

Paint.NET (www.getpaint.net/index.html) is a powerful, lightweight image-editing alternative to Photoshop and GIMP. If you need to do basic/intermediate image editing from time to time, but you don't need the horsepower of Photoshop or GIMP, Paint.NET is a wonderful alternative.

MyUninstaller



Windows 7 Built-in: Add/Remove Programs (in Control Panel)
 Alternative: MyUninstaller
 Windows only: Freeware application MyUninstaller (www.nirsoft.net/utills/myuninst.html) is a lightweight replacement to the Windows

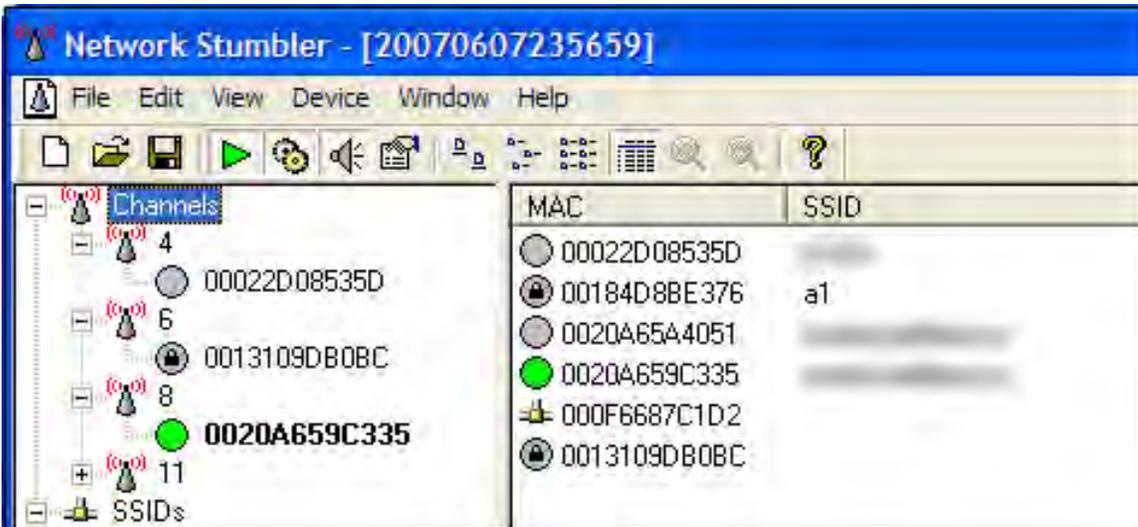
Add/Remove Programs dialog, similar to Revo Uninstaller (www.revouninstaller.com/) (which is not free). The main difference, other than cost, is rather than going for an impressive feature set of uninstall capabilities, MyUninstaller is a very simple, barebones uninstaller. It runs from a stand-alone executable and is therefore very lightweight and non-intrusive.

Launchy

Windows 7 Built in: Start menu
 Alternative: Launchy

The start menu for Windows 7 is definitely an improvement over Windows XP, but Launchy (launchy.net) is still worth mentioning. This little utility allows you to perform a multitude of tasks like open Web site URLs, run commands or open documents from the "Launcher."

NetStumbler



Windows 7 Built-in: Wi-Fi network detector
 Alternative: NetStumbler
 A nice alternative to the built-in network detector in Windows is NetStumbler (www.netstumbler.com/downloads/), which

can even detect networks that don't broadcast their SSID, with signal strength and encryption status.

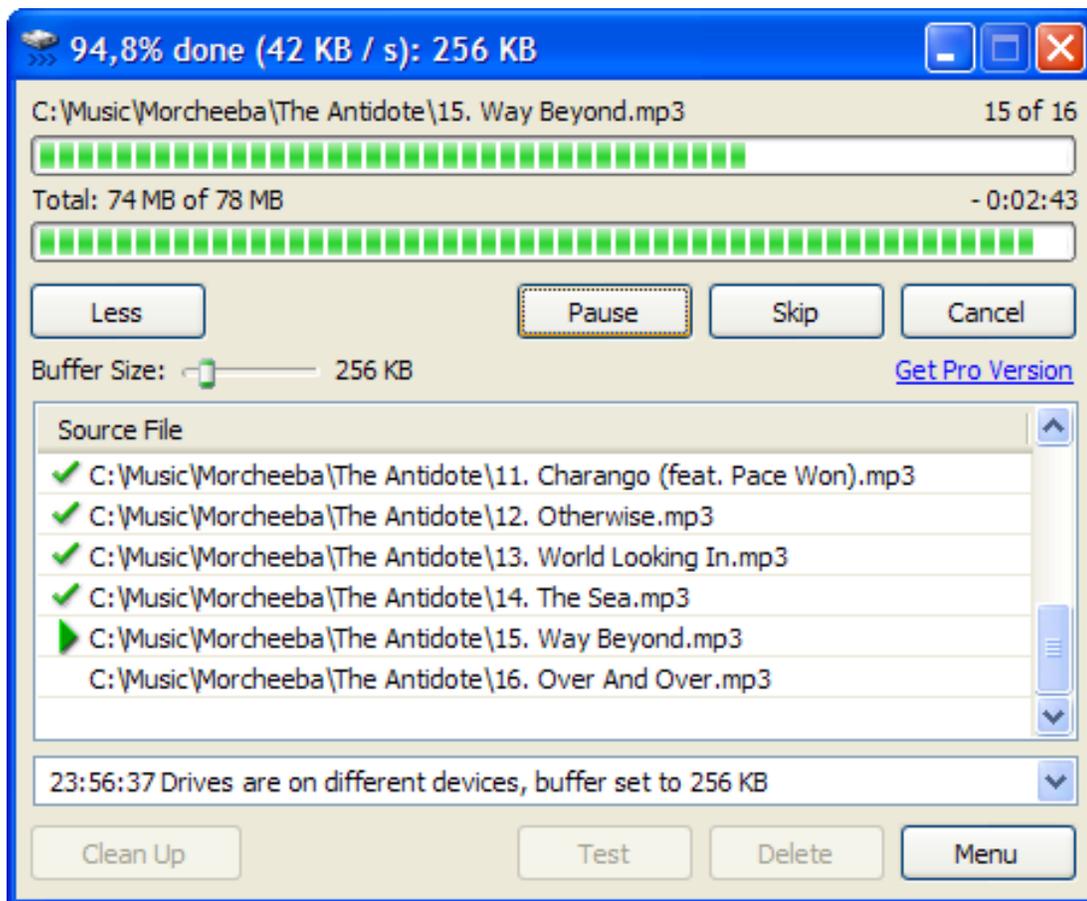
Cygwin

Windows 7 Built in: Command Prompt

Alternative: Cygwin or PowerShell

Cygwin (*cygwin.net*) is a powerful command-line interface built to run in the Windows environment but with more commands, and more familiar commands, for those of us who work on *nix platforms when we're not on Windows, are available in the Cygwin Unix emulator and Microsoft's own new PowerShell command prompt apps. However, this is not to say that PowerShell is in any way a replacement or satisfactory alternative to the Unix command-line environment. The Unix command shell typically relies on a combination of newer tools and classic Unix utilities; the PowerShell has its own set of command-line programs. Neither the twain shall meet.

TeraCopy



Windows 7 Built in:
Windows Explorer file
copy operation
Alternative: TeraCopy

A free file-copying utility, TeraCopy (www.codesector.com/teracopy.php) speeds up file transfers and can pause, resume and test file copy operations. With TeraCopy you can:

1. Copy files faster. TeraCopy uses dynamically adjusted buffers to reduce seek times. Asynchronous copy speeds up file

transfer between two physical hard drives.

2. Pause and resume file transfers. Pause copy process at any time to free up system resources and continue with a single click.

3. Error recovery. In case of copy error, TeraCopy will try several times and in the worse case just skips the file, not terminating the entire transfer.

You can also use TeraCopy to diff the contents of two directories by running a "Test" copy, which shows you which files exist in the destination directory as compared to the source. If you've ever

had Windows fail at the very last minute of a multi-gigabyte file copy, TeraCopy's for you. TeraCopy is a free download for home use for Windows.

