

Windows Vista

Customization Manual

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Windows Vista – Customization Manual

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*Dedicated to my wife, Mallory – thanks for being patient  
with me while I balance my time with you and  
with work, school, and my web design hobby*

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Introduction

Windows Vista is a great operating system, with looks that really bring it up to date over its predecessor – Windows XP. If you are looking to add a personal touch to your installation of Vista, this guide will help you get started.

There are thousands of customizations you can apply and this guide only scratches the surface. As always, I've written this book so anyone can pick it up and work through it.

I recommend you begin with the 'Getting Started' chapter, as this will give you a good foundation for the rest of the book. A basic knowledge of Windows Vista is required to follow most of the guides; any extra understanding will come from the above chapter.

Introduction

Once you have read ‘Getting Started’ chapter, you’re ready to explore the rest of the book and personalize your machine to match your style.

I’m sure there’s something here for everyone, so take a browse through the contents page and see what strikes your interest.

If you have questions, head to the ‘Contact Me’ section at the back of this book and get in touch.

Introduction

2.0 Getting Started

Before you get started with this book, there are a few things you should first consider. In this chapter I'll cover how you can slim down your Vista install, which can be a key component of your customization. I'll also get you prepared to back up your system before you work with the Windows Registry or the Group Policy Editor.

There are a few Vista annoyances, which can drive you crazy when you are applying many changes to your system; the latter half of this chapter will cover editing your security settings to help you make changes without User Account Control constantly bugging you while you try.

Enjoy working through this book and remember: "More is less" – when you customize your system, don't

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look to change every last thing. Make changes that look good and keep your system clean and tidy.

2.1 Slimming down Your Vista Install

If you are new to using Vista, or if you want to begin a clean slate, you may want to cut out some of the bulk that comes with Vista. A popular program designed to help you with this task is named [vLite](#).

vLite requires you to copy the setup files from your Vista installation disc to your hard drive. You then select the components you want to include in your install and then you make a bootable ISO file.

Details of which components you remove come down to your choice and are out of the scope of this book. However, there are many sites out there that are willing to give you a starter point and suggestions.

While vLite is aimed at more advanced users, you should have no problems having a go yourself. In the worst scenario, you are left with a Vista installation that doesn't have all the components you need.

One tip I will urge you to follow is to create the vLite ISO on a computer other than the one you are putting Vista on. If your OS is not functional you can at least try again.

2.2 Utilizing the Backup and Restore Center

The Backup and Restore center – bundled with Windows Vista – is an excellent tool, which allows you to backup and restore your files or an image of your operating system.

2.2.1 Launching the Backup and Restore Center

To launch the Backup and Restore Center, do the following:

1. Press the Start button
2. Type Backup
3. Select Backup and Restore Center

2.2.2 Backing up Your Files

To backup your files, click Backup Files and follow the directions given to you. Select the directories and files you want to backup and find a suitable place to store

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these files. I recommend an external hard drive or DVD(s).

2.2.3 Restoring Your Files

Launch the Backup and Restore center and click Restore Files. Locate the medium your files are stored on and follow the instructions to get your previously backed up files back.

2.3 Working with the Windows Registry

Throughout this book you will need to access the Windows Registry and make changes. I try to make executable registry hacks in most cases, but it can be fun to script your own registry files. Before doing anything with the Windows Registry, you should know what the registry is, how to back it up, how to restore it to a previous state, and how to add keys and values.

2.3.1 What is the Windows Registry?

Think of the Windows registry as a **control center for your computer**. Windows settings, individual program settings, and other important configuration information are stored here.

2.3.2 Accessing the Windows Registry Editor

To access the Windows Registry, press the start button, type **regedit**, and press **Enter**.

When the registry loads, you will be presented with the Windows Registry Editor. The registry is made up of the following components:

- Keys
- Subkeys
- Values

2.3.3 Adding Keys or Values

In some of the tutorials in this book, you will need to create a new key or value.

2.3.3.1 Adding a New Key

To add a new key, do the following:

1. **Right click** on the parent key

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2. Select **New > Key**
3. Follow the guide's instructions for what key name to assign

2.3.3.2 Adding a New Value

To add a new value, do the following:

1. Navigate to the key that you want to add a value to
2. **Right click** in the blank space of the right pane
3. Select **New > xx** (*Where xx is the value specified in the guide*)
4. Follow the guide's instructions for what value to assign

2.4 Backing up and Restoring the Registry

Some guides in this book will require you to change values in your registry. If you make a mistake and don't correct it, you may find your computer is not as functional as it was before. To protect yourself from

any mistakes, you need to backup your registry. To back up and restore your registry, you can use system restore or the registry editor.

2.4.1 Backing up and Restoring the Windows Registry using System Restore

You may back up or restore the entire registry using system restore, which takes an image of your computer in its current (stable) state. This image can then be used to restore order to your computer if something goes wrong.

2.4.1.1 Backing up the Entire Registry with System Restore

1. Click **Start** type **systempropertiesprotection** in the Start Search box, and then press **ENTER**.
If you are prompted for an administrator password or for a confirmation, type the password, or click Continue
2. Wait for Windows to search for available disks and most recent restore points. In the **System Properties** dialog box, on the **System Protection** tab, click **Create**

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3. **Type a name** for the restore point and then click **Create**
4. After the restore point has been created successfully, **click OK two times**

Note: *If System Restore is turned off, click to select the local disk, click Apply and then click Create.*

2.4.1.2 Restoring the Entire Registry using System Restore

1. Click **Start**, type **systempropertiesprotection** in the Start Search box, and then press **ENTER**
If you are prompted for an administrator password or for a confirmation, type the password, or click Continue
2. In the System Properties dialog box, on the **System Protection** tab, click **System Restore**
3. In the System Restore dialog box select **Choose a different restore point**, and then click **Next**
4. Select the restore point that you want to use, and then click **Next**
5. Confirm your restore point, and then click **Finish System restore** - this restores the selected Windows Vista configuration and then restarts the computer

6. Log on to the computer. When the System Restore confirmation page appears, click **OK**..

2.4.2 Backing up and Restoring the Windows Registry using the Registry Editor

You may back up or restore the entire registry using the registry editor, which saves a file on your hard drive (or any media.) This file can then be restored at any time if you make a mistake.

