

# Windows 7 Tips & Treats



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So you got your new windows 7 computer or are thinking of getting one. Then the tips below will help.

It's great to see [windows](#) 7 released to the world! In many ways, it sets a new quality bar for an operating system release. Building on top of the Windows Vista foundation, Windows 7 adds a great deal of polish and refinement to both the user interface and the underlying architecture, while at the same time introducing many new features and improvements that support new hardware, give power users and casual users alike better tools to manage their digital lives, and enable new classes of application experience.

We will focus in on some of "secrets" of Windows 7: the many little tweaks and enhancements that we've made in this release that were discovered and collated over the last few months of using Windows 7 across my home and work machines. These are the things that are too small to appear in any marketing document as "features", but that you quickly miss when you switch to an older version of Windows.

**Windows Management.** By now, you've probably seen that Windows 7 does a lot to make window management easier: you can "dock" a window to the left or right half of the screen by simply dragging it to the edge; similarly, you can drag the window to the top of the screen to maximize it, and double-click the window top / bottom border to maximize it vertically with the same horizontal width. What you might not know is that all these actions are also available with keyboard shortcuts:

- **Win+Left Arrow** and **Win+Right Arrow** dock;
- **Win+Up Arrow** and **Win+Down Arrow** maximizes and restores / minimizes;
- **Win+Shift+Up Arrow** and **Win+Shift+Down Arrow** maximizes and restores the vertical size.

This side-by-side docking feature is particularly invaluable on widescreen monitors – it makes the old Windows way of shift-clicking on two items in the taskbar and then using the context menu to arrange them feel really painful.

2. **Display Projection.** Had enough of messing around with weird and wonderful OEM display driver utilities to get your notebook display onto an external projector? In that case, you'll be pleased to know that projection is really quick and simple with Windows 7. Just hit **Win+P**, and you'll be rewarded by the following pop-up window:

Use the arrow keys (or keep hitting Win+P) to switch to "clone", "extend" or "external only" display settings. You can also access the application as **displayswitch.exe**.

If you want broader control over presentation settings, you can also press **Win+X** to open the Windows Mobility Center, which allows you to turn on a presentation "mode" that switches IM clients to *do not disturb*, disables screensavers, sets a neutral wallpaper etc. (Note that this feature is also available in Windows Vista.)

- **Cut Out The Clutter.** Working on a document in a window and want to get rid of all the extraneous background noise? Simply

hit **Win+Home** to minimize all the non-active background windows, keeping the window you're using in its current position. When you're ready, simply press Win+Home again to restore the background windows to their original locations.

- **Multi-Monitor Windows Management.**

The earlier tip on window management showed how you can dock windows within a monitor. One refinement of those shortcuts is that you can use **Win+Shift+Left Arrow** and **Win+Shift+Right Arrow** to move windows from one monitor to another – keeping them in the same relative location to the monitor's top-left origin.

- **Command Junkies Only.** One of the most popular power toys in Windows XP was "Open Command Prompt Here", which enabled you to use the graphical shell to browse around the file system and then use the context menu to open a command prompt at the current working directory. In Windows 7 (and in Windows Vista, incidentally – although not many folk knew about it), you can simply hold the Shift key down while selecting the context menu to get exactly the same effect. If the current working directory is a network location, it will automatically map a drive letter for you.

- **It's a Global Village.** If you've tried to change your desktop wallpaper, you've probably noticed that there's a set of wallpapers there that match the locale you selected when you installed Windows. (If you picked US, you'll see beautiful views of Crater Lake in Oregon, the Arches National Park, a beach in Hawai'i, etc.) In fact, there are several sets of themed wallpapers installed based on the language you choose, but the others are in a hidden directory. If you're feeling in an international mood, simply browse to **C:\Windows\Globalization\MCT** and you'll see a series of pictures under the Wallpaper directory for each country. Just double-click on the theme file in the Theme directory to display a rotation through all the pictures for that country. (Note that some countries contain a generic set of placeholder art for now.)

- **The Black Box Recorder.** Every developer wishes there was a way that an end-user could quickly and simply record a repro for the problem that they're running into that is unique to their machine. Windows 7 comes to the rescue! Part of the in-built diagnostic tools that we use internally to send feedback on the product, the Problem Steps Recorder provides a simple screen capture tool that enables you to record a series of actions. Once you hit "record", it tracks your mouse and keyboard and captures screenshots with any comments you choose to associate alongside them. Once you stop recording, it saves the whole thing to a ZIP file, containing an HTML-based "slide show" of the steps. It's a really neat little tool and I can't wait for it to become ubiquitous on every desktop! The program is called **psr.exe**; you can also search for it from Control Panel under "Record steps to reproduce a problem".

