TECHNICAL GEEKERY TIPS

Microsoft Word
Zap Clippy!

Do you still have Word 2002, 2003, or an even earlier version? Yeah, me too. What do you think is the number-one annoyance that was resolved in Office 2007? ("It looks like you're writing a letter…") You guessed it. *Clippy.* Well, believe it or not, there is a pretty easy way to turn him off.

Choose Help>Show the Office Assistant one last time. Right-click Clippy (or whatever character you may have chosen) and choose Options. Uncheck every box on this page, including (if you have it) Use the Office Assistant. Click OK. Just don't go to Help>Show the Office Assistant again, okay?

Internet Explorer Version 7

If you just switched to IE 7, you might be annoyed at the loss of the menu bar. Although all its functions are available elsewhere, it is often the easiest way to do something. If you just need to see it for a second, you can push the Alt key and it will appear. (By the way, that trick works for just about any Vista [or XP] app without a visible menu bar.)

But if you use it often, you should consider showing it. To enable this feature, you need to use—you guessed it—the menu bar. In Internet Explorer, push Alt, then choose View>Toolbars>Menu Bar.

Firefox

Have you ever noticed the Links toolbar? It can look a bit annoying, but once you get used to it, it can be rather helpful for some people. If you're not sure what the Links toolbar is or if you have it enabled, look under the Back button. If you see a Latest Headlines button, it's working. (If you've installed a toolbar [or it came with your computer or another app] such as Google or Yahoo, you may need to look under that.) To add something to this toolbar, find the little icon to the left of the URL (see Screenshot 1 at the bottom) and drag it to the toolbar.

Windows
What really changed in Vista?

This article will be slightly long this month, owing to the length of the topic. Please feel free to skip parts of it if you don't think they apply to you, but if it interests you, I encourage you to read because you may learn something new.

Below I will talk about what the changes are. I will explain all the features, then supply another paragraph or two talking about differences between versions.

Interface

Yes, the new "Aero" interface seems more like a marketing feature for people who just go by looks. But it can truly be helpful to you. One thing is that you can see under the title bar of any window. With certain windows, there may be a larger transparent portion. (See Screenshot 2.) Another lesser-known fact is that you can see a preview of a window by hovering the mouse over the taskbar button (Screenshot 3). Probably the most fancy feature that Microsoft used for marketing is called Windows Flip. You've probably heard of it. Use Screenshot 4 to confirm your suspicions. I like to call it "Twirly Window." To get this, push Windows-Tab. Continue pushing Tab until the window you want is in the front. The desktop is also a choice. If you can't figure out what a window is, you can try Alt-Tab, which also shows the name of the window as well as a thumbnail preview. You may have to switch back and forth. Alt-Tab is shown in Screenshot 5. (Incidentally, Alt-Tab with a much less fancy interface was available in earlier versions of Windows back to Windows 95.) As you can see, transparency is widely used in all these features.

Start menu

Yes, the new Start menu has several new features, but you can probably live without it. To check it out, see Screenshot 6. The most notable change is that there is now a search box (which can be activated by simply typing, no need to click in it) meaning that searches are much easier. This same box is also found in every Windows Explorer window. The icon at the top of the Start menu shows your user picture. However, when you mouse over an option on the right side of the Start menu, it changes to show the icon for that folder or option. The big power button now activates "Turn Off" mode, which saves the hard drive's contents to disk and switches to low power mode. This means that if the power goes out, you won't lose any data. To shut down, click the little arrow to the right of the two power buttons.

Other changes include that All Programs now changes the Frequently Used Programs and Pinned Items lists to All Programs rather than opening a little flip-out menu (no, that's not the official name) and the absence of a Run button.

Windows Explorer

Several features in Windows Explorer may greatly help those of us with many files (such as a certain webmaster and newsletter writer in Valparaiso). See Screenshot 7 to take a look at my Documents (yes, the My finally got omitted) folder without any sort techniques.

Although the distinctions can get extremely confusing at times, there are four sorting techniques: sorting, filtering, grouping, and stacking. Both sorting and grouping (in a limited form) were available in Windows XP. Sorting is the simple, old way to organize files, simply organizing files by one of the columns you click at the top (see Screenshot 8). I sorted by Type in this example. If you don't see columns at the top of the window, choose Views and drag the slider to Details. To sort, you can simply click a column. To reverse the order, click it again. The default sort is ascending by name.