2.4.2.1 Backing up the Entire Registry Using the Registry Editor

To back up the entire registry using the registry editor, do the following.

1. Press Start > Run (Winkey+R) and type regedit
2. Left click Computer in the left pane
3. Go to File > Export
4. Save the file (for extra caution, save the file to a USB thumb drive)

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2.4.2.2 Restoring the Entire Registry Using the Registry Editor

To restore the entire registry using the Registry Editor, do the following:

1. Press Start > Run (Winkey+R) and type regedit
2. Left click Computer in the left pane
3. Go to File > Import
4. Choose the backup file you created

2.4.3 Backing up and Restoring Individual Registry Entries using the Registry Editor

You may back up or restore individual registry entries using the registry editor, which saves a file on your hard drive (or any media.) This file can then be restored at any time if you make a mistake.

2.4.3.1 Backing up a Single Key

1. Find the key you want to back up and right click on it

2. Click Export
3. Save the file somewhere safe with a distinctive name

2.4.3.2 Restoring a Single Key

1. **Find the key** that you previously saved
2. Double click on the file and select **Yes**

2.5 Get a Windows Vista Recovery Disc

Most new computers these days come with windows Vista installed. Most of these computers don't come with any kind of Windows Vista disc. Some may come with a recovery disc but they are bad news as most recovery disks will delete all your files and restore your computer to the state it was in when you first purchased it.

Windows Vista DVD's come with a recovery center to allow you to fix operating system related problems. If you do not have this DVD, Microsoft made a recovery disc for this purpose.

Please Note: This disc cannot be used to install or reinstall Windows Vista.

Getting Started

[Download Windows Vista Recovery Disc](#) (from NeoSmart technologies) (120 MiB)

Or Download [Windows Vista Recovery Disc Torrent](#)

[Learn how to burn an ISO image to a DVD](#)

2.6 Adding “Take Ownership” Context Menu

Many folders in Vista are protected from changes and require administrative approval to change every time. Sometimes this can become tedious, so I’ve created a registry hack you can use to take ownership of select files.

1. Download [TakeOwnership.zip](#)
2. Add “Take ownership” to your context menu by merging (double click) InstallTakeOwnership.reg into your windows registry

Remove “Take ownership” from your context menu by merging RemoveTakeOwnership.reg into your registry.

2.7 Stop UAC Blacking Out the Screen

Have you noticed that when Windows Vista prompts you to allow a program to take action, that the screen blacks out? This is to show you that you are moving to an elevated desktop - where you will allow the program to continue. This can be annoying but you can disable this feature.

1. Download [DisableUACBlackout.zip](#)
2. Extract the archive
3. Double click on DisableUACBlackout.reg

To re-enable the blackout, double click on ReEnableUACBlackout.reg

2.8 Disabling User Account Control

If you feel confident with taking control of security, you probably don't need the User Account Control (UAC) altogether. To disable UAC, do the following:

1. Open the Start Menu and select Control Panel
2. Select User Accounts
3. Select Turn User Account Control on or off

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4. Uncheck the box next to “Use User Account Control (UAC)...” and press OK

You will now be asked to restart your computer to activate your changes. After your computer is restarted you won't be bothered anymore by the UAC.

To re-enable UAC, repeat the above process and at step 4 recheck the box next to “Use User Account Control (UAC)...” and press OK.

Getting Started

3.0 Cleaning up Your Computer

Just like any car, Windows needs to be maintained and cleaned frequently. Whenever I work on someone's computer, I have a check list of things I like to do to ensure I won't be working on the same computer anytime soon.

Anyone can maintain their computer; they just have to learn how. In this chapter you'll learn some basic tips and about some tools to use – to ensure your computer becomes/remains clutter free and does not get sluggish.

Clean Your Computer

3.1 Automatically Delete Temporary Files

The Windows Disk Cleanup Wizard will delete your temporary files, but only if they are over a week old. To create a simple batch script that will clean up your temporary directories, do the following:

3.1.1 Creating the Batch File

1. Open Notepad and type the following:

```
cd C:\Users\%username%\AppData\Local  
  
rmdir /S /Q Temp
```

2. Save the file as cleantemp.bat
3. Now double click on the file to remove your temporary files and free up space on your computer.

If this doesn't work and gives an access error, try replacing %username% with you windows login username.

3.1.2 Automating the Process

To automate this process, so you do not need to remember to run it, do the following:

1. Right click on the batch file and select create shortcut
2. Place the shortcut in your startup folder in the start menu.

Now when you log in to Windows Vista, your temporary files will be deleted.

3.2 Cleaning up Windows

Cleaning up Windows can be a tedious task as there are so many temporary and unused files stored everywhere. Manual cleaning may be more thorough, but would take hours. Luckily there are two programs suited to this job.

The first of these two programs is the well known [CCleaner](#). CCleaner is a freeware system optimization, privacy and cleaning tool. It removes unused files from your system - allowing Windows to run faster and freeing up valuable hard disk space. It also cleans traces of your online activities such as your Internet history. Additionally it contains a fully featured registry cleaner.

Another program I use frequently is [Advanced Windows Care](#) (AWC.) AWC is a comprehensive PC-care utility that has a one-click approach to helping protect, repair and optimize your PC.

Clean Your Computer

Personally I prefer AWC, but CCleaner is great too. You do not need both of these programs; one of these programs should take care of keeping your computer free of temporary clutter.

3.3 Disable and Delete the Hibernation File

Windows places a file on your hard drive that stores your current data when your computer goes into hibernation. If you do not use hibernation, you can delete these files and save as much space as you have RAM (i.e. 512mb or 2gb etc.) In this guide you will learn how to disable hibernation and remove the old hibernation file.

3.3.1 Disable Hibernation

1. Click Start, All Programs, and then right click on Command Prompt. (Or type CMD into the start menu search box.)
2. Select Run as administrator.
3. If User Account Control prompts you to allow the action, click on Continue.

