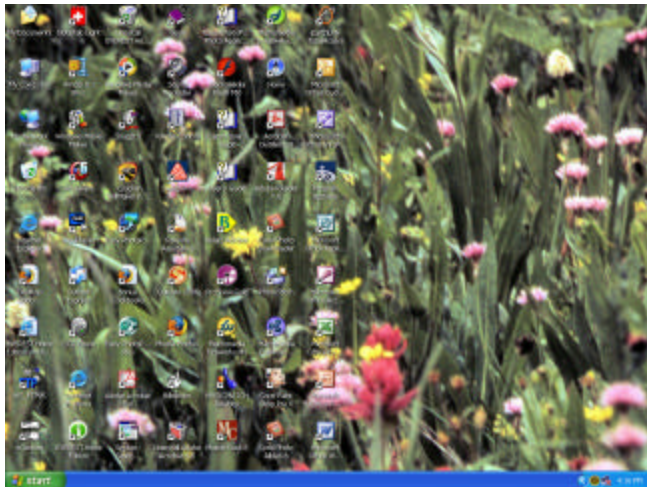


# Cleaning Up Your Desktop

## (And Other Nifty Stuff!)

Does your Windows Desktop double as convenient ad hoc storage? Do you use it as a canvas for personal expression? When you're looking for something, do you have a difficult time locating it? If you answer yes to these questions, you should think about cleaning up your electronic life.

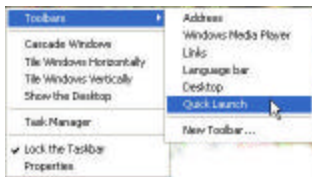


*Aarrghh!* Who can even **find** an icon on this desktop!

Does your Desktop have 40 or 50 icons overlaying a picture of your kids and dog? How do those icons get there? They're installed when you install new programs so they will be *convenient* for you to use. But most of them—in fact, all but a couple of them—are never used by you. And if you really do need to use them, you can find them in your Start Menu. Dump 'em!

### Quick Launch

But first, let's move the ones that you really use to a more convenient spot—the Quick Launch bar. Right click the Taskbar at the bottom of your screen, select *Toolbars*, and select *Quick Launch*.



Right click the Taskbar again and deselect *Lock the Taskbar*. This action will give you more flexibility in tailoring your Quick Launch icons. You will see a few icons, followed by a double arrow (⇨), followed by a series of vertical dots.



Place your cursor over the dots until you see a two-sided arrow.

Hold down your left mouse key and drag the dotted area to the right so you can see all the icons on the Quick Launch bar.



You will probably see icons on the Quick Launch that you do not use, so your first task is to delete them. Simply right click the icons you do not use or rarely use and select *Delete*. These are only shortcuts to the programs, so you don't have to worry about deleting the program. And remember, all of these icons are also available on your Start:Programs Menu, so only keep the ones you use often.

One of the best icons on the Quick Launch, by the way, is the Desktop icon (🖥️). You can click that icon to minimize all of your open applications and see your Desktop. Of course, once you make use of your Quick Launch, you'll no longer have much need to get to your Desktop!

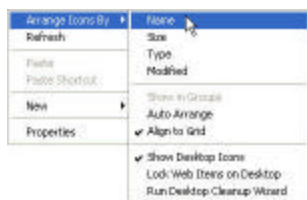


When you have removed all the Quick Launch icons you don't need, you're ready to add the ones you do need. First, make sure you can see everything clearly on your Desktop. If necessary, change your background to a plain one. Right click on a blank spot on your Desktop and click *Properties*.

Select the *Desktop* tab, select *None*, select the *Color* you would like to see, and click *OK*. When you're done cleaning up your Desktop, you can return your picture, or, better yet, use your pictures as a screen saver rather than backdrop (explained below).



Right click on a blank spot on your Desktop again and arrange the icons by name so you can more easily locate the ones you need.



Now you can start. Single click on a Desktop icon that you use often, such as Microsoft Word, and simply drag it to the Quick Launch bar. You will see a vertical black line, which indicates that, if you let up on the cursor, the shortcut will appear in that spot on the Quick Launch bar. Note that if you drag an icon from a location other than your Desktop (for example, a program folder), you must press the Ctrl key as you drag the icon, which *copies* it.

You can move things around on the Quick Launch bar in much the same way. Simply click on the icon and drag it to the spot you want it. For example, you might find it most convenient to have the Desktop icon in the very first spot.

Once you have all the icons you want on the Quick Launch, you can choose to show all of them all of the time, or only show the ones you use **most** often, relegating the rest to a click on the double arrow (⇨).



