

Get up to speed On Windows 7

Windows 7

Windows 7 is Microsoft's newest desktop operating system. Introduced in October 2009, Windows 7 improves on the features provided by Windows Vista and Windows XP. Here are some tips and tricks that can help you get around the newest version of Windows.

The Start menu

- The Start menu has been around in the Windows operating system since Windows 95; however, as soon as you click the Windows 7's Start button, you'll notice that Microsoft has made big changes to Windows 7's interface.
- The Start menu is the launching point for practically all of the tasks that are available within the Windows 7 operating system. Not only can you launch applications, but you can access common tasks via Jump Lists, initiate search operations, access your documents, configure your system, and much more!
- Of course, the main design of the Start menu remains intact, but certain things are different. For example, it's still a two paneled menu structure with the most recently used applications appearing in the left panel and the standard items appearing on the right panel. However, you'll notice right away that the standard items in the right panel no longer contain individual icons—only text. A single icon appears at the top of the right panel and changes according to the item you point to. For example, when you point to the Control Panel, the Control Panel icon appears at the top of the right panel. The logged on user's name now appears at the top right-hand side and the infamous "My" has been dropped from Documents, Pictures, Computer and the others.
- Clicking All Programs no longer opens a separate submenu that pops up over top of the Start menu. Instead, the programs menu simply slides over and occupies the left panel. There's a Back button that when clicked reinserts the most recently used applications into the panel.
- The Run box, which was available on previous versions of the Start menu has been replaced by the Search box. As soon as you click the Start button, the Search box is highlighted and you can begin searching for anything, including applications, documents, pictures, or Web sites from your Favorites. (If you still need it, the Run box can be found on the Accessories submenu.)

Computer & Windows Explorer

- The core purpose of an operating system like Windows 7 is to facilitate the storage and management of important data on a computer. Applications let you create data files, but it's the OS that determines how the files are stored as well as how you keep track of, find, and access those data files.
- The tried and true Computer and Windows Explorer are still the main file management tools in Windows 7. Of course, both of these tools sport refinements that make them more efficient and easier to use. For instance,

the toolbars are now context sensitive such that the buttons which appear on the toolbar depend on the type of folder or file that you have selected. For example, when you access the Documents folder and select a document, the toolbar contains such commands as E-mail, Print, and Open, which allows you to easily perform the most common types of file management operations.

Libraries

- When you launch Windows Explorer, you'll see the four main Libraries in Windows 7: Documents, Music, Pictures, and Video. While Libraries share the same names and the same basic purpose as the operating system's main data folders, they provide a much broader file management functionality. Essentially, you can think of Libraries as collection points for files of a certain type that can exist in any number of locations.
- For example, you can configure the Documents Library to display all the documents on your computer, on an external hard disk, as well as on a server. In this way, you'll have a one-stop access point for all documents regardless of where they are located.
- You can even create new Libraries, which can come in handy when it comes to keeping track of files that belong to a specific project.

Jump Lists

- The Jump List feature is designed to provide you with quick access to the tasks associated with your applications and that includes accessing documents. Jump Lists can be found on the application icons that appear on the Start menu and on the Taskbar.
- The file management capability in Jump Lists refers to the fact these menus contain a section titled Recent that displays a list of the 10 most recently accessed files. If you regularly access particular files, you can pin them to the Jump List so that they will always be there.

Integrated Search

- Windows 7's new search engine is integrated throughout the operating system making it easy to search no matter where you are. Furthermore, it is very efficient in that it can create very detailed search indexes without hampering overall system performance.
- You now know that the Start menu's Search box is highlighted and ready to use as soon as you click the Start button. This makes it very easy to track down your data file anywhere on the system. However, you can perform more targeted data file searches from Windows Explorer, which contains its own Search box. Just access a folder, click the Search box, and begin typing your keyword. To further refine your search, Windows Explorer's Search box provides context sensitive filters that are enabled with a single click.