- **The Font of All Knowledge.**

[Long Zheng](#) will be happy: we've got rid of the [Add Fonts](#) dialog that has served Windows faithfully for the last twenty years. (Of course, for most of that time, it's been deprecated – the easy way to install a set of fonts has simply been to drag them into the Fonts folder via Control Panel.) But now font installation is really easy – we've added an "Install" button to the font viewer applet that takes care of the installation process:

There are lots of other new features built into Windows 7 that will satisfy those of a typographic bent, incidentally – grouping multiple weights together, the ability to hide fonts based on regional settings, a new text rendering engine built into the DirectWrite API, and support in the Font common file dialog for more than the four "standard" weights. For example:

- **Gabriola.** As well as the other typographic features mentioned above, Windows 7 includes Gabriola, an elaborate display type from the [Tiro Typeworks](#) foundry that takes advantage of OpenType Layout to provide a variety of stylistic sets, flourishes and ornamentation

ligatures:

- **Who Stole My Browser?** If you feel like Internet Explorer is taking a long time to load your page, it's worth taking a look at the add-ons you have installed. One of the more helpful little additions in Internet Explorer 8 is instrumentation for add-on initialization, allowing you to quickly see whether you're sitting around waiting for plug-ins to load. Just click **Tools / Manage Add-ons**, and then scroll right in the list view to see the load time. On my machine, I noticed that the Research add-on that Office 2007 installs was a particular culprit, and since I never use it, it was simple to disable it from the same dialog box.

- **Rearranging the Furniture.** Unless you've seen it demonstrated, you may not know that the icons in the new taskbar aren't fixed in-place. You can reorder them to suit your needs, whether they're pinned shortcuts or running applications. What's particularly nice is that once they're reordered, you can start a new instance of any of the first five icons by pressing **Win+1**, **Win+2**, **Win+3** etc. I love that I can quickly fire up a [Notepad2](#) instance on my machine with a simple Win+5 keystroke, for instance. What's less well-known is that you can similarly drag the system tray icons around to rearrange their order, or move them in and out of the hidden icon list. It's an easy way to customize your system to show the things you want, where you want them.

- **Installing from a USB Memory Stick.** My wife has a [Samsung NC10 netbook](#) (very nice machine, by the way), and we wanted to install Windows 7 Beta on this machine to replace the pre-installed Windows XP environment. Like most netbook-class devices, this machine has no built-in media drive, and nor did I have an external USB DVD drive available to boot off. The solution: I took a spare 4GB USB 2.0 thumbdrive, reformatted it as FAT32, and simply copied the contents of the Windows 7 Beta ISO image to the memory stick using **xcopy e:\ f:\ /e /f** (where e: was the DVD drive and f: was the removable drive location). Not only was it easy to boot and install from the thumbdrive, it was also blindingly fast:

quicker than the corresponding DVD install on my desktop machine. It's also worth noting in passing that Windows 7 is far better suited to a netbook than any previous operating system: it has a much lighter hard drive and memory footprint than Windows Vista, while also being able to optimize for solid state drives (for example, it switches off disk defragmentation since random read access is as fast as sequential read access, and it handles file deletions differently to minimize wear on the solid state drive).

- **I Want My Quick Launch Toolbar Back!**

You might have noticed that the old faithful Quick Launch toolbar is not only disabled by default in Windows 7, it's actually missing from the list of toolbars. As is probably obvious, the concept of having a set of pinned shortcut icons is now integrated directly into the new taskbar. Based on early user interface testing, we think that the vast majority of users out there (i.e. not the kind of folk who read this blog, with the exception of my mother) will be quite happy with the new model, but if you're after the retro behavior, you'll be pleased to know that the old shortcuts are all still there. To re-enable it, do the following:

- Right-click the taskbar, choose Toolbars / New Toolbar
- In the folder selection dialog, enter the following string and hit OK:  
**%userprofile%\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Internet Explorer\Quick Launch**
- Turn off the "lock the taskbar" setting, and right-click on the divider. Make sure that "Show text" and "Show title" are disabled and the view is set to "small icons".
- Use the dividers to rearrange the toolbar ordering to choice, and then lock the taskbar again.