Place your cursor over the vertical dots and drag the two-sided arrow to the left until you show only icons you **always** want to see.

### Remove Desktop Icons

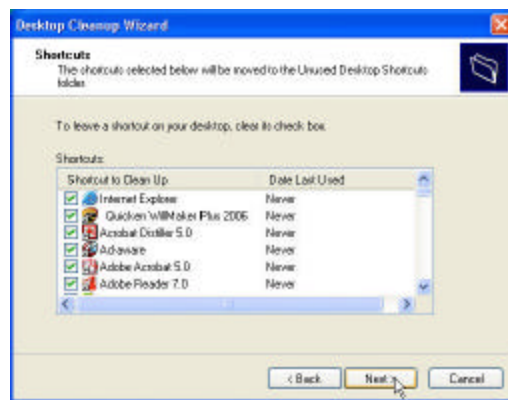
Microsoft understands that Desktop icon proliferation is a constant problem and has built a Desktop cleanup tool that automatically removes icons you haven't used in a while. Now that all those icons and shortcuts are accessible from the Quick Launch toolbar, you can wipe the Desktop clean.

Several of the icons, such as My Computer, Recycle Bin, and My Network Places, can't be deleted because they're central to WinXP's functionality (although you

can *hide* them). They shouldn't be moved, because Windows needs to know where to find them.

Start to clean up your Desktop by running the Desktop Cleanup Wizard. Right click on a blank area of your Desktop, select *Arrange Icons By*, and select *Run Desktop Cleanup Wizard*.

When the Wizard launches, click Next.

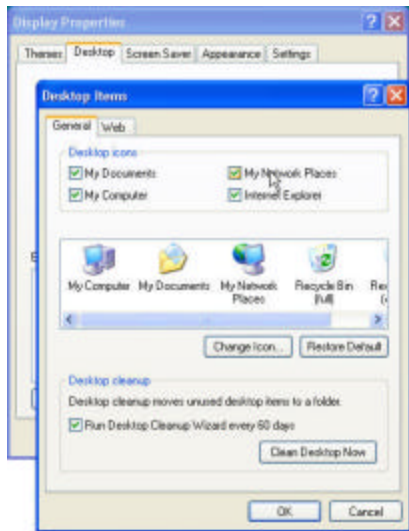


You will see a listing of all the icons on your Desktop and the Date Last Used. Not surprisingly, most of them have *never* been used. Windows will already have put a check mark by the icons it suggests removing. Remember, these are only *shortcuts*. You will not be removing the actual programs. Remember also, that every, single, solitary one of these icons is available to you on the Start Menu, plus you've already put the ones you **really** need on the Quick Launch bar, including Internet Explorer. Best advice is to delete them **all**. If you have some recently used items, such as Microsoft Word, go ahead and check it to be deleted also.

The wizard gives you a *cushion*. It puts all of the icons that you just deleted into a folder on your desktop. If you're really nervous about this, just leave the folder there for several weeks, see how often you get into it. When you find out—eventually—that you **never** get into it, just delete it from your desktop. It's a safety net that you won't ever need.

But wait! There are still some icons on your Desktop. If you don't have networked computers, you probably don't use *My Network Places*, for example. Right click a blank spot on your *Desktop*, click *Properties*, and

select the Desktop tab. Click the *Customize Desktop* button.



You will see check marks by the *system* icons that appear on the Desktop. Simply uncheck the icons that you don't need to see (you can always reverse the process). If you have, for example, put your My Documents folder on your Quick Launch, you can uncheck it. Do you really need anything more than the Recycle Bin?

#### Make Your Background a Screen Saver

If you stop here, you'll no doubt notice how much more efficient it can be to work from the Quick Launch bar rather than from a cluttered Desktop. Plus, in the process of doing all that, you've already removed your Desktop background picture. Maybe you should keep it that way. After all, it is most often covered by application windows and doesn't make the world's greatest reading background.

But my great picture, you say! Make it a screen saver instead. Better yet, you can set the screen saver to sequence through several of your favorite pictures, something your Desktop background can't do.