Clean Your Computer

4. In the command prompt window, type “powercfg -h off” (without the quotes).
5. Close the Command Prompt window.

3.3.2 Delete the Hibernation File

1. Click Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, and then click Disk Cleanup. (Or type Disk Cleanup into the start menu search box and hit enter.)
2. If prompted to choose a drive, select the drive in which Windows XP/Vista is installed on to and press OK.
3. Disk Cleanup will scan the hard drive and present you with a list of options.
4. Check Hibernation File Cleaner, and then click OK.
5. When asked “Are you sure you want to permanently delete these files?” click on the Delete Files button.

Clean Your Computer

3.4 Reclaim Disk Space after SP1 Install

When you install Vista SP1, a backup of all replaced files is made. This is done so you can roll back to pre-SP1 if you desire. SP1 has been out for some time now and many of you will no doubt be satisfied with using it. In this guide, you will learn how to reclaim disk space taken up by the Vista SP1 install.

By following this guide, you will be able to save 600-800 MB of disk space.

Please note: After running this tool, you cannot uninstall Vista SP1.

1. Press WINKEY+R
2. Type `vsp1cln.exe` and hit enter
3. When prompted, type Y and hit enter
4. After a few seconds, you will have your hard disk space back

3.5 Remove Entries from Add/Remove Programs

There may be several reasons for removing certain programs from the add/remove programs list. One reason may be that you have no intention of removing

some programs and they are cluttering the list - or you may want to remove that net monitoring program so your kids can't remove it. In this guide you will learn how to remove these programs.

I recommend you backup your registry before doing this; however, if you follow these instructions, you will be fine.

1. Press the windows key and R
2. Type in regedit
3. Now you will see the registry editor.
4. Go to the following entry:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Uninstall

5. In the left pane are the programs (some represented by numbers and letters, and some by their name) and in the right pane you can see the display name.
6. Find the key that corresponds to the program you want to hide. Select the key in the left pane and click File > Export
7. Choose a name for the file and save it. (This will allow you to restore the key when you want to uninstall the program.)
8. Now the key is backed up, you can delete the key by right clicking on it and choosing Delete

Clean Your Computer

3.6 Scan Your Drive for Duplicate Files

Do you have thousands of photos, documents, songs etc on your hard drive? If you do, you'll likely have duplicates all over the place. In this guide you'll learn how to search for duplicates and delete them; thus, saving you space and keeping you organized.

[Download Easy Duplicate Finder](#)

3.6.1 Easy Duplicate Finder Features

- Search for true duplicates (files with same contents)
- Powerful search engine with fast files check
- Full binary (byte-by-byte) comparison
- Flexible Scan settings
- Search files by masks
- Size conditions & skip zero-length files option
- Find duplicates from selected folders or drives
- Add multiple folders/drives for scanning
- Protect system files and folders

Clean Your Computer

- Move files to Recycle Bin or delete duplicate files permanently
- Mark selected duplicates by renaming them with adding prefix to file names - to test which files is safe to delete
- Much more...

3.6.2 Easy Duplicate Finder System Requirements

- OS: Windows 95/98/Me/2000/XP/Vista
- CPU: 400 MHz or higher
- RAM: 128 MB or more
- Hard Drive: 5 MB of free space

3.7 Remove Unwanted Software

I advise you to browse your add/remove programs list and weed out any software you do not use and is clearly taking up space.

If you have a newer PC, there may be a lot of trial software, coined “bloatware”. The [PC Decrapifier](#) is designed to remove a specific list unwanted software in an unattended fashion. The PC does not need to be

Clean Your Computer

new; however, the older the PC is, the less likely it will have any of the software it can detect.

Simply download the file above, and run the EXE. There is no installer necessary. If you have anti-virus software installed, it may complain about this program because it is written with a scripting language. These warnings can be safely ignored.

When it runs, you will be presented with a wizard style dialog box that steps you through the entire process.

You will be able to pick and choose what you want to remove.

It will not begin removing anything, without prompting you first!

Hit the “Next” button and it will begin cleaning your PC. If it does not find anything, a pop-up box will notify you of this and the program will exit and not modify your PC.

3.8 Disable Memory Dump Files and Save HDD Space

If your computer crashes it will create a dump file. From this dump file you can diagnose the source of the problem. It is unlikely you will need this file; if you do,

you can always turn the option back on. This guide will show you how to save space by disabling memory dump files in Vista.

1. Press Start and click Control Panel
2. Type Advanced in the search box
3. Click on View advanced system settings in the search results
4. Under Startup and Recovery, click Settings
5. In the Write debugging information drop down, click (none) and press OK

You will now save space and not store useless information.

4.0 Changing Your Boot and Login Screens

The first thing you see as you boot up your computer is your boot screen and shortly after you'll come to your login screen (if you have login enabled.) Although you don't spend much time using these interfaces, customizing them can be a nice touch. In this chapter you'll learn how to customize both these screens.

To successfully achieve this in an easy manner, you'll need two tools: 'Vista Boot Logo Generator' and 'LogonStudio Vista'. Both of these programs do not need to run in the background, so the performance of your system does not deteriorate at all. These programs simply patch your system files, so you don't have to do any shell scripting or editing of system files. Add a personal touch to your system as you follow this chapter.

4.1 Enable the Aurora Boot Screen

The boot screen in Windows Vista is plain and lame. To change the boot screen, follow these simple steps:

1. Press the Start button, type 'msconfig', and hit enter
2. If prompted, select Continue
3. The System Configuration window will come up. Click on the Boot tab
4. Select your Windows Vista installation
5. Check the 'No GUI boot' box
6. Press OK
7. Click on Restart

Your computer will now reboot, and you will see the Aurora boot screen.

4.2 Making a Custom Boot Screen

You can easily make your own boot screen for Windows Vista by following this guide: (Please note: this does not work for SP1... yet)

1. Navigate to C:\Windows\System32\en-US
2. Locate 'winload.exe.mui' and take ownership of the file (see chapter 2)
3. Rename the file to 'winload.exe.mui.old'
4. Press the Start button, type 'msconfig', and hit enter
5. On the 'Boot' tab, check 'No GUI Boot'
6. Press OK and when prompted to restart, select 'Exit without restart'
7. [Download](#) Vista Boot Logo Generator
8. Install the software on to your machine
9. Open Vista Boot Logo Generator
10. Select your boot screen (you'll need both 800x600 and 1024x768 24-bit BMP files)
11. Select 'File > Save Boot Screen File As...' and save your new 'winload.exe.mui' file in C:\Windows\System32\en-US

Restart your computer to verify your boot screen works.