Snap

- While many will simply brush off the new Aero UI features, Snap, Shake and Peek, as being nothing more than Windows 7 eye candy, the fact is that these three items have actually been designed to address the lack of any real improvement in a very common task that has been around since Windows came into being — managing multiple open windows.
- The Snap feature allows you to arrange open windows, including maximizing and resizing, just by dragging and dropping a window to different edges of the screen. When a window is dragged to the correct position, a ripple effect will emanate from the cursor and you'll see an animated outline of the window instantly appear in its new position. As soon as you release the mouse button, the window will *snap* to that position.
- To position a window on half of the screen, just drag the title bar toward the left or right side of the screen and drop. To maximize a window, just drag its title bar to the top of the screen. To stretch a window that is in the middle of the screen so that it spans from the top to the bottom, just drag the bottom edge toward the bottom of the screen.
- For example, suppose you need to copy files from one folder to another? You can use Snap to position two Windows Explorer windows side by side and easily drag files from one to the other.

Shake

- Shake also provides a new way to work with open windows. When you have multiple windows open at the same time, you can use Shake to quickly minimize all the open windows except the one that you want to focus on.
- To use Shake, just click the title bar of the window you want to work with and while holding the mouse button down, shake the window back and forth. (You don't have to shake wildly; just a couple of flicks of your wrist are all it takes.) When you do, all other open windows instantly minimize to the Taskbar. To restore all the minimized windows, just click and shake the window again.

Peek

- A vast improvement over the old Minimize All Windows and the Show Desktop commands, the new Peek feature allows you to instantaneously make all the open windows on the desktop become temporarily transparent so that you can see any icons or Gadgets on the desktop without having to minimize anything.
- To activate Peek, you just hover your mouse pointer over the transparent button at the right edge of the Taskbar. When you do, all of the open windows will instantly become transparent. When you move your pointer off the button, the windows reappear.
- If you decide that you need to access something on the desktop, just click the Show Desktop button and all open windows will be minimized. Click

the button again and all open windows will be restored to their original size and position.

Task Switching

- Ever since Microsoft gave the Windows operating system the ability to run multiple programs at the same time, they've struggled with a good method of keeping track of and switching between all the running programs.
- Probably most graphically appealing way to cycle thru all the open programs is with Windows Flip 3D, which is accessed by pressing the [Windows] key along with the Tab key. However, Microsoft has endowed the tried-and-true taskbar in Windows 7 with many new and improved features that not only enhance task switching but add a host of other features designed to improve the overall usability of the operating system.

Live Thumbnails

- The most prominent graphical feature of the Taskbar is the Live Thumbnails feature. You just hover your mouse pointer over any button on the Taskbar and you'll see a thumbnail of that window's contents. If the application has several open windows, such as Windows Explorer, you'll see a thumbnail for each individual window.
- When you see the thumbnail you are looking for, just click and its window will appear on the desktop ready for you to go to work.
- Because the thumbnails are live, they can actually show active operations in real time, such as the progress of a file transfer operation.

Thumbnails to Windows

- Even though the thumbnails make it easy to identify the contents of the task, sometimes they just aren't large enough. However, you can easily get a better view. Just hover your mouse pointer over any thumbnail and you'll see the full window on the desktop.
- If that's not the window you want, just move your mouse pointer away from the thumbnail and the window disappears instantly. If that's the window you want, just click the thumbnail and the window stays put.

Problem Steps Recorder

- Both end users and the folks on the help desk know how frustrating it can be to accurately describe problems. To help alleviate those types of problems Windows 7 provides the Problem Steps Recorder.
- When started, this new tool will essentially record each and every step a user takes and documents the entire operation in both screen captures and step-by-step details. At any point, you can add comments to further explain the problem.

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- When stopped, the Problem Steps Recorder will save the recorded information as a compiled HTML file and package it up in a ZIP file that the end user can then e-mail to the help desk.

Control Panel

- The Control Panel in Windows 7 is the central location for all your operating system configuration needs. There, you will find 45 individual tools that will allow you to configure and control just about every aspect of Windows 7.
- To help simplify the interface the Control Panel is by default configured in Category with eight categories. Additionally, you can display the Control Panel in either a large or a small icon view, but either choice shows icons for all 45 tools.
- Because the Control Panel has so many tools, Microsoft added a Search box to make it easy for you to find the tool that you need for a particular task. Just select the Search box when you need to find a specific tool and begin typing. As you do, Windows will sort and display the results making it easy to find what you are looking for.