*Note: Unless you have a really old CRT, you have no need for a screen saver to save your screen—it's really only for your personal pleasure. New monitors, particularly LCDs, are built to withstand long periods of nonusage while they're turned on.*

To start, open your My Documents folder. In the left side of the window, click *Make a New Folder*. When the folder appears, name it ScreenSaver. Next,

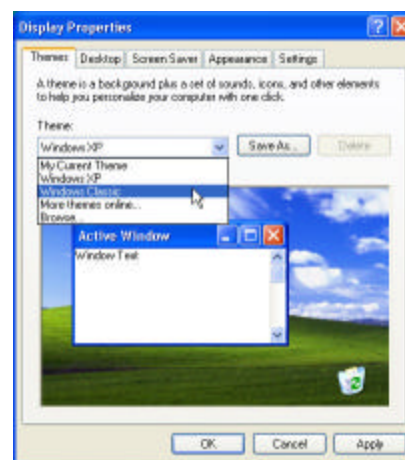
navigate through your folders to find the picture or pictures you want to use as a screen saver and copy them into this new ScreenSaver folder. (If you want to use one of Windows' photo backgrounds as your screen saver, you'll find them in the C:\WINDOWS folder; be sure to copy, not move them, to your new ScreenSaver folder.)

Right-click your new blank Desktop, click Properties, and click the *Screen Saver* tab. From the Screen Saver drop-down menu, select *My Pictures Slideshow* and then click *Settings*. If you have only one picture in your ScreenSaver folder, you may want to set the *How Often Should Pictures Change?* interval to something longer, such as one minute; otherwise, leave it be. *Under How Big Should Pictures Be?*, choose the appropriate setting. (Choose 100% if your old background pictures covered your entire Desktop.) Then click *Browse*, select your ScreenSaver folder, and click OK. Finally, make sure that *Use Transition Effects Between Pictures* is selected and that the other three options aren't. Then click OK.

Back on the Screen Saver tab, you'll see a preview of your screen saver in the small sample monitor. If you have only one picture, you'll have to wait a minute to preview the transitional effects. Either way, the pictures will disappear when you move your mouse or touch your keyboard.

#### Changing Your Theme

Were you used to the Windows Classic view of things—the simpler life before Windows XP?



You can have that life again. Right click on an empty spot on the desktop and select *Properties*. The first tab is *Theme*. You can change back to the Windows



Once you've created the subfolders, you have to do the hard work of dragging files into the appropriate folders. The payoff, however, is great—the next time you look for your spreadsheet of tax donations, you'll find it easily.

**Tip:** Now that you have your Desktop cleaned off, save all temporary files—ones that you know you are going to delete—to your Desktop. That way you'll remember to actually delete them instead of letting them linger in My Documents until 2009!

### Bookmarks

If you're in the habit of bookmarking Internet sites, maybe you also need a little organization in your Bookmark listing. It works the same way as the cleanup you just did for My Documents.

Open your browser. In Internet Explorer select *Favorites:Organize Favorites*; in Firefox select *Bookmarks:Manage Bookmarks*; and so on. You can figure it out from here—determine what kind of categories you need, create your folders, and move the bookmarks to the appropriate folder. You can, in fact, make subfolders to further categorize your bookmarks. Firefox makes this entire task a little easier than Internet Explorer—and if you're not yet using Firefox, maybe you should think about doing so.

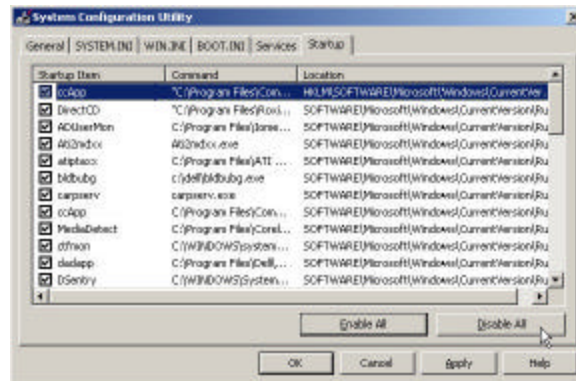
Oh, my goodness, we're getting organized!

### Startup Cleanup

Moving right along, let's take a look at what you've got in your system startup. The easiest place to look, of course, is in your Start:Programs:Startup folder. If you have items in that folder, ask yourself whether you actually need those items to start up when you launch your computer. In 99.99% of the cases, the answer will be "no." Okay, you want your Google Toolbar!

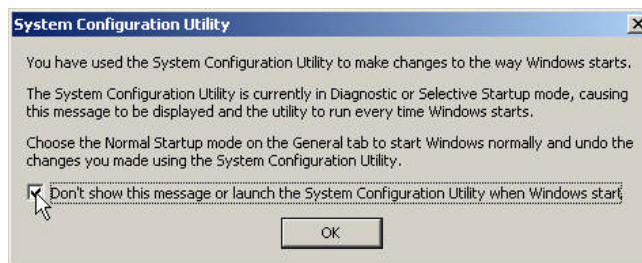
The primary culprit for launch overload is your System Configuration Utility. Select Start:Run, enter *msconfig*, and click OK. Click the *Startup* tab.