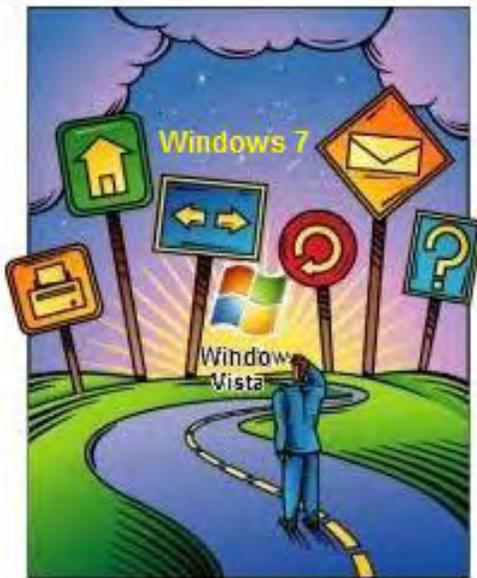
Windows 7 is taking the computer and software industry by storm. Microsoft has put a great deal of thought and improvements (after the Vista blunder) into this OS. However, for those of us who love our power with the computer, there are many really nice alternatives as well.

Feel free to submit your own recommendations for great alternatives to Windows utilities. I'd love to hear from you.

Pete Choppin has been an IT Professional for over 15 years. He currently works as a network and systems administrator for a company called Albion based in Clearfield, Utah. He has experience in all types of hardware, software, and networking technologies. He is proficient in many operating systems including Linux, Windows and Macintosh. His interests include cooking, sci-fi, computers and technology, and Web design—a semi-professional endeavor, having designed Web sites in the dental field, e-commerce businesses, and for the Boy Scouts of America.

Pete has been a devout reader of *ComputerEdge* since 1990 and contributes regularly to featured articles as well as the Linux Lessons section of *ComputerEdge*. He can be contacted at pchoppin@comcast.net but prefers to have comments on *ComputerEdge* articles submitted to the editor and posted for the benefit of all readers.

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Windows Tips and Tricks

Windows Tips and Tricks: A Toolbar Trick “Easier Windows File Navigation” by Jack Dunning

Jack explores a technique for adding toolbars to the Taskbar, giving you much quicker access to your most important folders and files without loading any other programs, such as Windows Explorer.

Last week's foray into restoring the Quick Launch to Taskbar in Windows 7 opened up a number of other possibilities for easier Windows navigation without using Windows Explorer. The techniques shown here should work with all versions of Windows—although the Libraries portion mentioned is Windows 7 only. This will work equally as well whether using any Windows folder or the Windows 7 Libraries.

The concept is to add the same type of tree menu file location to the Taskbar as is found in the older Windows XP Start Menu for program location. The primary difference is that you are now locating commonly used folders and files rather than programs—without opening Windows Explorer. For the example here, I'm using Windows Libraries only because it will give a long list of files located on another computer. It works the same way with local folders and files.

The first step is to right-click on an empty area of the Taskbar and select Toolbars/New Toolbar, as shown below in Figure 1—and as demonstrated last week.

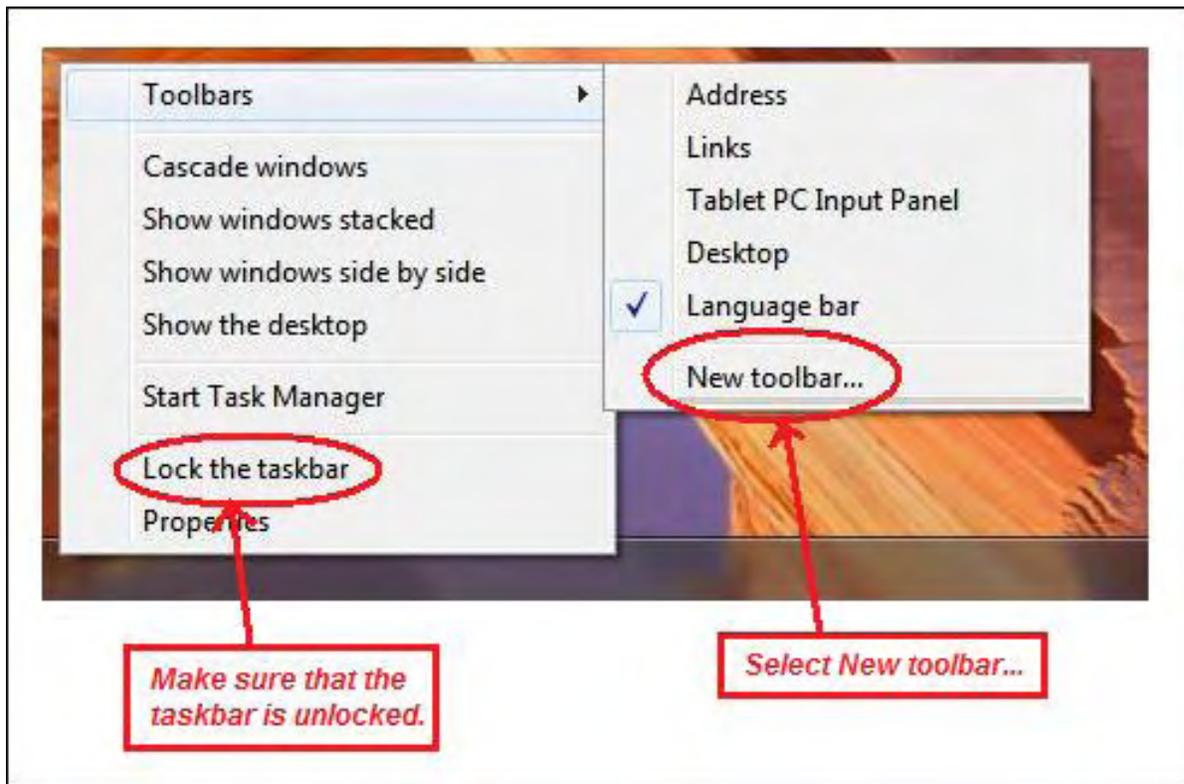


Figure 1. Creating a new toolbar.

The New Toolbar window will open (see Figure 2). In this situation Libraries is highlighted and selected, but you can navigate to and select your most used folder or a Favorite as well. When Select Folder is clicked, it will be added to the Taskbar with only the title of the folder showing. This is the same title that can be removed by right-clicking on the dotted area just to the left of the toolbars. (The dotted area will not display unless the Taskbar is unlocked—right-click on an empty area of the Taskbar and uncheck "Lock the taskbar.")

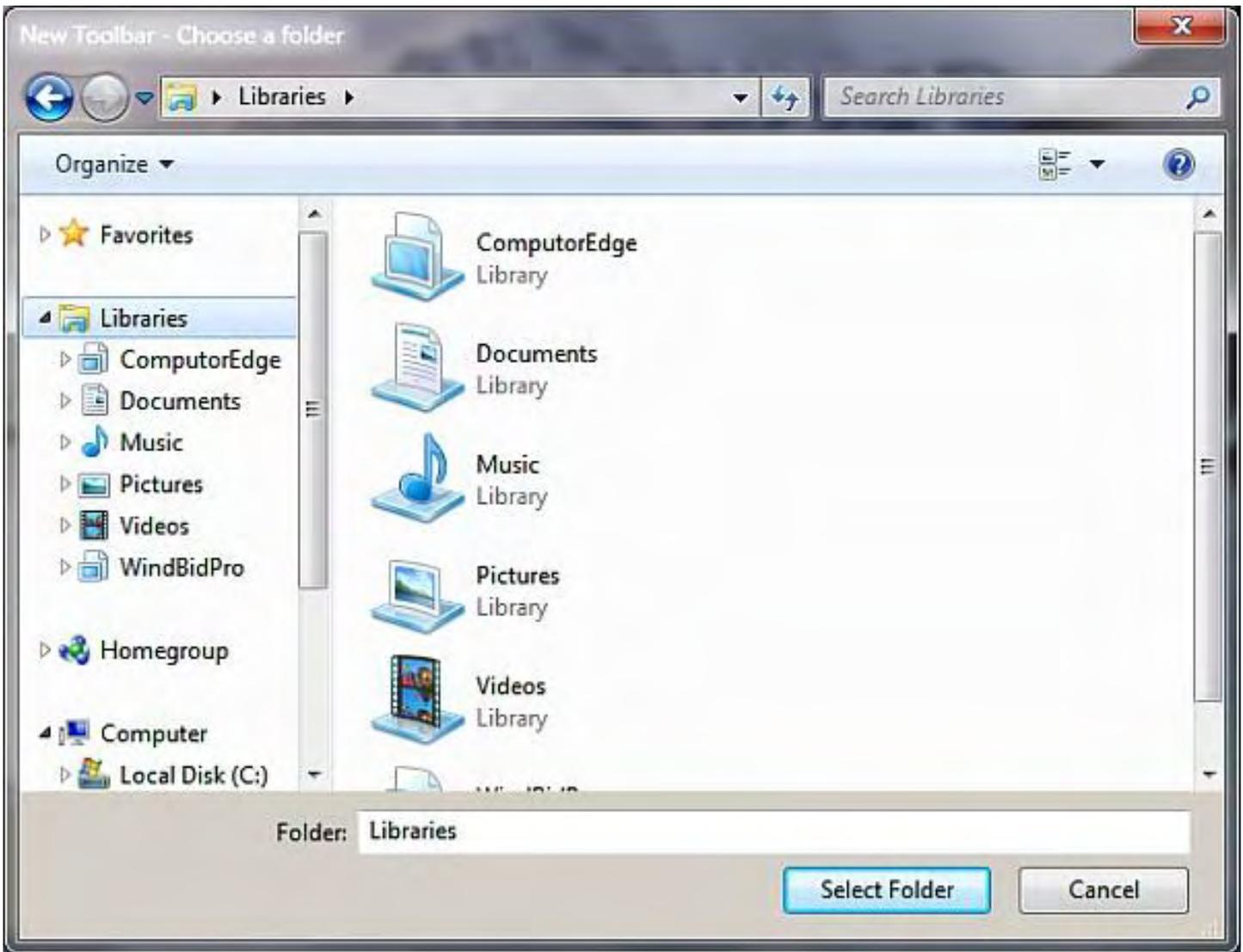


Figure 2. The New Toolbar window.