If it's not obvious by the semi-tortuous steps above, it's worth noting that this isn't something we're exactly *desperate* for folks to

re-enable, but it's there if you really need it for some reason. Incidentally, we'd love you to really try the new model first and give us feedback on why you felt the new taskbar didn't suit your needs.

- **It's a Drag.** Much play has been made of the Jump Lists feature in Windows 7, allowing applications like Windows Live Messenger to offer an easy task-based entry point. Jump lists replace the default right-click context menu in the new taskbar; another way to access them (particularly useful if you're running Windows 7 on a one-button MacBook) is by left-clicking and dragging up in a kind of "swooshing" motion. This was designed for touch-enabled devices like the [beautiful HP TouchSmart all-in-one PC](#), where the same gesture applies. Another place where you can "swoosh" (not an official Microsoft term) is the IE 8 address bar, where the downward drag gesture brings up an expanded list containing the browser history, favorites and similar entries. The slower you drag, the cooler the animation!
- **Standards Support.** Every review of Windows 7 that I've seen has noted the revamped WordPad and Paint applets that add an Office-like ribbon to expose their functionality. Few, however, have noticed one small but hopefully appreciated feature: WordPad can now read and write both the Word 2007-compatible [Office Open XML](#) file format but also the [OpenDocument specification](#) that IBM and Sun have been advocating:
- **Windows Vista-Style Taskbar.** I wasn't initially a fan of the Windows 7 taskbar when it was first introduced in early Windows 7 builds, but as the design was refined in the run up to the beta, I was converted and now actively prefer the new look, particularly when I've got lots of windows open simultaneously. For those who really would prefer a look more reminiscent of Windows Vista, the good news is that it's easy to customize the look of the taskbar to more closely mirror the old version:

To achieve this look, right-click on the taskbar

and choose the properties dialog. Select the "small icons" checkbox and under the "taskbar buttons" setting, choose "combine when taskbar is full". It's not pixel-perfect in accuracy, but it's close from a functionality point of view.

- **Peeking at the Desktop.** While we're on the taskbar, it's worth noting a few subtleties. You've probably seen the small rectangle in the bottom right hand corner: this is the feature we call "Aero Peek", which enables you to see any gadgets or icons you've got on your desktop. I wanted to note that there's a keyboard shortcut that does the same thing – just press **Win+Space**.
- **Running with Elevated Rights.** Want to quickly launch a taskbar-docked application as an administrator? It's easy – hold down **Ctrl+Shift** while you click on the icon, and you'll immediately launch it with full administrative rights (assuming your account has the necessary permissions, of course!)
- **One More of the Same, Please.** I've seen a few folk caught out by this one. If you've already got an application open on your desktop (for example, a command prompt window), and you want to open a second instance of the same application, you don't have to go back to the start menu. You can simply hold down the **Shift** key while clicking on the taskbar icon, and it will open a new instance of the application rather than switching to the existing application. For a keyboard-free shortcut, you can **middle-click** with the third mouse button to do the same thing. (This trick assumes that your application supports multiple running instances, naturally.)
- **Specialized Windows Switching.** Another feature that power users will love is the ability to do a kind of "Alt+Tab" switching across windows that belong to just one application. For example, if you've got five Outlook message windows open along with ten other windows, you can quickly tab through just the Outlook windows by holding down the **Ctrl** key while you repeatedly click on the single Outlook icon. This will toggle through each of

the five Outlook windows in order, and is way faster than opening Alt+Tab and trying to figure out which of the tiny thumbnail images relates to the specific message you're trying to find.

- **Walking Through the Taskbar.** Another "secret" Windows shortcut: press **Win+T** to move the focus to the taskbar. Once you're there, you can use the arrow keys to select a particular window or group and then hit Enter to launch or activate it. As ever, you can cancel out of this mode by hitting the Esc key. I don't know for sure, but I presume this shortcut was introduced for those with accessibility needs. However, it's equally valuable to power users – another good reason for all developers to care about ensuring their code is accessible.

- **The Widescreen Tip.** Almost every display sold these days is widescreen, whether you're buying a notebook computer or a monitor. While it might be great for watching DVDs, when you're trying to get work done it can sometimes feel like you're a little squeezed for vertical space. As a result, the first thing I do when I set up any new computer is to dock the taskbar to the left hand side of the screen. I can understand why we don't set this by default – can you imagine the complaints from enterprise IT departments who have to retrain all their staff – but there's no reason why you as a power user should have to suffer from default settings introduced when the average screen resolution was 800x600.