4.3 Customize Your Logon Screen

[Logon Studio](#), created by the Stardock team lets you customize your Windows Vista logon screen. Choose from many styles that will make your computer stand out from the crowd.

Logon Studio is freeware, which can set any wallpaper as your logon screen. All you need to do is to download this utility and choose the wallpaper you want to use.

Logon studio lets you create custom screens within the program. Once you apply the screen, Logon Studio locks your computer so you can test drive the screen to see if it works for you.

4.4 How to Use Logon Studio

Logon Studio is simple to use, but in this guide, I'll show you the basics. To change your login screen, do the following:

1. Open Logon Studio
2. In the left-hand menu, click 'Create'
3. Browse for your background image and then select 'Save'
4. Now click 'Apply' to test your login screen

4.5 Use Windows Wallpapers for Your Logon Screen

You already have a collection of wallpapers that come with Windows. You may use any one of the wallpapers from the collection as your boot screen and I'll show you how to achieve this easily.

1. [Install login studio](#) (if you haven't already)
2. Download [this zip file](#)
3. Extract the .logonvista files to your desktop
4. Drag and drop the .logonvista files on to the LogonStudio Vista window

The new logon screens will appear on the right-hand side, under "Built-in logon screens". You can now delete the .logonvista files.

5.0 Customizing Your Start Menu and Desktop

The start menu and your desktop are two of the most commonly used elements of Windows Vista. Customizing both of them can make your computing experience more enjoyable and productive. In this chapter, you'll learn how to customize and improve your start menu; you'll also learn how to customize your taskbar, system tray, desktop icons, color scheme, and mouse cursors.

When you are done customizing, you'll learn how to save your configuration as a theme. Remember, more is less with customization, so you don't need to follow this chapter completely. Use this chapter to inspire you to add the finishing touches to your system.

5.1 Customizing Your Start Menu

The Windows Start Menu is notoriously bloated. There are a couple of ways you can customize your start menu to restore order. The first is to customize the right-hand panel and the second is to organize the programs folder.

5.1.1 Customizing the Right-hand Panel

1. Right click on the Windows button and select Properties
2. Click the Customize... button
3. Here you can change what shows up in the right section of the start menu. If you don't use your Music folder, then why have it linked there?

5.1.2 Customizing the Programs List

After installing a few programs, your start menu can get cluttered. To reduce the number of folders in the left part of the menu, consider using folders like 'Media', 'Internet' etc. To customize your Start Menu, do the following.

1. Click the Start Menu button
2. Click on Programs

3. Right click on a folder and select Explore All Users/Explore
4. Once in the windows explorer window, you can rename folders and put links together. I usually delete the shortcuts to readme files, help files, and uninstall links as these can all be accessed from other places, and I rarely use them.

5.2 Adding Widgets to Your Start Menu

[Start++](#) is an enhancement for the Start Menu in Windows Vista. It also extends the Run box and the command-line with customizable commands. For example, typing "w Windows Vista" will take you to the Windows Vista page on Wikipedia!

Advanced functions can work with search results, powered by Windows Vista's integrated desktop search engine. For example, typing "play radiohead" will find all music that matches the query "radiohead", compile the results into an .M3U file, and launch it in Windows Media Player.

[Download Start ++](#)

Start Menu & Desktop

5.3 Search Google and More from the Start Menu

If you use Google, Wikipedia, Yahoo, etc a lot then this guide is for you. In this guide, you'll learn how to search these websites from your Start Menu.

Please Note: This guide involves the use of the Group Policy Editor, which is not included with Vista Home Premium/Basic or Windows XP Home.

5.3.1 Configuring Your Start Menu to Search Google

1. Start Group Policy Editor (Start > Run > "gpedit.msc")
2. In the left panel, go to User Configuration > Administrative Templates > Windows Components > Instant Search
3. In the right panel, right click on Custom Instant Search Internet Search Provider policy setting and select Properties
4. Select Enabled
5. Now in the first String or dll resource... field, type Search Google
6. In the The URL to use when... field, type <http://www.google.com/search?q=%w>

Start Menu & Desktop

7. Press OK and Reboot your computer(If you wish to apply the changed policy setting immediately, open a command prompt and run gpupdate/force)
8. Press the Start button, type your search for Google, click Search Google, and Google will load

5.3.2 Configuring Your Start Menu to Search Wikipedia

Follow the steps above and replace steps 5 & 6 with the following:

5. Now in the first String or dll resource... field, type Search Wikipedia
6. In the The URL to use when... field, type <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%w>

5.3.3 Configuring Your Start Menu to Search Yahoo

Follow the steps above and replace steps 5 & 6 with the following:

5. Now in the first String or dll resource... field, type Search Yahoo
6. In the The URL to use when... field, type <http://search.yahoo.com/search?p=%w>

5.4 Choosing a Color Scheme

In Vista, you can easily change the color scheme of your desktop. Unfortunately, not all computer systems support the Windows Aero color scheme and you will need to be using Windows Vista Home Premium, Business, or Ultimate to enable Aero.

To change the color scheme, do the following:

1. Press the Start button
2. Select 'Control Panel'
3. Under the 'Appearance and Personalization' section, select 'Customize Colors'
4. Select the color scheme you want
5. Press 'OK'

You can now enjoy your more personalized colors.

5.5 Customizing the Taskbar

The Windows Taskbar can be customized to meet your needs. You can resize the taskbar, hide it, and even add toolbars to it.

5.5.1 Moving the Taskbar

By default, the taskbar resides at the bottom of your screen. You can move the taskbar to any side of the screen or even to another screen if you use more than one monitor. To move the taskbar, do the following:

1. Right click the taskbar and ensure 'Lock the Taskbar' is unchecked
2. Point to a blank spot on the taskbar and drag the taskbar to the side of the Desktop where you want it

5.5.2 Resizing the Taskbar

By default, the taskbar is one 'row' wide. You can resize the taskbar to any size you want. To resize the taskbar, do the following:

1. Right click the taskbar and ensure 'Lock the Taskbar' is unchecked
2. Place the mouse pointer on the outer edge of the taskbar until the pointer turns into a two-headed arrow
3. Drag the border to change the size of the taskbar

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5.5.3 Controlling Taskbar Grouping

Grouping common items on the taskbar can reduce clutter. If you have five instances of internet explorer running, the grouping option will display them as one button the taskbar. Clicking the internet explorer button will bring up a list of all active Internet Explorer windows.