At this point the menu navigation will be fully available by clicking on the double arrow (>>) to the right of the title as shown in Figure 3. If you click on a file, it will open. If you double-click on a folder, it will open in Windows Explorer.

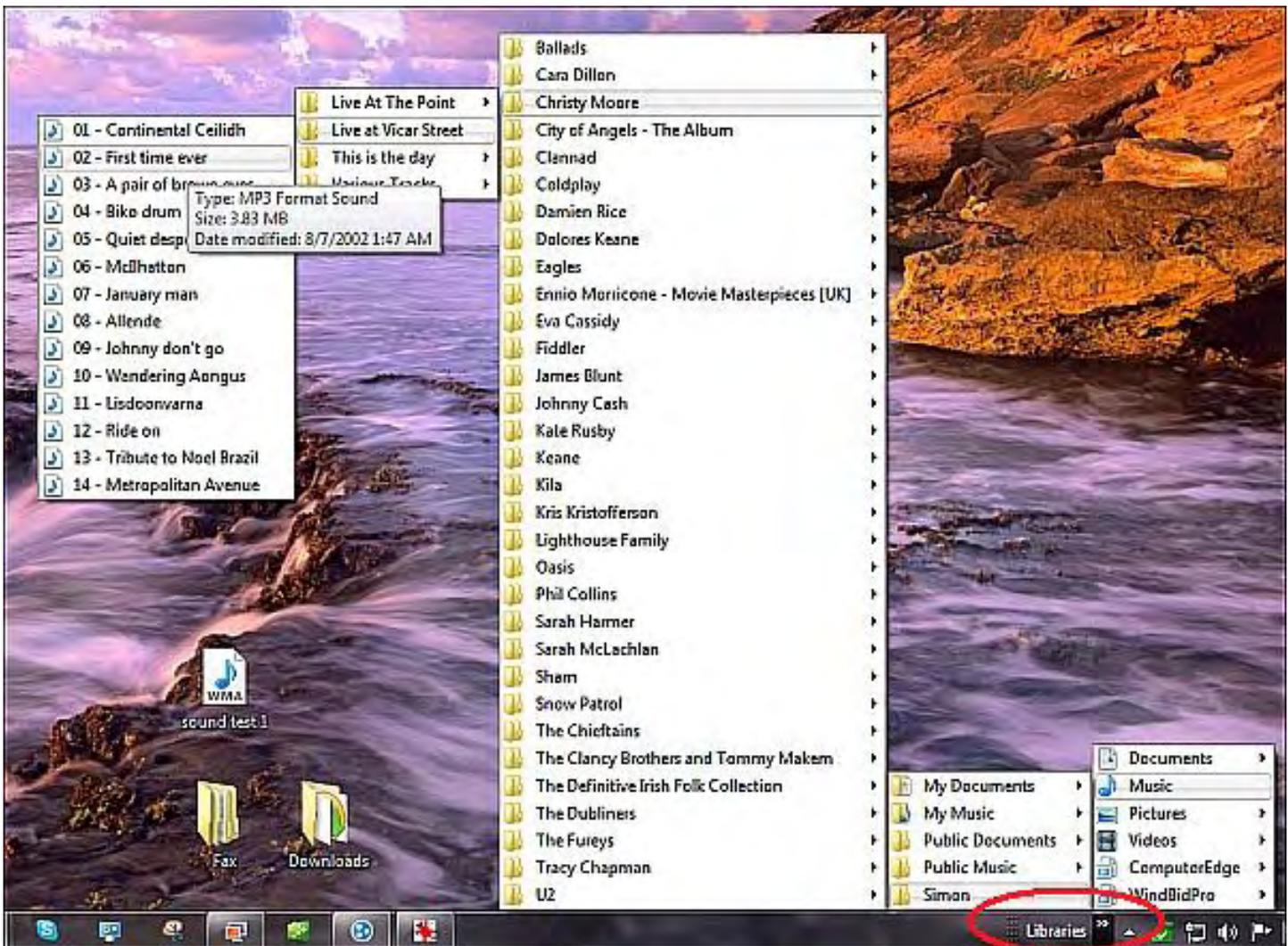


Figure 2. A toolbar that will navigate folders and files.

It is important to note that the menu structure activated by the double arrows will show only those folders that do not appear on the taskbar. In other words, if you drag the toolbar to the left with a left-click on the raised dotted area on the left side of the toolbar, thereby revealing folder names and/or icons, the exposed folders will no longer appear in the double-arrow navigation menu—although each new button will become a quick launch for opening the selected folder in Windows Explorer. If you expose all the initial folders, the double arrows will disappear. They can be brought back by dragging back to the right or dragging another toolbar up on the right side.

At this point, if so desired, you may drag the toolbar all the way to the left, next to the Start Menu, by clicking and holding the dots on the left side of the toolbar, then moving the mouse to the left. Make sure that there is another toolbar (Quick Launch, Desktop, etc.) butted up against the new toolbar keeping the folder names and/or icons hidden. Then your menu tree will operate in a manner similar to the old Windows XP program menus cascading out to the right until you make your selection.

It is probably best to leave Show Title checked for this type of new toolbar since, for most cases, the first subfolder will be displayed, merely causing confusion.

Using this technique for adding toolbars to the Taskbar can give you much quicker access to

your most important folders and files without loading any other programs, such as Windows Explorer.

Jack is the publisher of *ComputerEdge* Magazine. He's been with the magazine since first issue on May 16, 1983. Back then, it was called *The Byte Buyer*. His Web site is www.computoredge.com. He can be reached at ceeditor@computoredge.com

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

“Running Windows on Your Macintosh” by Wally Wang

To run Windows programs on a Macintosh, you have two free choices and two choices that will cost you money. Also, the continuing success of the iPad; Photoshop CS5's latest features are irresistible; and a tip on using the Paste and Match Style command.

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

Although the Macintosh market continues to grow, there are still some programs that only run on Windows. AutoCAD runs only on Windows, but the company recently announced that it is developing a Macintosh version (www.macrumors.com/2010/05/22/autocad-coming-to-mac-first-beta-screenshots). SolidWorks, another 3-D drawing program, is also rumored to be developing a Macintosh version of its software. Steam, a gaming platform that had previously been available only for Windows, recently ported its game engine to the Macintosh (store.steampowered.com/news/3569/). From the initial results, Steam claims (arstechnica.com/apple/news/2010/05/mac-lags-windows-in-gaming-performance-excels-at-stability.ars) that the Macintosh's graphics performance lags behind Windows, but its stability is five times greater than Windows.



"They were caught running Windows programs on their Macs."

Companies recognize that they need to tap into the lucrative Macintosh market or risk losing potential customers. Unfortunately, many smaller developers can't afford to support more than one operating system, so specialized programs may exist only on Windows (which also creates opportunities for Macintosh developers). To run Windows programs on a Macintosh, you have two free choices and two choices that will cost you money.

The first free choice is to use Boot Camp, Apple's dual-boot solution that lets you install Windows XP, Vista or Windows 7 on a separate disk partition on your Macintosh. The main advantage

of this option is that it essentially turns your Macintosh into a PC so you won't experience any

compatibility problems. The drawback is that you must choose between Windows (Windows XP, Vista, or Windows 7) or Mac OS X. Any time you want to switch operating systems, you'll have to reboot your computer.

The second free choice is to download a free copy of Virtual Box (www.virtualbox.org) from Oracle. Virtual Box lets you load any operating system into a virtual machine, which lets you run Mac OS X in the background and another operating system (such as Windows 98 or Linux) in a separate window.