User Account Control

- Part of built-in security system in Windows 7 is the ability to allow different users on a computer to have different rights. Administrator rights allow a user to do anything they want, including adding hardware or software to a workstation, making system changes, and running certain programs.
- Often, the IT department will disable Administrator rights for users to protect the workstation from accidentally having hardware or software installed that can expose the network to security threats.
- Only the IT department can grant you Administrator rights to your local machine if you don't already have it. Check with IT if you're trying to do something but get a message saying that you don't have rights to do so.

WordPad and Paint

- After close to 15 years of remaining virtually unchanged, both WordPad and Paint have been endowed with some new features including the Ribbon interface first introduced in Office 2007.
- For example, WordPad now sports additional word processing features such as the capability to justify text, use various styles of bullet points, insert pictures, use superscript and subscript, set the zoom level, and even open and save files in the OOXML (Office Open XML) and ODF (OpenDocument format) formats.
- Paint's new features include a host of new shapes, more intricate brushes, and a nicer ruler.

Calculator

- The Calculator in Windows 7 is now a powerful tool with two new views: Statistics, Programmer, as well as Scientific and Standard view.
- In each view, you'll find a History feature that will display a history of your calculations and allow you to copy and paste, as well as edit, the history. And best of all, there are a host of built-in templates or worksheets that allow you to quickly and easily perform common calculations, such as unit conversion, date calculations, mortgage, and gas mileage, just to name a few.

Viewing System Information

- The System tool accessible from the Control Panel or by right-clicking Computer and selecting Properties, will allow you to quickly view detailed information such as the amount of memory in your computer, the processor speed, the Windows version, the computer name, and activation details.
- Notice the Windows Experience Index number, which assesses and rates key system components on a scale of 1.0 to 7.9. A higher base score generally means that your computer will perform better and faster than a computer with a lower base score, especially when performing more advanced and resource-intensive tasks.

Ten Windows 7 Tips

1. Using Windows Key shortcuts and Snap, you can create a dual-pane file-manager simulation with four simple keystrokes:
[Windows]+E
[Windows]+[Left Arrow]
[Windows]+E
[Windows]+[Right].
2. Need to jot down a quick note? Use the Sticky Notes applet. Click the Start button, and type *sticky* in the Start Search box. When you create a note, Sticky Notes automatically saves the note and will keep it until you delete it.
3. Pressing the Windows Key and a number from 1 to 0 will launch a program on the Taskbar in the position indicated by the number. For example, if Windows Explorer is the third icon on the Taskbar, pressing [Windows]+3 will launch it.
4. You can open up a Command Prompt window for any folder by holding down the Shift key, right-clicking the folder, and choosing *Open command window here* from the context menu.
5. When Windows Media Player is displayed as a Live Thumbnail, you'll discover that it sports a feature called a Thumbnail Toolbar that provides you with Pause/Play and Next and Previous buttons. This means that you can control Windows Media Player right from the Live Thumbnail.
6. Windows Explorer's toolbar is context sensitive such that the buttons that appear on the toolbar depend on the type of folder or file that you have selected. For example, select a document file and you'll see Open and Print buttons. Select anywhere in a folder and you'll see a New Folder button.
7. By default Jump Lists can display up to 10 items. To increase the number of items in the Jump list, right-click on the Start button, select the Properties command, and click the Customize button. Use the Jump Lists spin button to increase the number.
8. Windows 7 allows you to rearrange icons on the Taskbar. Just click an icon and drag it to the left or right. When you have the icon where you want, just drop it.
9. The Performance tab in Task Manager shows detailed information about physical memory usage. Press [Ctrl]+[Shift]+[Esc] and click the Performance tab. The Total entry shows the amount of RAM installed in the system. The Cached entry indicates the amount of physical memory used for system resources. The new Available entry indicates the amount of physical memory

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currently not being used. The Free entry indicates the amount of memory in the cache that does not contain useful information.

10. Windows Mail, Windows Calendar, Windows Photo Gallery, and Windows Movie Maker are no longer part of the operating system in Windows 7. You can get them back by downloading the Windows Live Essential package from the Windows Live site (www.windowslive.com.)