5.5.3.1 Disabling Grouping

Grouping isn't for everyone (including me). To disable grouping, do the following:

1. Right-click the Start button
2. Select 'Properties'
3. Select the 'Taskbar' pane in the 'Taskbar And Start Menu'
4. Uncheck the 'Group Similar Taskbar Buttons' checkbox

5.5.3.2 Setting Grouping Limitations

To change the number of similar windows that need to be open to 'kick in' grouping, do the following:

1. Press the Start button
2. Type in regedit and hit enter
3. Navigate to
HKCU\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\Advanced
4. Create a new DWORD value named
TaskbarGroupSize

In the value field, specify the minimum number of similar windows that need to be open to enable grouping. A setting of 2 groups related items as soon as you open a second window, even if there's plenty of room on the taskbar; 3 enables grouping as soon as you have three or more similar windows; and so on.

Now log off and log back in to put your new settings into effect.

5.5.4 Auto-hiding the Taskbar

You may find the taskbar gets in the way when you are using a program, or even when you are on your desktop. You can auto-hide the taskbar in two different ways. The first way is to have the taskbar auto-hide when it is not in focus. The other way is to have the taskbar in the background when you maximize a window or move a window over it.

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5.5.4.1 Auto-hiding the Taskbar All the Time

To autohide the taskbar, do the following:

1. Press the Start button
2. Type taskb in the Search box
3. click 'Taskbar And Start Menu'

The Taskbar and Start Menu Properties dialog box will now display.

4. Check 'Auto-Hide The Taskbar'

To access the taskbar, simply move your mouse to the side of the screen the taskbar is located on and it will appear.

5.5.4.2 Hiding the Taskbar Behind Active Windows

To hide the taskbar behind active windows, do the following:

1. Press the Start button
2. Type taskb in the Search box
3. click 'Taskbar And Start Menu'

The Taskbar and Start Menu Properties dialog box will now display.

4. Uncheck 'Keep The Taskbar On Top Of Other Windows'

5.6 Customizing Desktop Icons

There are many ways you can customize your desktop icons: you can resize them, change them, or even remove them. Learn how to customize your icons in this guide. To customize your icons, do the following:

1. Right click the desktop and select Personalize
2. Click Change Desktop Icons

Here you can select the icons you want to be shown on the Desktop.

You can also change the appearance of an icon by selecting it, and clicking 'Change Icon'. In the Change Icon dialog box that appears, click the image you want to replace that of the selected icon and press OK.

To change the size, order, and alignment of your desktop icons, right click a blank spot on the Desktop, select view, and specify the size and alignment of the icons or whether you want the icons to be shown on the Desktop or hidden.

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You may also resize the icon size on the desktop by clicking a blank area on the desktop, holding the CTRL key, and scrolling your mouse wheel.

5.7 Changing Your Account Picture

Your account picture is used for the login screen, your start menu, windows meeting space, and more. When you first set up your account, you may select one of the default images. In this guide you'll learn how to customize your account picture. Do this by following these steps:

1. Press the Start button
2. Click your account picture at the top of the menu
3. In the User Accounts window, choose 'Change Your Picture'
 - a. Either click a picture you want to use
 - b. OR click Browse For More Pictures, locate your picture, and click Open

If you see any white space around your picture, edit it in paint or another editing program to make your image square.

5.8 Customizing Your Mouse

You're probably pretty happy with how your mouse works, but you can always make some changes, which may help you out. I always turn the sensitivity of my mouse pad up the maximum, which makes me move my fingers less to get around the screen. If I want precision, I am unlikely to get it with a laptop mouse pad anyway, so I plug in an external one, or use the desktop. Learn how to customize your mouse in this guide.

5.8.1 Setting the Mouse Buttons

To change the behavior of your mouse buttons, do the following:

1. Press the Start button
2. Type mouse in the Search box
3. Click 'Mouse' to display the Mouse Properties dialog box

On the Buttons tab, you can switch the mouse for left or right-handed use

Move the slider to set the speed at which you need to double-click for Windows to recognize your double click.

When you finish customizing, press the OK button.

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5.8.2 Setting Mouse Pointer Options

To change your mouse pointer options, do the following:

1. Press the Start button
2. Type mouse in the Search box
3. Click 'Mouse' to display the Mouse Properties dialog box
4. Click the Pointer Options tab

Here you may set or change the following options:

- The speed at which your mouse pointer moves. (As you move the slider, you can test the effect of the change by moving your mouse.)
- Increase the precision of the pointer when you move short distances
- Configure the mouse to automatically move to the default button in a dialog box to facilitate quick selection of the button
- Set the length of the trails if you want to increase the mouse pointer's visibility by temporarily showing its path
- Remove the mouse pointer's visibility when you're typing and not using the mouse

- Locate the mouse pointer on your screen by pressing the CTRL key

5.9 Enabling Vista Aero Mouse Cursors

Can't use Vista Aero because it melts your computer? Well you can still use the cursors. To enable the Vista Aero cursors, follow these simple steps:

1. Right click on your desktop and select Personalize
2. Click on the Mouse Pointers item to select a different mouse cursor scheme
3. Change the Scheme from None to Windows Aero
4. Click OK

Now you have the Aero cursors working for you.

5.10 Adding a Mac-like Dock to Your Desktop

Although OS X doesn't suit my computing needs, I do love the look of some of the features it has. One of the

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best features is the easy-to-use and customizable dock. You can put a dock in Windows Vista too. To install a dock, do the following:

1. [Download ObjectDock here](#) (Go to the page and click the “Free Download” button.)
2. Install ObjectDock on to your computer.
3. Once installed, launch ObjectDock (if it hasn’t already).

You can get thousands of icons for your dock [here](#).

ObjectDock is very easy to use and there is a lot of support out there for this free product; go to the [ObjectDock website](#) and click “Forums”.