Figure 1. Virtual Box running Windows XP on Mac OS X.

The drawback of a program like Virtual Box is that it runs other operating systems slightly slower, but the advantage is that you can easily switch back and forth between Mac OS X and another operating system, essentially running two or more operating systems simultaneously.

While Virtual Box is getting better all the time, two commercial virtualization programs that offer greater reliability and faster speed are Parallels (www.amazon.com/gp/product/B002X7F2Y2?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B002X7F2Y2) and Fusion (www.amazon.com/gp/product/B002Q72JB8?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B002Q72JB8). If you need to run Windows programs regularly but prefer doing the bulk of your work in Mac OS X, installing Windows in a virtualization program gives you the best of both operating systems.

Before you rush off to install Windows on your Macintosh, determine what software you need to

run. Often times you'll find that you don't need to run Windows 7 (which needs a minimum of 1GB RAM). Instead you can save memory by running either Windows XP (512MB RAM) or even Windows 2000 (256MB RAM), which you may still be able to buy from eBay or local computer stores. The less memory devoted to running a Windows virtual machine, the more memory your Macintosh can use.

By running Windows on a Macintosh, you can see the differences between the two operating systems on a daily basis through your own experience. You may want to run Windows regularly to run certain Windows programs, or you may just want to run Windows periodically until you can make the transition to the Macintosh altogether. Whatever your goals, you'll find that the Macintosh's flexibility in running Windows gives you greater options than using Windows alone.

The Continuing Success of the iPad

Despite all the critics' proclamations of "Failure!" about the iPad before its launch, the iPad has rejuvenated the previously moribund tablet market and spawned numerous copycats from Hewlett-Packard and Dell and even smaller companies trying to cash in on the suddenly hot tablet market. Apple claims to have sold more than one million iPads within the first month, and the company is still having a hard time keeping them in stock. By the end of May, Apple will start selling iPads internationally, so analysts predict that Apple could sell five million iPads by the end of the year.

Now members of Congress have started adopting the iPad to replace stacks of paperwork and reports (www.politico.com/news/stories/0510/37518.html). Part of the iPad's appeal is that you don't have to worry about becoming "iPad literate" in the same way that people need to become "computer literate." Without the need to learn arcane commands, cryptic user interfaces, or periodic maintenance tasks such as defragmenting a hard disk or optimizing the Windows Registry, ordinary people can pick up and use an iPad to get something done right away.

Many CEOs are also touting the benefits of the iPad (www.zdnet.com/blog/btl/tech-bigwigs-in-love-with-apples-ipad-push-business-case/34744). CEOs generally don't embrace technology for the sake of using something new, so it's likely that the iPad's greatest supporters are those who understand technology and appreciate well-designed products, and those who could care less about technology and just want something fun that works.

This shift to the iPad will likely continue as more students grow up with Apple products without the prejudice of using Windows all their lives. The Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) has announced that, like Seton Hill University students, IIT students will also receive a free iPad (www.chicagobreakingnews.com/2010/05/iit-to-give-all-freshmen-a-free-ipad.html) to take notes, read e-mail, surf the Internet, and read e-books. George Fox University students in Oregon can now choose between a free iPad or a MacBook laptop, and a flight school in the United Kingdom is using iPads to replace bulky manuals and flight reports (ipadmodo.com/1061/ipad-used-in-flight-school-eliminates-extra-baggage).

Clearly many people see the advantages of the iPad and are embracing its use in ways that traditional laptop or netbook computers can't do very well. For those who want a tablet device but refuse to buy anything from Apple, take a look at the JooJoo tablet (thejoojoo.com), a rival tablet device that offers Flash support, a built-in camera, and a USB port, which are features that iPad critics claimed were absolutely necessary for a tablet device to succeed.

Engadget reviewed the JooJoo tablet (www.engadget.com/2010/04/05/fusion-garage-joojoo-review) and came to these conclusions:

Flash support: "Currently the device is running Flash 10.1 beta 1, and won't have hardware-accelerated Flash video for a good while now (the timing is partly reliant on Adobe support, and is labeled as a "work in progress" by JooJoo). That means some regular-sized YouTube and Hulu works, as decoded by the CPU, but full-screen Hulu is jittery, and a 720p YouTube clip is like watching a slide-show."

Built-in camera: "The camera on the top of the screen is apparently meant for video conferencing, but all our attempts to video chat through Meebo or Tokbox failed."

Battery life: "The JooJoo's integrated three-cell battery repeatedly lasted 2.5 hours (just as we predicted!) during our moderate use, which included surfing the Web and playing short videos. JooJoo claims you can get 5 hours if you avoid Flash entirely, but that sort of defeats the purpose, right?"

Conclusion: "Even putting aside the fact that Apple's \$499 iPad brings more to the table than just Web browsing, the JooJoo is less portable, has a worse (if larger) screen, is unintuitive to use, and ships with half-baked software. We commend the start-up on its nice piece of hardware design, but until the software is given some much-needed love and the price is seriously reevaluated we simply cannot recommend this tablet. To add insult to injury, Apple's entry level iPad provides a much more seamless and feature-packed experience..."

One crucial element to notice in Engadget's review is that hardware features alone are worthless if the software fails to make the hardware work or makes the device too hard to use altogether. A second key element to notice is the problem with Flash. To get Flash working right depends on Adobe and Flash is so inefficient that it effectively halves the JooJoo tablet's battery life.

Anyone out there still think hardware features alone are important or that Flash is so important that it doesn't matter how it affects battery life and the user's experience just as long as you have it?

Amazing Photoshop Tricks

Every time Adobe (www.adobe.com) releases a new version of Photoshop, the company finds new ways to make advanced editing easier and more powerful than before. One of the latest tricks in the new Photoshop CS5 is the ability to select part of an image, remove that image, and automatically fill in the background, effectively making part of an image appear as if it were never there.

In the past, this type of photo-editing magic might have taken hours to accomplish, but in the new Photoshop CS5, this task can be accomplished within seconds. Just start with an image that contains something that you want to delete, such as a person or an object like a tree or building.



Figure 2. Start with an image that contains something you want to eliminate.

Select the image that you want to eliminate using your favorite selection tool, such as the Magic Wand or the Magnetic Lasso tool.



Figure 3. Selecting an image to wipe out.

After you select an image, you can choose the Fill command to fill in the selected area with the surrounding image. As long as the background image is fairly uniform, Photoshop can accurately fill in the area and make an image seem to disappear. If the background image is not uniform but consists of different colors, then this fill process won't be as seamless.



Figure 4. After selecting an image to wipe out, select the Fill command with the Content Awareness option.

Choosing the Fill command fills in your selected area and makes the image seem to disappear. This process won't always be perfect, so you may still need to edit portions of the picture to complete the editing process, but Photoshop takes care of the toughest part of deleting an image so you can do the relatively minor task of cleaning up the rest.



Figure 5. The final edited image.

This ability to wipe out an image and fill it in with a surrounding background is just one of Photoshop CS5's latest features. If you're a Photoshop user, you may find these latest features are too irresistible to pass up.

* * *

When you copy and paste text from one program to another, the formatting of the pasted text rarely matches the document where you want to paste the new text. For example, copying text from a Web page often displays different fonts and font sizes than the text stored in a Pages document.

To avoid this problem of copying and pasting text that appears in a different font, Pages and most other Macintosh programs offer a special "Paste and Match Style" command. This command essentially pastes text and reformats it so that it appears in the same font and font size as surrounding text.

Now you can copy text displayed in a Courier font off a Web page and paste it into a Pages document formatted using the Helvetica font. If you just choose the ordinary Paste command, your pasted Web page text will remain in the Courier font surrounded by text formatted in the Helvetica font.

In the early days, before Wally became an Internationally renowned comedian, computer book writer, and generally cool guy, Wally Wang used to hang around The Byte Buyer dangling participles with Jack Dunning and go to the gym to pump iron with Dan Gookin.

Wally is responsible for the following books:

- Microsoft Office 2007 for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470009233?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470009233),
- Beginning Programming for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470088702?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470088702),
- Breaking Into Acting for Dummies with Larry Garrison (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0764554468?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0764554468), Beginning Programming All-in-One Reference for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470108541?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470108541),
- Steal This Computer Book 4.0 (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271050?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271050),
- Visual Basic Express 2005: Now Playing (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593270593?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593270593),
- My New Mac (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271646?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271646),
- My New iPhone (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271956?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271956),
- Strategic Entrepreneurism with Jon Fisher and Gerald Fisher (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1590791894?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1590791894).

