

BASICS & BEYOND -- Session # 9 -- Oct. '08

WINDOWS DESKTOP TIPS

TASKBAR -- Want or need more space at the bottom of your desktop? Right click on the Taskbar and select Properties. The ensuing dialog box gives you a number of options on handling the Taskbar. One is to "auto-hide" the Taskbar. It will then remain out of sight until you run your cursor down to the bottom of the screen, at which time it will magically re-appear. You will probably also want to click the box "Keep the taskbar on top of other windows". By clicking this option you will never have to hunt for a missing taskbar. Be sure to click "apply" if you make any changes.

If you would rather have your Taskbar on the side of your desktop, or at the top, right click on the Taskbar and remove the check mark from "Lock the Taskbar". You can then drag the Taskbar to either side, or to the top. If you ever find your Taskbar "missing" run your cursor all the way to the bottom, or top, or each side and see if it re-appears.

QUICK LAUNCH TASKBAR -- If you have a program that you use quite often, and its' icon is on your desktop, you might want to consider putting a copy of that icon on the Quick Launch taskbar. This is the area on the task bar just to the right of the start button. The advantage of having a quick launch icon here is that if you have one or two windows open you do not have to minimize them to get to the desktop to launch the program; you simply click on the icon on the Quick Launch Taskbar.

To put an icon on the QL Taskbar simply drag the icon from your desktop into an open space on the QL Taskbar and drop it. If your Quick Launch Taskbar is not active right click on the Taskbar, select Properties and then select the Toolbar tab. Put a checkmark in the Quick Launch box.

NOTIFICATION AREA -- The area to the far right on the Taskbar is the Notification area, showing you which programs are open and running. The icons will usually give you an opportunity to open the associated program. Too many icons showing? You can hide some of them if you care to do so. Right click on the Taskbar and select Properties. Click on the Notification tab to view available options.

START MENU -- If you would like to have a program permanently available on the Start Menu simply click on the Start button and then click Programs. When you find the program you want to place on the Start Menu left click on the program and continue to hold down the left mouse button while you drag it down to the Start button. Hold it there until the Start Menu opens and then just drop it (release the left mouse button) on the Start button. To remove a program from the Start Menu open the menu, put your cursor on the program you want to remove to highlight it, right click on it and select "Remove from this list". And, remember that you are not removing the program from your computer, just its' listing on the Start Menu.

DESKTOP ICONS -- Are the icons on your desktop small and hard to read? Or, are they too big? Well, let's change their size. In XP right click on an open space on your desktop and click on Properties. After the Display Properties screen opens click on the Settings tab and then the Advanced button. Under "DPI setting" there is a drop down menu which offers a "normal" or a "large" size icon. If you want to also change the font size associated with each icon return to Display Properties and click on the Appearance

tab. On the Appearance screen near the bottom you will find "Fonts". In the options box you can select either Normal, Large or Extra Large font size.

In Vista right click on an empty space on your desktop and then click on view. You will have three options of either large, medium or Classic. Classic is the smallest. Both the size of the icon and the font will change with your selection.

CLEAR TYPE FONT -- Most of us are using LCD monitors today and unfortunately they do not show text quite as clear as the older CRT tube type monitors. To resolve part of this problem Microsoft offers a feature called "Clear Type", which smoothes the edges of a font. To use the basic version of Clear Type in XP right click on an open space on the desktop and select Properties > Appearance > Effects. On the Effects display box put a check in the box "Use the following method to smooth edges of fonts". In the options box just below, select "Clear Type" and click OK. In Vista Clear Type font is turned on by default.

If one desires to fine tune Clear Type, in either Vista or XP, google "MS Clear Type" and you will find a lead that will take you to the Microsoft site where you can perform this function.

OTHER TIPS & TRICKS

DIRTY KEYBOARD -- Do you have a keyboard with keys that stick, or don't function well? Before you throw it away give it the "dishwasher treatment". Put it face down on the top rack in your dishwasher and run it through a quick rinse cycle. (No detergent). Who knows, you may end up with a clean, working keyboard.

ANTI-VIRUS, SPYWARE & ADWARE -- The "big kids" say that you should not have more than one anti-virus program on your computer. Having two will probably cause conflicts. However, it is ok to have more than one spyware and adware program. SpyBot Search & Destroy and Ad-Aware are still highly recommended along with AVG Free anti-virus. All three programs are free.

WIRELESS ROUTER (Gateway or Access Point) -- Are you using a wireless router? If you have a name attached to your router and you have SSID (Service Set Identifier) enabled you are telling the world that your router is on and what your router's name is. Do you have encryption enabled? Having encryption enabled simply means that when you send information from your laptop, or desktop, to the router this information is scrambled and should it be intercepted enroute to the router it can not be read by a rogue computer. Also, having encryption enabled will eliminate other computers from using your network and from obtaining access to your computer and its data. Consult your user manual that came with your router for info on how to set up encryption and how to turn off your SSID.

WINDOWS XP -- Microsoft has announced that they will support Windows XP until at least 2014. This is good news for those who do not want, or do not need to upgrade to Vista. "Support" does not necessarily mean that they will update or upgrade the MS programs associated with XP, but it should at least mean that they will continue to fix any security flaws found in XP or MS programs associated with XP.

SEVERAL USEFUL PROGRAMS

PC WIZARD -- This free little program will tell you just about anything and everything that you want or need to know about your computer. It is extremely helpful in case you need to make repairs, or replace parts on your computer as it will tell you model numbers, manufacturer's names, etc. It will also tell you how well your computer is running. If you want to upgrade the RAM in your computer it will tell you if you have slots open for additional RAM and what type you need. You can download this free program at www.cpubid.com Note the spelling, it is not "cupid".

WIN PATROL -- This is another free utility program that you may want to consider downloading. Read the PC World magazine review below. I use it to monitor the "startup list" in the System Configuration utility. I find it easier to use and more intuitive than using "msconfig". (You can access "msconfig" by clicking Start > Run and then type "msconfig", without the quote marks). As stated below the program also keeps an eye on your computer and alerts you if a change is trying to be made to your computer or Registry, etc. You can download Win Partol 2008 at www.winpatrol.com

Editor's Review of *WinPatrol 2008*

Every house needs a watchdog to warn you when something nasty is at the front door. And your PC is no different: it needs something that is ever-vigilant, keeping an eye on the programs running on your PC and making plenty of noise when something seems out of place.

WinPatrol does this guard job, keeping tabs on programs running on your PC (including the hidden ones) and alerting you if a program tries to install something unexpected, sets itself to run on startup, change your home page or install something it shouldn't. You can delete the offending programs, block their automatic startup or just monitor them to see what they do.

WinPatrol 2008 offers Delayed Start, a smart feature that helps Windows load faster. That's because Delayed Start gives you a way to force non-essential programs to launch up to an hour after the system boots. That's ideal for programs such as pop-up blockers or backup programs.