5.11 Removing Icons from the System Tray

After using your computer for some time, you may find that there are a lot of icons building up in your system tray. With Windows Vista, you can hide these icons to remove clutter. This guide will show you how to do this.

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1. Right click the space next to the clock and select properties
2. In Taskbar and Start Menu Properties, select the Notification Area tab and then select customize
3. Now select the icons you want to hide and choose hide
4. Press OK on both windows you just opened and you are done

5.12 Adding Extra Clocks

Ever wanted to see, at a glance, what time it is in say... London or even Nuku'alofa? With Windows Vista you can. This guide will show you how to add up to two extra clocks with Windows Vista without adding any extra software.

1. Click the clock...
2. Click on "Change date and time settings..."
3. Click the "Additional Clocks" tab
4. Check the "Show this clock" button
5. Select the time zone you want to see a clock for

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6. Give the clock a name
7. Press "OK"

Now you can see, at a glance, the time around the world.

5.13 Replacing Outdated System Icons

[Vize](#) is a GUI enhancer for Windows Vista. It replaces most of the non-Vista icons, animations and bitmaps that Microsoft is still overlooking.

Vize automates the process of replacing resources in system files, applying the real fit and finish to Windows Vista.

5.13.1 How Does Vize Work?

The patching process will not disable Vista's built-in security features. Vize will automatically restore all files and folder permissions, making your Vista experience nicer without sacrificing security.

Vize does not contain any spyware or ad-ware of any kind.

If you are not satisfied with the results, you can completely uninstall Vize.

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Vize is compatible with any version (except x64) and any language of Windows Vista and Windows Server 2008.

6.0 Making the Most Out of Wallpaper and Screensavers

One of the easiest ways to add a personal touch to your computer is to change your wallpaper or your screensaver. If this concept is new to you, then this chapter is for you. If you are already familiar with changing your wallpaper and screensaver, you can skip the basic guides, which show you how, and you can explore the rest of this chapter.

In this chapter, you will learn how to change your wallpaper, how to make it more functional, and how to animate it. You'll also learn how to change your screensaver and I'll point you toward some good screensavers you can use on your computer. Finally, you'll learn how to save your settings as a theme so you can reuse your customization settings anytime.

6.1 Changing Your Desktop Wallpaper

This simple guide will teach you how to change your wallpaper. If you are already familiar with this, please move on to the rest of this chapter to find out what else you can do with your wallpaper and screensavers.

To change your desktop wallpaper, [download one](#), and do the following:

1. Right click the desktop and select Personalize
2. Click Desktop Background
3. Select the wallpaper picture or color you want, and specify its location:
 - a. Windows Wallpapers to use one of the background patterns or pictures that came with Windows Vista
 - b. Pictures, Sample Pictures, or Public Pictures to use a picture from one of those locations
 - c. Solid Colors to use a single color
 - d. Click Browse if you want to locate and use a picture from another location
4. You can specify how your wallpaper will look:
 - a. Stretched to fit the screen
 - b. Repeated (tiled) across the screen

- c. Or normal sized in the center of the screen with a solid colored background behind it

Experiment and see what looks good on your computer.

6.2 Making Your Wallpaper More Functional

When you think of desktop wallpaper, you probably think of a way to express yourself with a picture you really like. You probably change your wallpaper often as your tastes change etc. One suggestion I have, is to make your desktop wallpaper more functional; thus, using it in a different way.

We speak of the main screen of your computer as a desktop, but it doesn't really look like a desktop. Download a [desktop-like image here](#) and organize your files accordingly – just like you would on a physical desktop.

See Figure 6.2.1 for a sample of what the wallpaper looks like.



Figure 6.2.1 – ‘Desktop’ Desktop Wallpaper

6.3 Animating Wallpaper with Dreamscene

Unfortunately, Dreamscene only comes with Windows Vista Ultimate. There are ways to enable DreamScene on other versions of Vista, but this is not legal. If you do not have Vista Ultimate, please follow the next guide, which shows how you can get the same effect with VLC Player.

6.3.1 Installing Windows DreamScene

To enable and use Vista DreamScene on your computer, do the following:

Please note: As well as running Windows Vista Ultimate, you'll also need Aero enabled.

1. Press Start and select Control Panel
2. In the search box, type 'update' and select 'Windows Update' from the search results
3. Click 'View available updates' in the upper right corner
4. Under 'Windows Ultimate Extras', click on 'View available Extras'
5. Select 'Windows DreamScene' and click 'Install'
6. Restart your computer after DreamScene has finished installing
7. Repeat steps 1-4 and download Windows DreamScene Content Packs
8. Exit Windows update and right click on the desktop. You'll now have two options:
 - **Pause DreamScene:** This will pause a Windows DreamScene desktop background
 - **Play DreamScene:** This will un-pause the Dreamscene

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6.3.2 Selecting a Dream

To change your desktop background to a dream, do the following:

1. Right click on a empty area of your desktop and click Personalize
2. Select the 'Desktop Background' tab
3. Click on the 'Location' drop down list and click on 'Windows DreamScene Content'
4. Select a DreamScene (video) you want on your desktop background
5. Press 'OK'

6.4 Animating Wallpaper with VLC Player

If you do not use Vista Ultimate, you can still animate your wallpaper, by using VLC Player – a free media player solution that is low on resource usage. To get animated wallpaper with VLC, do the following:

1. [Download](#) the latest version of VLC Player
2. Navigate to Settings > Preferences > Video > Output Modules > Direct X

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3. Check the 'Advanced Options' box in the bottom right-hand corner
4. Check 'Enable Wallpaper Mode'
5. Navigate to 'Playlist' in the left-hand navigation menu
6. Select 'Repeat Current Item'
7. Press 'Save'
8. Open your video file
9. Right click on the video and select 'Wallpaper'

Download some good animated wallpaper here:

microsoft.com

winmatrix.com forums

skytimelapse.com

corbismotion.com

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6.5 Making Your Desktop Wallpaper Ripple like Water

Want to add some eye candy to your desktop? With Ripple, you can do this. To configure your desktop, do the following:

1. [Download](#) ripple
2. Extract the file and install it
3. Start ripple from the start menu and enjoy

[\[Click for image of ripple on my desktop \(1.04 MB\)\]](#)

6.6 Choosing a Screensaver

To change your screensaver, you can do the following:

1. Right click the desktop and select Personalize
2. Click Screen Saver
3. Select a screensaver from the list (or see the next section to add new screensavers)
4. Click Settings and specify the options you want for the screen saver

You can also do the following from this screen:

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- Preview the screen saver in full-screen view
- Specify the length of time you want your computer to be inactive before the screen saver starts
- Require log on after you stop the screensaver running

6.7 Recommended Screensavers

With so many screensavers available, here is an offering of some of the best screensavers that are low on resource consumption.