When not performing stand-up comedy or writing computer books, he likes to paper trade stocks with the video game Stock Reflex (www.plimus.com/jsp/download_trial.jsp?contractId=1722712&referrer=wwang), using the techniques he learned from a professional Wall Street day trader.

In his spare time, Wally likes blogging about movies and writing screenplays at his site "The 15 Minute Movie Method." (www.15minutemoviemethod.com/) Wally can be reached at wally@computoredge.com.

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Rob, The Computer Tutor

Rob, The ComputerTutor: Technology Solutions

“Word Formats and Paragraphs” by
Rob Spahitz

Last week, we looked at most of Word 2010's character-formatting features. This week we wrap that up and begin looking at paragraph features, throwing in a few helpful tips, as well.

Last week, we looked at most of Word 2010's character-formatting features. This week we wrap that up and begin looking at paragraph features, throwing in a few helpful tips, as well.

Format Wrap-Up

After reviewing the Font block of Word 2010's ribbon bar, we found most of the common features you need for word processing. In case that's not enough, you may want to see what else is available. Also, if you're used to Word 2003, you may want to get back to familiar territory until you get used to this bizarre new ribbon-bar thingy. Well, you can still right-click on text and select the Font option. However, you can also just click on the bottom-right corner of the Font box, as seen in Figure 1, just below the font color (A with red underline).



Figure 1. Font box.

When you click on that little box and arrow, you get a window showing the standard font features, as seen in Figure 2.

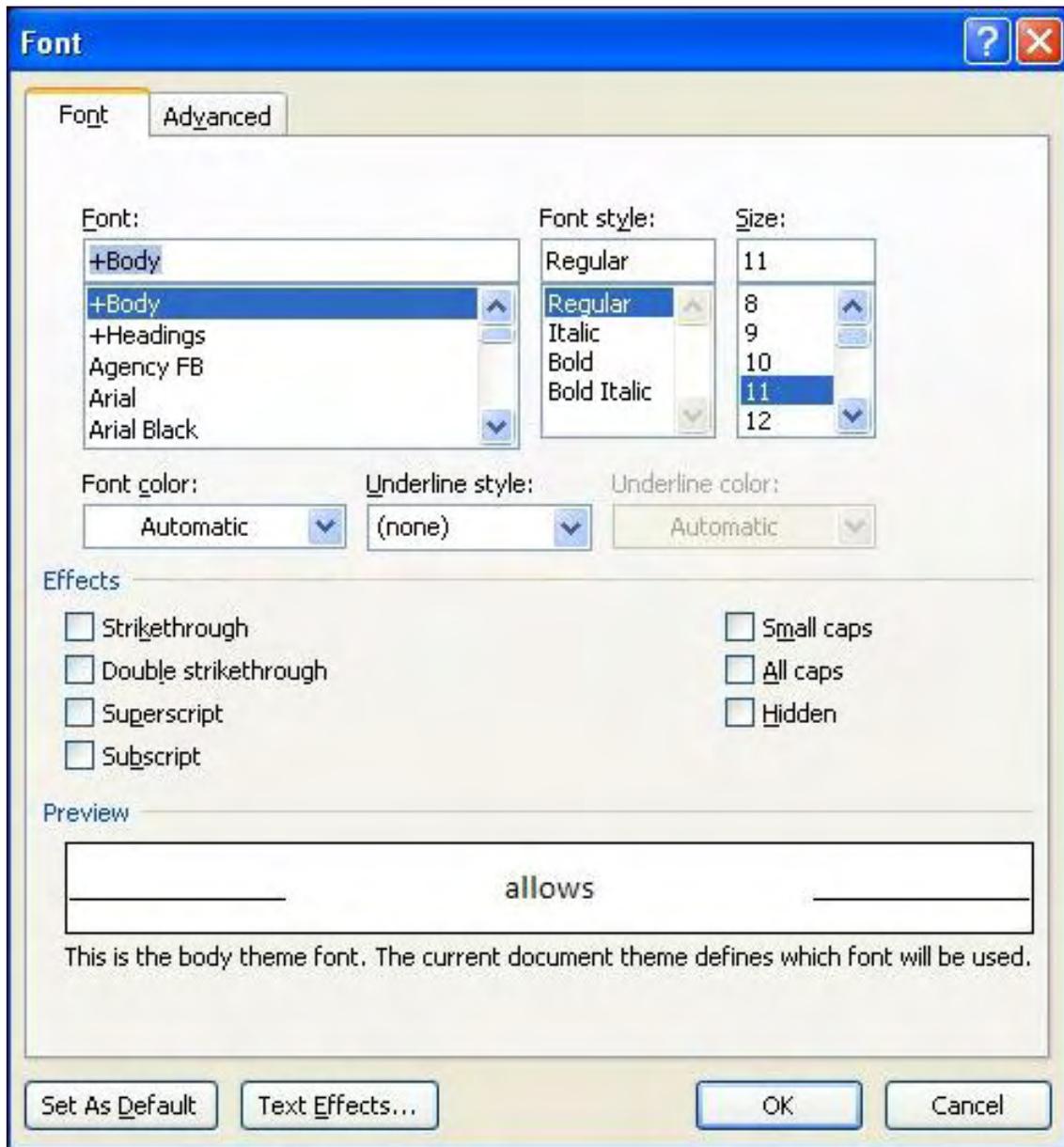


Figure 2. Font Properties.

As we look through the window, we see a lot of the same features we looked at last week: the items shown in the Font box seen in Figure 1. The font name and size are shown there at the top. And Bold and Italics are there, although grouped together rather than as individual icons. You can also find the various underlines, strike-through, superscript and subscript. However, it also offers a "Double strike-through" in case you need two lines drawn through your text. You also get the ability to make all of your selected text capital letters or even a smaller version of capital letters. And up next to the underlining, you can set the text color.

What about other features? "Hidden" allows you to leave the text there, but hide it from the normal view. Why would you want to do that? Well, sometimes you want to add notes to a document (although there are better ways to do that), or you may want to add some text, but you're not sure yet if you'd like to leave it in the final draft. If you hide it, you can see how the document looks without it; if you change your mind, it's easy enough to restore the hidden text. You can select the area around the hidden text (or the whole document if you like) and check the Font properties. If the Hidden check box shows a little green box (rather than blank or a check

mark), it means that some of the text is hidden and some is not. Click it until it's blank and the hidden text is restored.

Another choice is to go to Word's options File menu/Options/Display. There is a choice for "Hidden Text." If you select it, then all of your hidden text will appear with a dotted underline, as seen in Figure 3, with the word "allows." Note that, even though you see it here, this will not print unless you explicitly ask Word to print hidden text, which is another choice on that same option window.

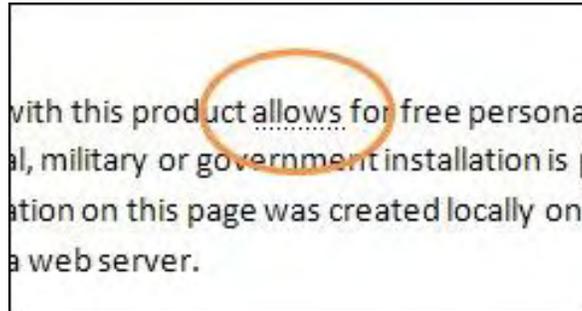


Figure 3. Hidden Text Revealed.

Some things seem to be missing from this window. There's no button to increase or decrease the font size. That was added to the ribbon bar as a special feature; here you can simply scroll up and down the font size list box to find the size you'd like. Since the current size is highlighted, it's easy to see what the next larger or smaller size will be.

The ribbon bar feature that is not in the window is the Text Effects. However, if you look at the bottom, you see a button for that. Clicking that will show the window shown in Figure 4.