Chances are you will see dozens of items with check marks beside them, which means that all of them launch when you start your computer.



What do you really need? You need your anti-virus utility—period! Begin by clicking *Disable All*. Then go through the list and put a check mark by your anti-virus files. For example, if you use Norton, you should put a check mark by *ccApp* (you probably don't need every anti-virus file to start up, but click them all if you are not sure which ones you do need). If you have other things in there that you would **really** like to start up automatically, put a shortcut to them in your Start:Programs:Startup folder rather than leaving them in the System Configuration Utility. It's easier to manage them there.

When you are satisfied that you have only what you need, click *OK*. You will be asked to restart your system for the changes to take effect. When you restart, you will see the following screen:

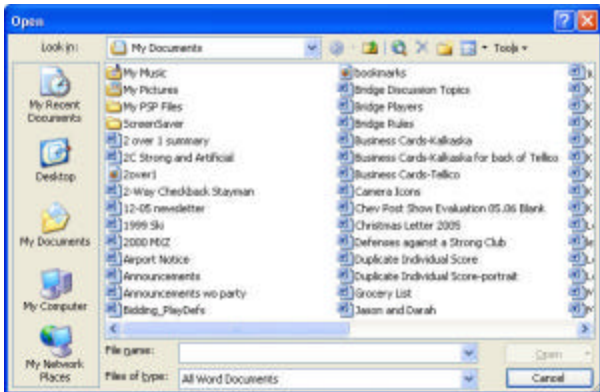


Check *Don't show the message or launch the System Configuration Utility when Windows starts* and then click *OK*.

**Miscellaneous Tip:** Do you know that you can right-click on the Taskbar to bring up *Task Manager*, rather than doing the old *Ctrl-Alt-Delete* thing? That same right-click will let you tile or cascade your open windows, no matter what software you have open.

## One, Final, Goodie

On the left side of the Office File Open dialog box are icons for five locations where Microsoft assumes you want to keep your files. You can, however, customize these choices to add folders that you use often and want to have there (e.g., Shared Documents, My Pictures). And, by the way, to delete ones that you do not use, such as My Network Places.



To change what Microsoft calls the Place Bar (under *Look In* above), you have to edit the Registry. As usual, you should **back up** the Registry first.

Note: Before you start editing the Registry, close all Office applications.

When you're ready, select Start:Run, type *regedit*, and press Enter to bring up the Registry Editor. Navigate in the left pane to HKEY\_CURRENT\_USER\Software\Microsoft\Office\n.0\Common\Open Find\Places\StandardPlaces, where *n* equals the version of Office you are using (9.0 for Office 2000, 11.0 for Office 2003).

The dialog box allows you to display only five place icons, so for every one you want to add, you must hide one of Microsoft's defaults. (See the last paragraph for information on how to outwit this requirement.)

Beneath *StandardPlaces* you'll find a key for every icon on the Place Bar. Right-click on one for an icon you don't want, and select *New, DWORD Value*. Name the value *Show*, and leave it with its default value of 0. Repeat this procedure for every icon you want to hide.

Once you've hidden a folder icon, you're ready to create a new one. Right-click the *UserDefinedPlaces* key under *Places*, and then select *New, Key*. Give the key any name you wish.

Right-click the new key and select *New, String Value*. Name this value *Name*. Press Enter, type in an appropriate name, and press Enter again.

Right-click the key again and select *New, String Value*. Call this one *Path*; for the text string, enter the full path to the folder. For instance, if you want a shortcut to your Shared Documents folder, your name value might be Shared Docs and your path value C:\Documents and Settings\All Users\Documents.

Tip: Copy the path by opening My Computer and navigating to the folder you want to add. Then simply copy the Address and paste it into the registry entry.

There's a way to get around the dialog box's five-folder limit. Right-click the *Places* key and select *New, DWORD Value*. Name the new value *ItemSize* and leave it with the default value of 0. The folder icons will be smaller, and you'll be able to fit more of them in the dialog box.

*Author's Note: As much as I'd like to take credit for everything in this article, I must tell you that I did grab information from other sources. I borrowed ideas and some words from "Tabula Rosa," Smart Computing, January 2006 (wonderful timing on that article, by the way). The last section on changing your Place Bar is adapted from a column that appeared in PC World several years ago. Wish I was smart enough to figure all this stuff out by myself!*