6.7.1 Photo/Video Slideshow Screensaver

To use you're photos and videos as a slide show, do the following:

1. Right click the desktop and select Personalize
2. Click Screen Saver
3. Select Photos in the Screen Saver list
4. Click Settings

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- a. Choose pictures from your Photo Gallery (limit by tags or ratings)
 - b. OR choose pictures from a specific folder (click Browse to specify the folder)
5. Select a theme for the display
 6. Select the speed at which you want the pictures to change
 7. Specify whether or not you want your pictures appear in random order
 8. Press Save and press OK

6.7.2 Other Recommended Screensavers

I have a [collection of screensavers here](#) that you can download and use.

6.8 Saving Your Settings as a Theme

When you are satisfied with the appearance of your windows desktop, you may save the settings as a theme. A theme incorporates the following settings:

- Color and appearance choices

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- Color schemes
- Sound schemes
- Mouse pointer schemes
- Advanced appearance settings
- Screen saver choice

These settings are all unique to your account, so things like screen resolution, which is a global setting, will need manual changing.

To save your settings as a theme, do the following:

1. Right click the desktop and select 'Personalize'
2. Click Theme
3. Click 'Save As...' and choose a name

You may now restore these saved settings at anytime by using the same method as above.

6.9 Change the Taskbar to Any Color(s) You Want



Want to have a colorful task bar in Vista? Achieving this effect is very simple. Simply paste a color bar over the top of your wallpaper and set the new image as wallpaper. Now when you are viewing the desktop in Vista (with Aero enabled) you can see a colorful effect on your task bar.

To create a wallpaper to change the taskbar color, do the following:

1. Open your wallpaper in Photoshop/Paint.Net etc
2. Create a new layer with the bars provided below and align the bar to the bottom of the wallpaper
3. Save the file and set it as your wallpaper
4. Now, when you are viewing your desktop with Aero enabled, you will see a colorful bar

I put together some Photoshop and Bitmap files you can use these as the top layer — or you can make your own.

Wallpaper & Screensavers

Sample Files to Use to Create Rainbow Taskbar Effect

Resolution (Width)	PSD Files	BMP Files
--------------------	-----------	-----------

1024	Download	Download
------	--------------------------	--------------------------

1152	Download	Download
------	--------------------------	--------------------------

1280	Download	Download
------	--------------------------	--------------------------

1600	Download	Download
------	--------------------------	--------------------------

7.0 Customizing Windows Explorer

Windows Explorer is your main portal to all your files. You can greatly increase your efficiency by making some simple changes. You can also add a personal touch to your file structure by following this chapter.

In this chapter, you'll learn how to standardize the view of Windows Explorer, set up quickly accessible shortcuts, improve the way you select files, change your folder backgrounds, and customize your folder icons.

Windows Explorer

7.1 Setting Views for all Folders

Windows Vista does a pretty good job at analyzing the content of a folder to determine how it should display the files. 98% of the time I just want to see the details of the files and I don't care for thumbnails, tags, ratings etc. If you are like me and want to simplify Windows Explorer's view, do the following:

1. Open and folder and customize it in a way that you want reflected across all your folders
2. Within the folder, press the ALT key once and then select 'View > Folder Options'
3. Click the 'View' tab and click 'Apply to Folders'
4. When prompted, select 'Yes' and your settings will now be in effect.

Please Note: Any previous customization may be retained for specific folders you've already worked with – but don't count on it.

7.2 Setting up Shortcuts to Common Folders

Windows Explorer has a great feature in Vista: the shortcut menu. This shortcut menu is customizable and can save you a lot of time if you frequently open and close files from specific locations.

7.2.1 Adding Shortcuts to the Shortcut Menu

To add a shortcut to the menu, do the following:

1. Locate the folder you want to add
2. Click on it and drag it to the menu

7.2.2 Removing Shortcuts from the Shortcut Menu

To remove a shortcut from the menu, do the following:

1. Right click on the shortcut
2. Click 'Remove Link'

Windows Explorer

7.3 Selecting Multiple Files with Checkboxes

When you want to select multiple files, you need to hold the CTRL key; if you let go of it before selecting another file, you lose your entire selection. Windows Vista's solution to this is allowing you to select checkboxes next to files, so you do not have to hold the CTRL key.

To enable check box file selection, do the following:

1. Within the folder, press the ALT key once and then select 'View > Folder Options'
2. Click the 'View' tab and under 'Advanced settings', locate and select 'Use check boxes to select items'

Now you can check the files you want to collectively select.

7.4 Changing Folder Backgrounds

In Vista, the ability to have custom backgrounds in explorer folders is gone. [Vista Folder Background](#) makes folder backgrounds possible again.

7.4.1 About Vista Folder Background

Vista Folder Background applies a background to any folder and automatically applies that same background to subfolders.

7.4.2 Installing Vista Folder Background

1. [Download](#) Vista Folder Background
2. Unzip the downloaded file
3. Run install.bat

To uninstall, run uninstall.bat - then restart your computer

7.5 Customizing Folder Icons

I use some folders as a dashboard to get to commonly used folders. A good example of this is my 'Media' partition. Here, I have my Music, Video, Pictures, and other folders. In this guide, you'll learn how to customize your folder icons to achieve something similar to Figure 7.5.1.