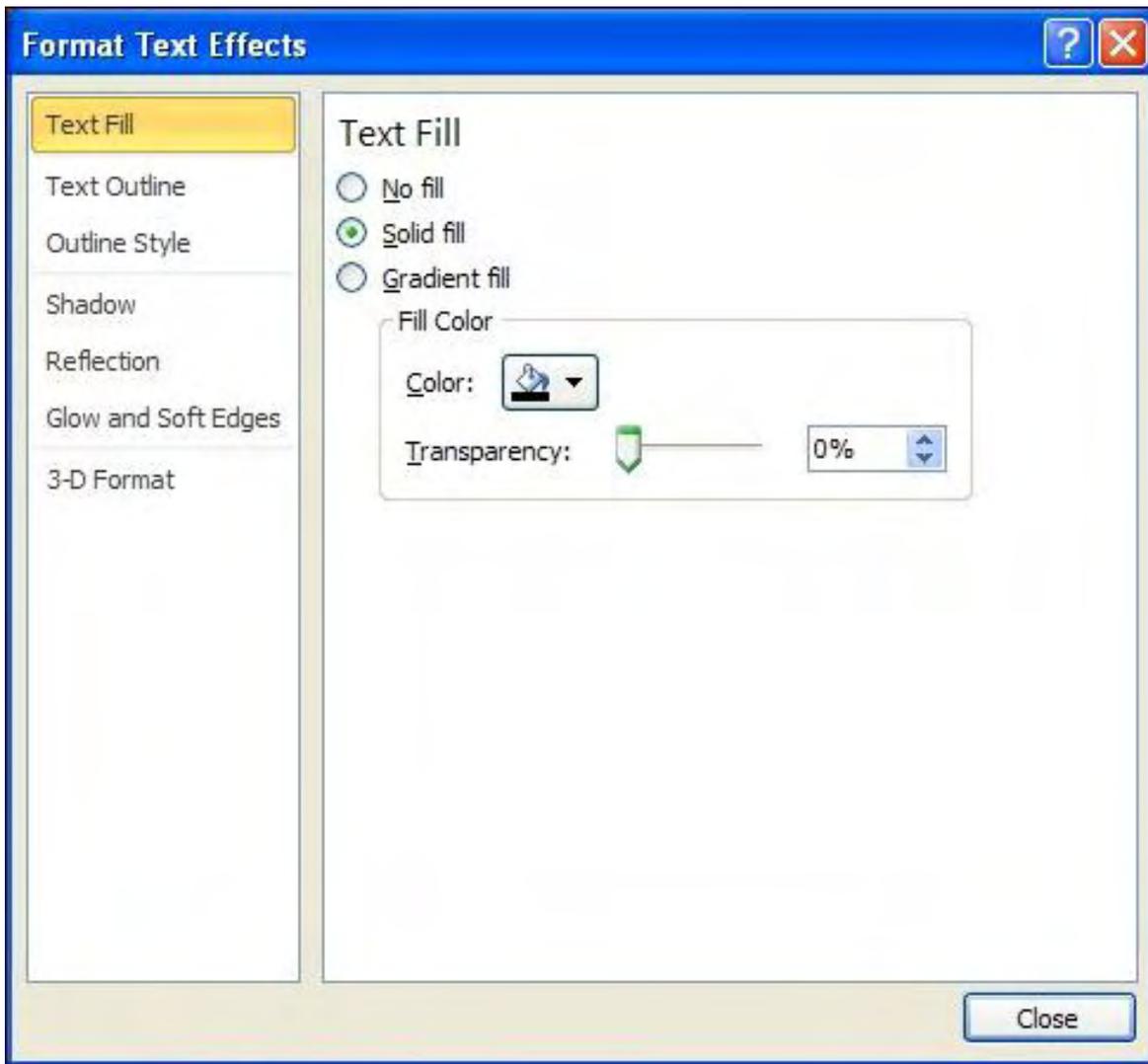


Figure 4. Text Effects.

I leave it to the reader to play with some of these effects, which offer features commonly seen in graphics applications such as Corel Draw.

Finally, if that's not enough, maybe you need to adjust the spacing between the letters of a word or other features found in desktop publishing tools (such as kerning, where something like a capital "T" wraps around the letter "o" in the word "Together.") These can be found in the Advanced tab. Again, these are rarely used by most of us, so I leave it to the reader to explore that area.

Paragraph Pointers

Working up from text characters, the next thing to consider is paragraphs. Back in the typewriter days, we had to manually tell the page to go to the next line to keep typing. With electronic word processors, this is no longer needed since the computer will recalculate the needs of the line as the text changes. But for some reason, people still feel obliged to go to a new line at the wrong times. For example, suppose that you want to double-space your documents. No problem! Every time you press the Enter key, just press it again. Although that works, you may end up missing one along the way, or giving one too many. It also adds extra characters to the document. A better way is to manage your paragraph the more efficient manner. Let's see what paragraph

features are available in Word, starting with those shown in the Paragraph box of the ribbon bar, right next to the Font box, as seen in Figure 5.

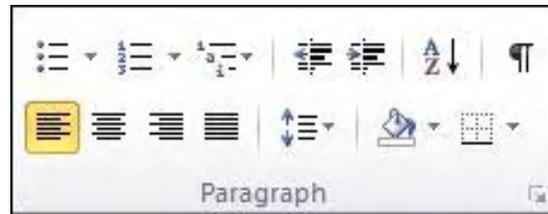


Figure 5. Paragraph Box.

The first three items are related to lists. The bullet list is commonly used to identify a collection of items that are not necessarily shown in any particular order. These "bullets" come in a variety of shapes, including small square blocks, small filled-in or open circles, arrows, check marks or other things. These are seen by clicking the little arrow next to the first item. Oh, and in case the bullet picture you'd like is not shown, you can even make your own custom bullet, pulled from any font on your system or a custom picture. Here's a typical example for the ingredients of a cake:

- * Flour
- * Sugar
- * Eggs
- * Water

Next is the numbered bullet. Unlike the above, these are typically shown in a specific order, such as instructions on how to complete a task. Again, the adjacent arrow key offers a variety of number styles. Huh? How many types of numbers are there? Word offers three "numbers" and two varieties. You get the normal numbering (1, 2, 3), plus Roman numerals (i, ii, iii) in upper or lower case, and even letters (a, b, c) again in upper or lower case. After each "number" you can have a period or an open parenthesis. Again, you can customize this to change the suffix shown after the number and adjust the font of these numbers (different from the text they're being used with). Here's an example for baking a cake:

1. Mix all ingredients
2. Pour into cake pan
3. Bake for 30 minutes

The next item is the multilevel list, commonly used for books and government documents, where sections have subsections and maybe sub-subsections. Again, this offers a collection of bulleted structures such as 1-a-i (numbers, then letters, then Roman numerals), 1-1.1-1.1.1 (keep adding dots and numbers) or a variety of bullet symbols, as seen in Figure 6.

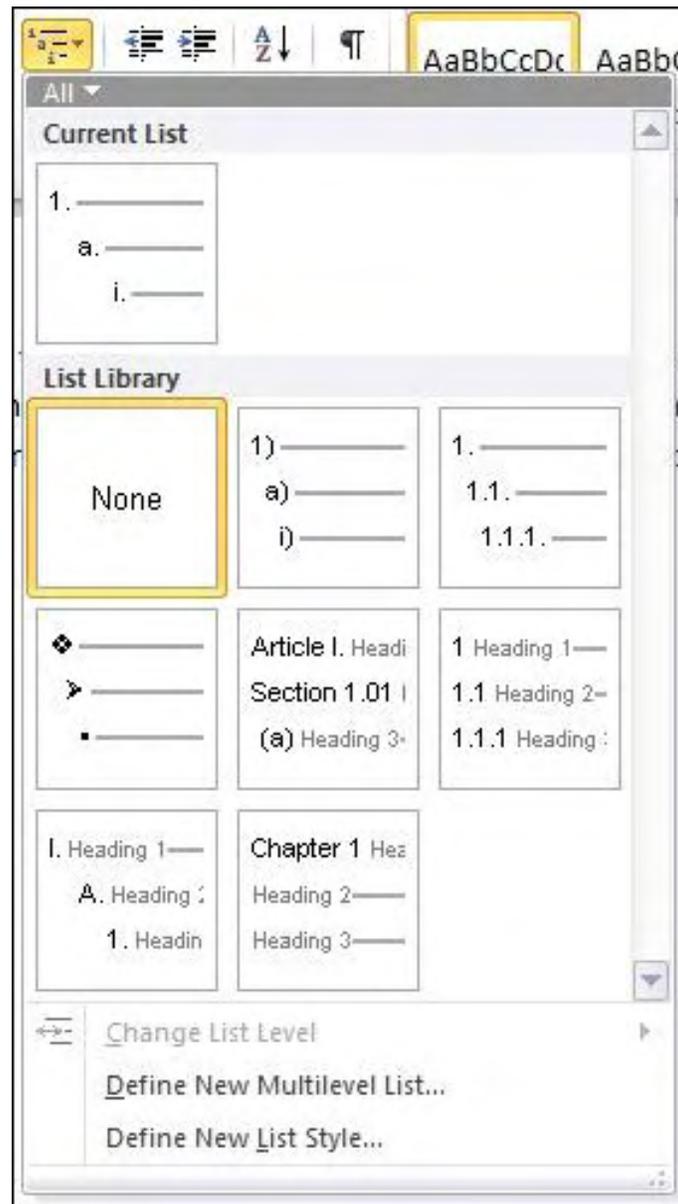


Figure 6. Multilevel bullets.