Filtering is nearly as simple, but is a totally new feature. It takes sorting to a new level by blocking out the files that are not of a specific type that you select. On a technical level, filtering uses the search engine, so, unlike with grouping and sorting, filters you set will not still be there when you go back to the folder later. As evidence of this, you may see a message at the bottom of the screen saying Did You Find What You Were Searching For? Unlike with grouping, stacking, *and* sorting, you can filter by more than one category. Filtering is done by clicking the drop-down arrow next to a column. This arrow only appears when you mouse over the column. A filtered column displays a check mark next to it. To learn about filtering, see Screenshots 9 and 10.

Grouping is like in Windows XP. To group, right-click the window and choose Group By>Whatever Category You Want To Group By. If there's too much on the screen, you can click the little up arrow at the right of the heading. See Screenshot 11 to learn about grouping.

Finally, stacking is basically a different way to use search. If you've ever used Google Directory (http://directory.google.com) you know what I mean. Great site, by the way. Stacking sorts all the files and folders in the current folder and subfolders and provides them for you to pick one. It can be helpful if you don't want to group things but don't want to use the search either. It's also just a cool new feature. See Screenshot 12 to get an example of stacking. To view one of these searches ("folders"), just double-click it.

The other new feature of Windows Explorer saves copies of your files and allows you to restore an old one if something goes haywire. This is not available in all versions, but if you have it, it can be really useful. To access these versions, open the Properties dialog box for the file by right-clicking and choosing Properties. Then choose Previous Versions.

There are other improvements in Vista, but I am not trying to write a book or even an essay on the topic. If you want to learn more about the new features and basic functions of Vista, I highly recommend picking up a copy of *Windows Vista All-In-One Desk Reference for Dummies* by Woody Leonard. This book has been highly useful to me in making the transition to Vista and learning about the differences.

Version Differences

This maybe shouldn't come after a paragraph that seems to end this article, but I figured it should be last. There are, unbelievably, eight versions of Vista, and all of them are designed to make Microsoft money, save Microsoft money, or stop a lawsuit. Don't get tricked into buying the wrong one for stupid reasons.

Vista Home Basic is very cheap but doesn't provide many features that people like about Vista. Previous Versions, the Aero interface, and several video tools are the main items left out.

Vista Home Premium is also relatively cheap but doesn't leave out nearly as much. The only big thing that is left out if Previous Versions.

Vista Business is for business users and generally should not be bought by home users. Video tools are left out.

Vista Enterprise is for big businesses and includes everything in Business plus tools to connect the computer to a corporate network. It can only be rented, five copies at least.

Vista Ultimate includes everything in all versions but tends to be very expensive.

Windows Starter 2007 is not available in the US. It was designed to reduce software piracy by making a cheap version of Vista available in developing countries, but it has extremely few features.

Vista Home N is like Home Basic, except it doesn't have Media Player. This had to be included because of lawsuits long ago. Totally goofy. There's no possible reason you would want it.

Vista Business N is like Business, except it does not include Media Player. As one of my favorite books says, "Goofy with a tie."
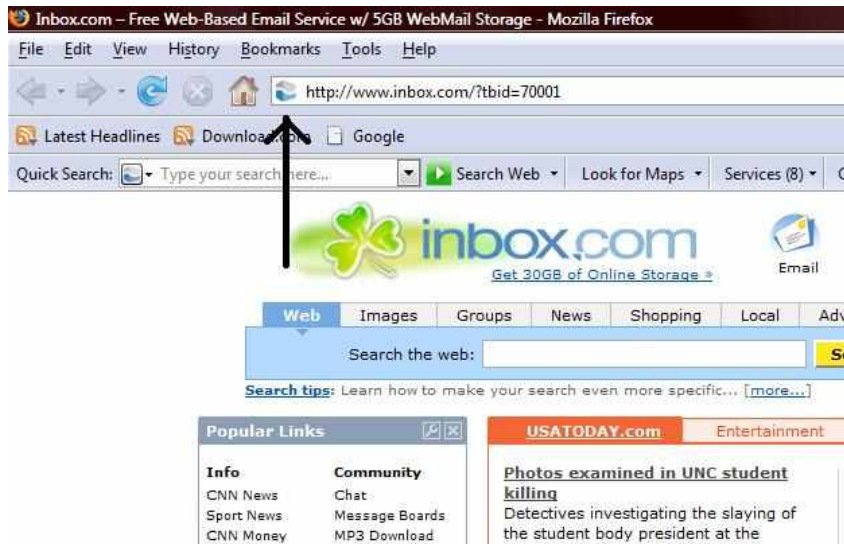

Announcements

There may be some programs you would love to have tips for. Send me an email at soren.bjornstad@gmail.com and tell me what program you want included. Sorry, but there are no guarantees that it will be.