Windows Explorer

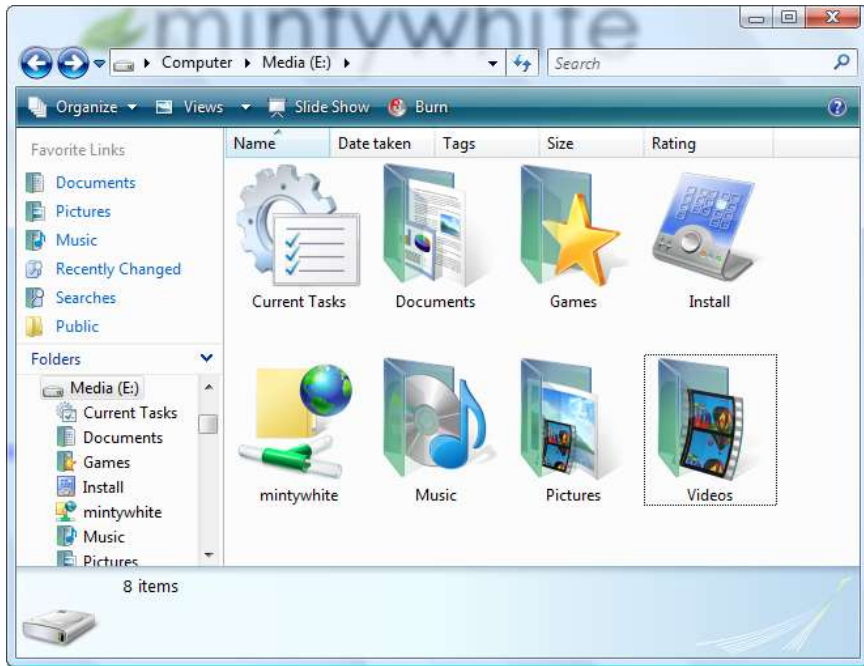


Figure 7.5.1 – Customized Folder Icons

To change your folder icons, do the following:

1. Right click on the folder you want to customize the icon for and select 'Properties'
2. Select the 'Customize' tab and click on 'Change Icon...'
3. Select an Icon or browse for your own (get [thousands of icons here](#))
4. Press 'OK' on both screens and you are done.

Windows Explorer

Note: To view larger icons in Windows Explorer, click the 'Views' button, on the toolbar, until you get to large icons.

8.0 Organizing Your Files

There are many ways to organize your files and an in-depth organization solution is out of the scope of this book; however, this chapter offers a few tips to help you keep on top of your files.

In this chapter, you'll learn how to automatically move files from your desktop, use naming conventions, batch rename your files, and relocate your personal document folders from the default locations set in Windows Vista.

Organizing Files

8.1 Automatically Moving Files from Your Desktop

Do you have a cluttered desktop? Do you spend time looking for the documents, pictures etc you've saved recently and then move them to different folders? If this is the case, or if you just like a clean desktop, this guide is for you. Desktop teleporter is a great utility that moves files and folders that are newly created on your desktop to pre-determined folders.

To automate the process of organizing your desktop, do the following:

1. [Download](#) Desktop Teleporter
2. Set up rules to help manage images, music, documents etc
3. Set exceptions to your rules if you need them

[\[Click to see an image of my clutter-free desktop\]](#)

8.2 Use Naming Conventions to Organize Your Data

[Here](#) you may see the naming conventions I use for my files. This is just as a guide to get you started on your own system. I set many of these conventions many

years ago, but they work. Experience has given me newer ideas, some of which I am currently using.

Photo Files

I archive my photos in the following way:

Photo > %Year% > %Date%&Title

Documents

Even though you can sort files by date in all popular OSs, I still append a date to the front of a file. This helps me with versioning and I usually remember when I wrote something, and not what I called it.

Music

Everyone names their music differently, this is my way (but I'm not an MP3 tag person, so I would probably use this for inspiration and not instruction.)

I archive my music in the following way:

Music > %genre% > %album_title%

All individual songs that I buy separately go into the genre folder, along with any albums that are in their own folders. Tags essentially do the same thing, but when you have over 100 albums (or 1000s as may be the case), it helps to do some organization within your file structure.

As a reminder, please visit [this page](#), for screenshots of my file system.

8.3 Batch Rename Your Files

I don't remember when I first started using D-File Mu, but it is an invaluable tool for me. I use it all the time and I recommend it to anyone. It may take a little getting used to, but it's not too complicated and works very well. In this guide, you'll learn how to set rules and batch rename your files without going near the command prompt.

[Download D-FileMU](#)

8.3.1 D-FileMU Features

D-File MU Performs the following changes:

- Adding strings to the beginning and end of the filenames
- Deleting specified number of characters from beginning or end of the filenames
- Adding numbers in sequence to the beginning or end of the filenames
- Changing to upper or lowercase
- Replacing strings with specified string
- Changing the file extension of filenames
- Capitalizing words and more...

8.4 Relocating Personal Data Folders

I don't like having my personal files on the system drive. If you get a virus or reinstall your operating system, you stand a higher chance of losing your files. I always keep my personal files on a separate partition or drive. Windows likes to store your saved videos, music, pictures etc in your Documents folder; in this guide, you'll learn how to relocate your personal folders.

To relocate your personal files, do the following:

1. Press the Start button
2. Click your account name in the right-hand menu
3. Right click a folder that you want to relocate and select Properties
4. On the Location tab of the properties dialog box, enter the address that you want to relocate to
5. Click OK

Windows will ask permission to create the target folder if it doesn't already exist, so click 'Yes'. I advise moving all the original files to the new location, unless you see a reason not to.

The final step is to add your new personal folder locations to the search index. An explanation of how to do this is outside the scope of this book.

About This Book

My name is Rich and I am the author and creator of Windows Guides on mintywhite.com. Web design is my hobby and I've been developing websites for over ten years - HTML, DHTML, XML, C#, J#, VB.NET, ASP.NET, ASP, Javascript, Java, PHP - you name it, I've probably developed in it at some time.


I enjoy the design aspect of web development, but I'm not that good at it (make your own judgment on that) However, I love putting together How To's, documentation, tutorials, guides etc. and want to share that talent with you all.

There is no charge for this book - if you somehow paid for it, get a refund! I hope this guide can be a reference for you in the future as you customize Windows Vista.

I also wrote [Windows Vista - The Pocket Guide](#)

Contact Me

You may have questions as you read this book – please don't keep them to yourself – ask me them anytime. There are a number of ways you can contact me – listed below:

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 Digg: <http://digg.com/users/mintywhite>

 Plurk: <http://www.plurk.com/user/mintywhite>

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Windows Vista

Customization Manual