In the past, Windows did an indifferent job of supporting "side dockers" like myself. Sure, you could move the taskbar, but it felt like an afterthought – the gradients would be wrong, the Start menu had a few idiosyncrasies, and you'd feel like something of a second-class citizen. The Windows 7 taskbar feels almost as if it was designed with vertical mode as the default – the icons work well on the side of the screen, shortcuts like the Win+T trick mentioned previously automatically switch from left/right arrows to up/down arrows, and so on. The net effect is that you wind up with a much better proportioned working space.

Try it – in particular, if you've got a netbook computer that has a 1024x600 display, you'll immediately appreciate the extra space for browsing the Internet. For the first day you'll feel a little out of sync, but then I guarantee you'll become an enthusiastic convert!

- **Pin Your Favorite Folders.** If you're always working in the same four or five folders, you can quickly pin them with the Explorer icon on the taskbar. Hold the right-click button down and drag the folder to the taskbar, and it will be automatically pinned in the Explorer Jump List.

- **Starting Explorer from "My Computer".** If you spend more time manipulating files outside of the documents folders than inside, you might want to change the default starting directory for Windows Explorer so that it opens at the Computer node:

To do this, navigate to Windows Explorer in the Start Menu (it's in the Accessories folder). Then edit the properties and change the target to read:

```
%SystemRoot%\explorer.exe  
/root,::{20D04FEO-3AEA-1069-A2D8-  
08002B30309D}
```

If you want the change to affect the icon on the taskbar, you'll need to unpin and repin it to the taskbar so that the new shortcut takes affect. It's worth noting that **Win+E** will continue to display the documents library as the default view: I've not found a way to change this from the shell at this time.

- **ClearType Text Tuning and Display Color Calibration.**

If you want to tune up your display for image or text display, we have the tools included out of the box. It's amazing what a difference this makes: by slightly darkening the color of the text and adjusting the gamma back a little, my laptop display looks much crisper than it did before. You'd adjust the brightness and contrast settings on that fancy 42" HDTV you've just bought: why wouldn't you do the same for the computer displays that you stare at every day?

Check out **cttune.exe** and **dccw.exe** respectively, or run the applets from Control Panel.

- **ISO Burning.** Easy to miss if you're not looking for it: you can double-click on any DVD or CD .ISO image and you'll see a helpful little applet that will enable you to burn the image to a blank disc. No more grappling for shareware utilities of questionable parentage!
- **Windows Movie Maker.** Windows 7 doesn't include a movie editing tool – it's been moved to the Windows Live Essentials package, along with Photo Gallery, Mail and Messenger. Unfortunately, Windows Live Movie Maker is currently still in an early beta that is missing most of the old feature set (we're reworking the application), and so you might be feeling a little bereft of options. It goes without saying that we intend to have a better solution by the time we ship Windows 7, but in the meantime the best solution for us early adopters is to use Windows Movie Maker 2.6 (which is essentially the same as the most recent update to the Windows XP version). It's missing the full set of effects and transitions from the Windows Vista version, and doesn't support HD editing, but it's pretty functional for the typical usage scenario of home movie editing.

Download Windows Movie Maker 2.6 from here:

<http://microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyID=d6ba5972-328e-4df7-8f9d-068fc0f80cfc>

- **Hiding the Windows Live Messenger Icon.** Hopefully your first act after Windows 7 setup completed was to download and install the Windows Live Essentials suite of applications (if not, then you're missing out on a significant part of the Windows experience). If you're a heavy user of IM, you may love the way that Windows Live Messenger is front and central on the taskbar, where you can easily change status and quickly send an IM to someone:

On the other hand, you may prefer to keep Windows Live Messenger in the system tray

where it's been for previous releases. If so, you can fool the application into the old style of behavior. To do this, close Windows Live Messenger, edit the shortcut properties and set the application to run in Windows Vista compatibility mode. Bingo!

- **Enjoy The Fish.** I'm surprised that not many people seem to have caught the subtle joke with the Siamese fighting fish that is part of the default background, so I'll do my part at keeping the secret hidden. Check out [wikipedia](#) for a clue.
- **When All Else Fails...** There are always those times when you're in a really bad spot – you can't boot up properly, and what you really want is something you can quickly use to get at a command prompt so you can properly troubleshoot. Windows 7 now includes the ability to create a system repair disc, which is essentially a CD-bootable version of Windows that just includes the command prompt and a suite of system tools. Just type "system repair disc" in the Start Menu search box, and you'll be led to the utility.

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