Aside from bulleting, there are still more paragraph options. Next in line are the indent and "backdent" features. There are two ways to indent text in Word. First is the tab key. This will push the text in to the next defined tab-stop (at .5-inch increments by default). When you do this, only the current line is indented. At the end of the line, as you wrap to the next line, your text returns to the beginning of the line. With a real indent, the entire paragraph is indented so all lines are indented through a more sophisticated set of features. The default is to indent all lines a certain amount of space. That's what this second icon (with the little arrow pointing right) is used for. And to remove the indent, click the other icon (with the arrow pointing left).

By the way, the other features related to this (found in the paragraph options in the bottom right corner of this box, as we saw with font options) lets you create a "first line" indent (similar to using the tab key except that no extra characters are added to your document), or a "hanging" indent, which indents every line EXCEPT the first, which is hanging over to the left of the rest of the paragraph.

Continuing on, we can sort collections of text. This is done by clicking the "A-Z" icon. This is useful when you have a bulleted list and want to arrange the items alphabetically.

Next is the weird-looking backward P. This is the symbol for a paragraph. Here it is used to toggle displaying a mark wherever you have a paragraph within your document. This can be helpful in two ways. One way is to see where you pressed the Enter key multiple times to get to a new paragraph. The other is when you copy text from some sources (like certain Web pages) that may not have any paragraphs at all! By showing the paragraph marks, you'll see things like dots where spaces exist, open circles where double-spacing is applied, and arrows for tabs, as seen in Figure 7.

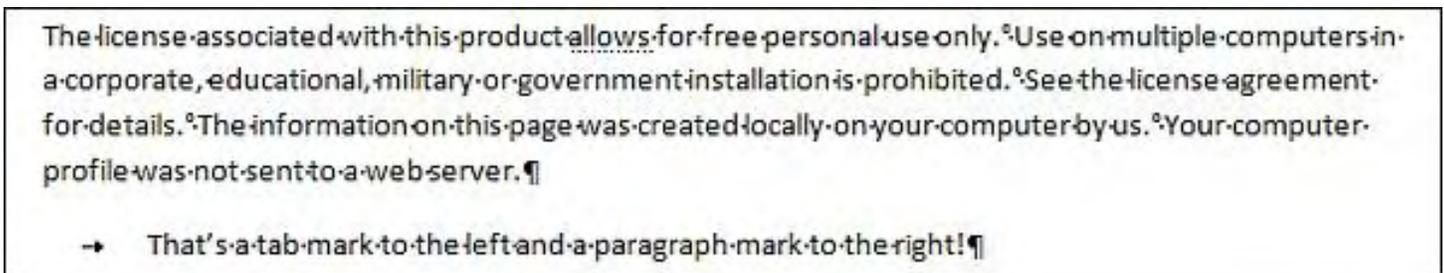


Figure 7. Show Paragraphs.

On the next row of the Paragraph box we see four collections of lines. These represent the types of text alignment. First, standard left alignment makes sure that the left edge of your text is neatly aligned. Next, center alignment aligns the text to an imaginary line in the middle of the paragraph margins, ensuring that the length of the left and right sides of each line are equal, regardless of lines around it. Next is right alignment. This is commonly used for collections of numbers or table cells that might look better on the right side of the margins. Finally, the "justified" paragraph adds little bits of space between words on a line to make sure that the left and right edges of the paragraph line up to the margins (except on the last line, which is not expanded).

Next is that feature to help with double-spacing. Rather than using the Enter key twice to get double-spacing, just click on this icon and you get the ability to adjust spacing to whatever you want: double-spacing, triple spacing, one-and-a-half-spacing. But this will apply to each line. If you want it at the paragraph level, choose the item at the bottom of this panel, which lets you add or remove spacing above the current paragraph. And, of course, you can go to the paragraph options to adjust the amount of space you'd like above or below the paragraph.

Next item, Theme colors, is similar to text highlighting. However, if you apply various themes to your document, this will get updated according to the theme. We'll explore that at a later time.

Finally, we get the option for Borders. If you'd like your selection (or paragraph, if nothing is selected) to have a box or line on any edge, this is the way to go. We'll explore that more when we get to Tables, since that's where it's usually used.

Whew! Lots of features today, many of which you probably knew but some that you may not have known. Next week we'll look at the misunderstood document styles.

Rob has been in the computer industry for over 25 years and is currently a part-time teacher, offering classes in Excel, Access, Visual Basic, and a variety of other technical tools. He has

loved *ComputerEdge* since 1990 and can be contacted at *RSpahitz@Dogopoly.com*.

Looking for a great boardgame? Grab a copy from DOGOPOLY.com (*dogopoly.com*) and have a dog-gone great time.



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Spam of the Week

Spam of the Week: iTunes Gift Certificate

“The latest in annoying and dangerous e-mail currently making the rounds.” by ComputerEdge Staff

There is nothing but bad news in an iTunes scam spam that is making the rounds. If you think you're getting something for nothing, forget about it.

I can't remember. Did I buy a \$50 iTunes gift certificate? I could have done it. (Even though I never use iTunes.) It sure is tempting to look at the certificate. It might be a mistake, but it might be good.

There is nothing but bad news in this iTunes scam spam (see Figure 1). It is another attempt to install malware on your computer.

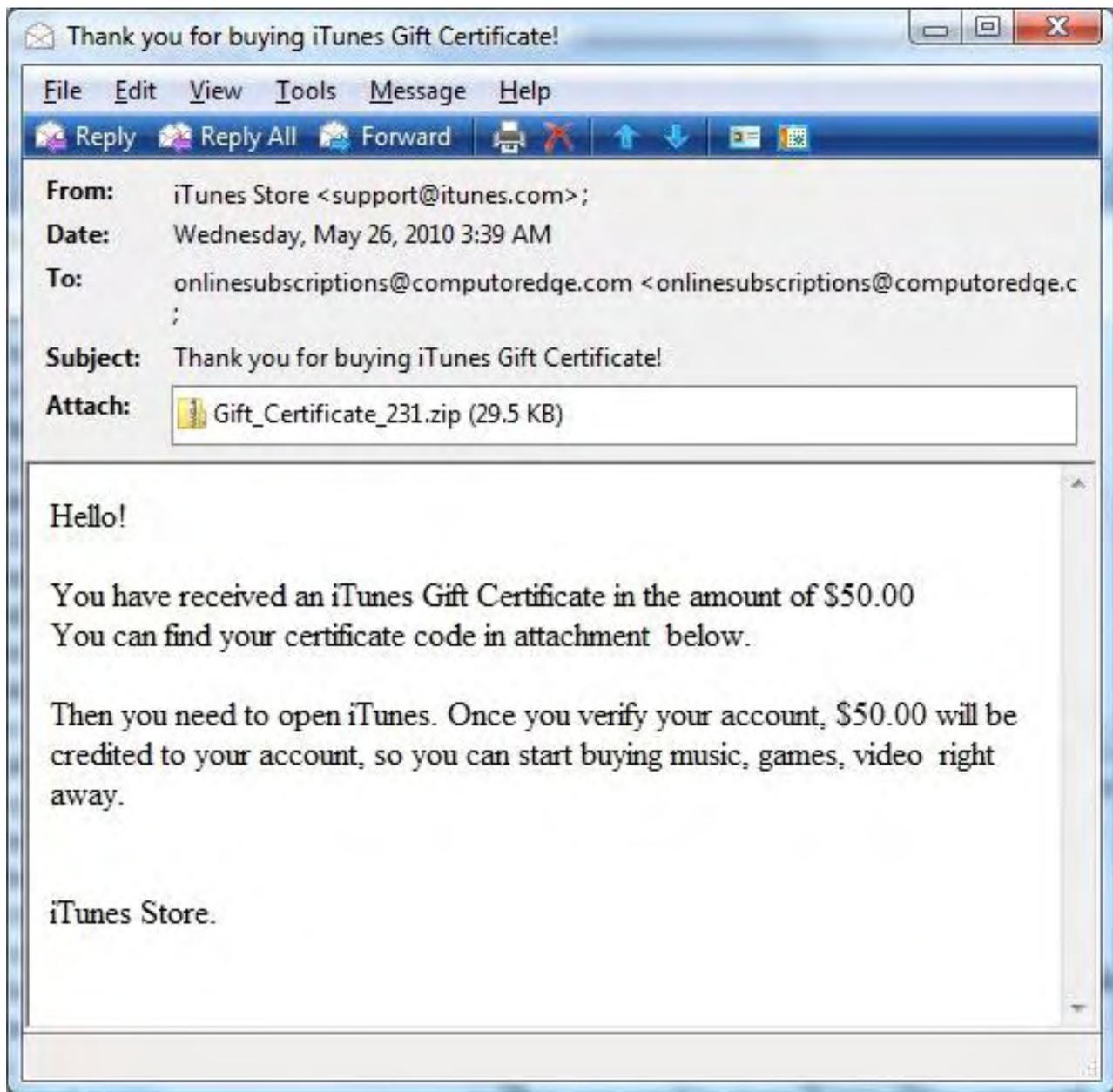


Figure 1. iTunes is not giving you something for nothing.

If you are doing business with iTunes, contact them directly about any certificates that you think are due. If you think that you're getting something for nothing, forget about it. You'll get something all right, and it will be nothing but trouble. Just delete the e-mail.

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If you want to submit a short "ComputerQuick Review", or yell at us, please e-mail us at ceeditor@computoredge.com.

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EdgeWord: Get Your Digital Photos Printed

“The Real World Goes on Outside the Box” by

Jack Dunning



Family photos have been forever altered in the digital age, but for some, it's important to print them out and bring them into the "real world."

It's easy to forget that not everyone uses computers. Sure, there are huge numbers of people who use the machines every day at work, but when they get home they have no desire to look at one. Those individuals don't count as regular computer users because they are doing it under the duress of their job. It is true that the younger generation sees computers as a natural part of their lives, yet there remains a huge portion of the population who do not use computers—and have found no compelling reason to start.

For those non-computer users, they can see how computers have taken something away from their lives—even if they recognize that the machines have added to their lives in other ways. For example, family photos have taken a hit. There is no lack of volume in the number of images taken, but often they sit stored on a chip, rarely to be viewed. Taking family pictures was once a simple matter of point and click, then dropping the film in for developing. When picked up, the new snaps were on sturdy photo stock that could be passed around or mailed for family sharing. It's not so easy with digital photos.

I don't want to go back to the good old days. I love my digital camera. I like the fact that I can take an almost limitless number of pictures in search of one good one. I can quickly delete the mistakes. Saving the photos for posterity is easy in digital format. If I want to send the images to someone, I can make a CD/DVD, post them to the Web, or attempt to e-mail them. (The problem with e-mail is that the resolution (quality) of the photo must be reduced for transmission, otherwise the processing can be unwieldy.) The digital images can be viewed and sorted on any computer. That's part of the problem.

Once the photos get on the computer, they are rarely ever printed. Many people think that viewing the photos on the screen is all they'll ever need. But for others, especially those who don't use computers, screen viewing is totally inadequate—if not impossible. There is no substitute for printed photos.

The problem with printing the digital photos is that it's a lot of work. Even if you're sending them to Costco over the Internet for processing, it's still work. The fact that you can take hundreds of pictures at the same time makes it even more difficult. It is not necessary, nor desirable, to print all of the photos taken, but the selection process alone is time consuming. Each photo must be reviewed and set aside (preferably in a separate "to print" folder) for future processing. If there is red-eye—a common malady among the amateur class of which I am a member—it needs to be removed. Most of the common photo-viewing programs, including the Windows Photo Gallery, feature tools for removing red-eye and other problems. I've found that the "getting ready to print" can be arduous and tedious.

I've tried printing on my photo-quality printer. While the quality is quite good, it's not worth the

time, cost or hassle. Each copy must be individually printed, which can take a long time. The paper slips or the ink runs out, plus the cost of the paper alone is not insignificant. I'm a proponent of sending the work to professionals. I use the Costco Photo Center, but I've also received photos of grandkids from Shutterfly. All you need to do is upload the desired photos, mark the desired cropping, and submit the order.

I use Costco for the price (13 cents/photo), plus I can pick them up the same day at the local Costco. Costco will also mail the prints (anywhere), which is similar to the service of most of the photo Web sites. (I notice that Shutterfly photos also can be picked up at Target the same day.) Most of the services are probably comparable—I would like to hear about your favorites. They most likely use the same type of processing equipment. It's a matter of how easy it is to use the Web site, the price to print, and how easy it is to get the photos (mail or pickup).

For me, not printing the photos is not an option. You see, my wife doesn't use a computer. (She figures that I use computers enough for the both of us.) While she enjoys reviewing digital pictures on a hi-res monitor, it doesn't compete with her ability to spread the printed photos all over the kitchen table for simultaneous macro-viewing. Plus, when we annoy friends with pictures of the grandkids, it's much easier to send them around the dinner table. People can either linger or quickly pass them on, as suits their individual style.

From the non-computer user's perspective, everything (including the Internet) goes on inside a box. The real world is on the outside of that box, so please make some of what's inside real by bringing it to the outside.

Jack is the publisher of *ComputerEdge* Magazine. He's been with the magazine since first issue on May 16, 1983. Back then, it was called *The Byte Buyer*. His Web site is www.computoredge.com. He can be reached at ceeditor@computoredge.com

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Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

“Computer and Internet tips, plus comments on the articles and columns.” by ComputerEdge Staff

"VoIP Service Question," "Keylogging Fears," "Russian Spam," "Spanish Keyboard," "Windows Live Mesh"

VoIP Service Question

[Regarding Michael J. Ross' March 19 article, "VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) Basics":]

A general question about VoIP: Would your computer have to be on 24/7 in order for you to receive an emergency call in the middle of the night? If the computer is off, is your phone service off, too?

-Sue, Denver, CO

[No, not if you plug the phone into the router/modem and have a 24/7 Internet connection. — Editor]

Keylogging Fears

[Regarding the May 7 Digital Dave column:]

I use the on-screen keyboard available in Windows if I am using an unsecured computer, and I have a concern with possible keylogging.

-Ed, La Jolla, CA

Russian Spam

[Regarding the May 14 Digital Dave column, where Dave discussed Google Translate:]

The only thing I could understand in the translation was the last sentence. Could you translate the translated spam into English spam (i.e., what are they selling or saying)?

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego, CA

Sending E-Mail Problem

[Regarding the May 7 Digital Dave column, where a reader had an issue with a "phantom" e-mail attempting to be sent:]

The problem is that the Sent Mail folder is full! Select [and delete] any and all Sent Mail, and then try sending again. This works!

I have enjoyed your insights for years; keep up the good work.

-Jim Garen, Vista, CA

Spanish Keyboard

[Regarding the May 7 Digital Dave column:]

Regarding changing the keyboard to Spanish:

I have been using the same keyboard configuration since Windows 95, being able to type in both languages without changing the keyboard configuration.

Within the same U.S. keyboard language, add United States-International (make sure to leave it as default). With this configuration the accent mark, tilde, upside-down quotation and interrogatory marks are all available.

Example: á - Type apostrophe ~ then a

-A. Johnson, San Luis, AZ

100 percent ditto on what A. Johnson from AZ said. That also works for some other languages, such as French and German. For example, á, è, ô, ç, ü, ñ, etc. can all be typed on the same keyboard. One caveat: To type certain punctuation or diacritical marks, you have to hit the appropriate key followed by the space bar. And for anyone still running a pre-Win 95 machine, you have to install Code Page 850.

-Werner Maurer, Rosarito, Baja Calif.

Since I answered this question on Spanish keyboards, I noticed that the On-Screen Keyboard found in the Windows Ease of Access Center is a better way to identify the function of each key in foreign keyboards.

-Digital Dave , ComputerEdge

Windows Live Mesh

[Regarding Pete Choppin's May 7 article, "Windows Live Mesh: A Better Way to Synchronize":]

Great article!

-Don, Denver, CO

Nice, informative article, but Live Mesh, though still in beta, has been around quite a while, and it already works on Windows Mobile devices. I've used it to keep multiple PCs and Windows phones in sync since the mobile client beta was introduced in mid-2008.

-Todd Allcock, Littleton, CO

Todd,

I was aware that Windows Live Mesh has been out now for a while. Although it is not "new," as in just released, it is also not widely known and advertised. It is not listed on the "All Services" (home.live.com/allservices.aspx) Windows Live site as one of the services offered. I take it that, for Microsoft, "beta" must mean, "Even though this is a service we offer, it is not widely known or placed in a prominent location where people can find it." In developer's and programmer's parlance, "beta" means in a test version, not for public release.

For those who are not aware of this service, I wanted to get it out there.

Perhaps we need to change our tag line from "A new tool..." to "An old tool that few people know about."

Thank you for pointing this out and for your interest.

-Pete

ComputerEdge always wants to hear from you, our readers. If you have specific comments about one of our articles, please click the "Tell us what you think about this article!" link at the top or bottom of the article/column. Your comments will be attached to the column and may appear at a later time in the "Editor's Letters" section.

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