Thank you for your support. If you want to unsubscribe, email me at the above address.

Screenshots
Sorry if this section made the download for you rather long. To tell which pic you want, screenshot numbers have been included in the sections.

Screenshot 1

Screenshot 2

Screenshot 3

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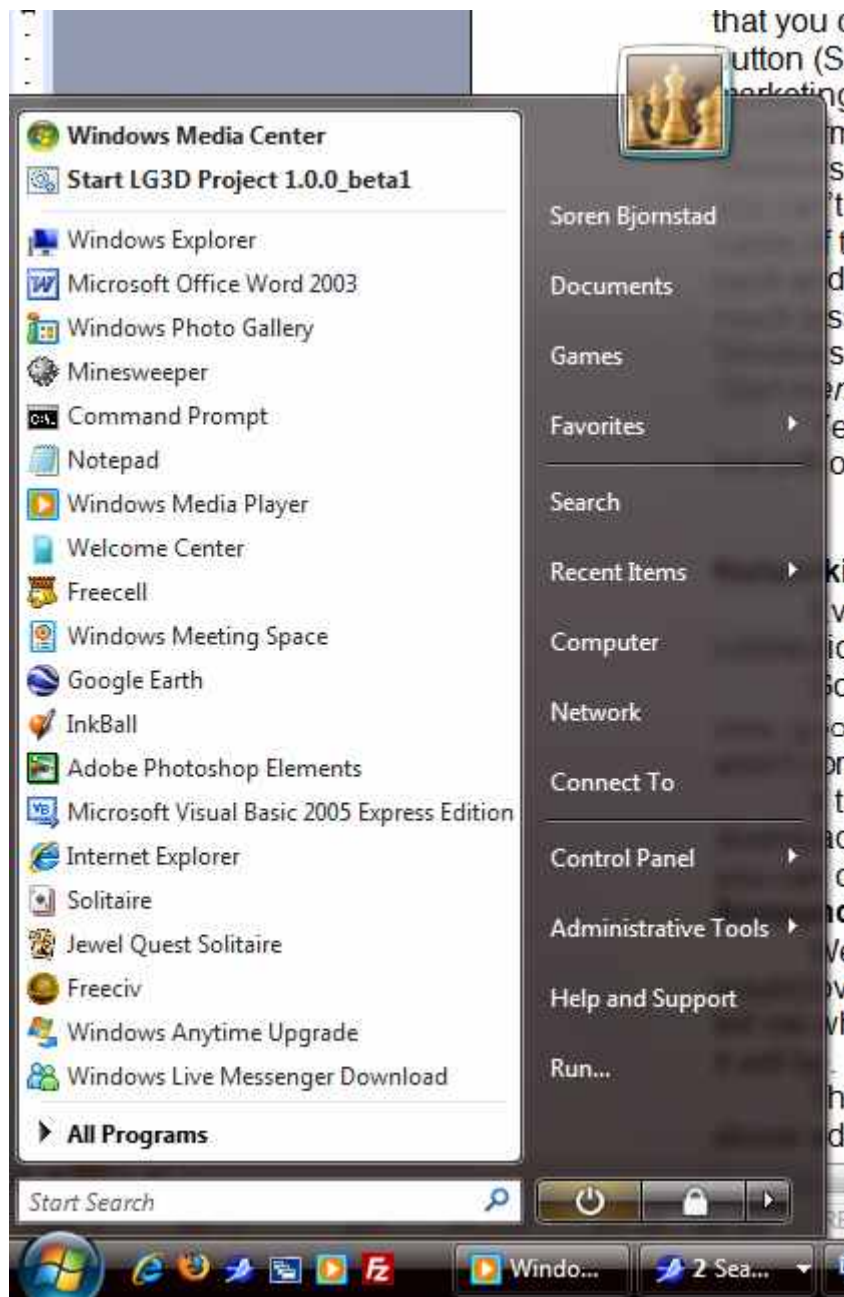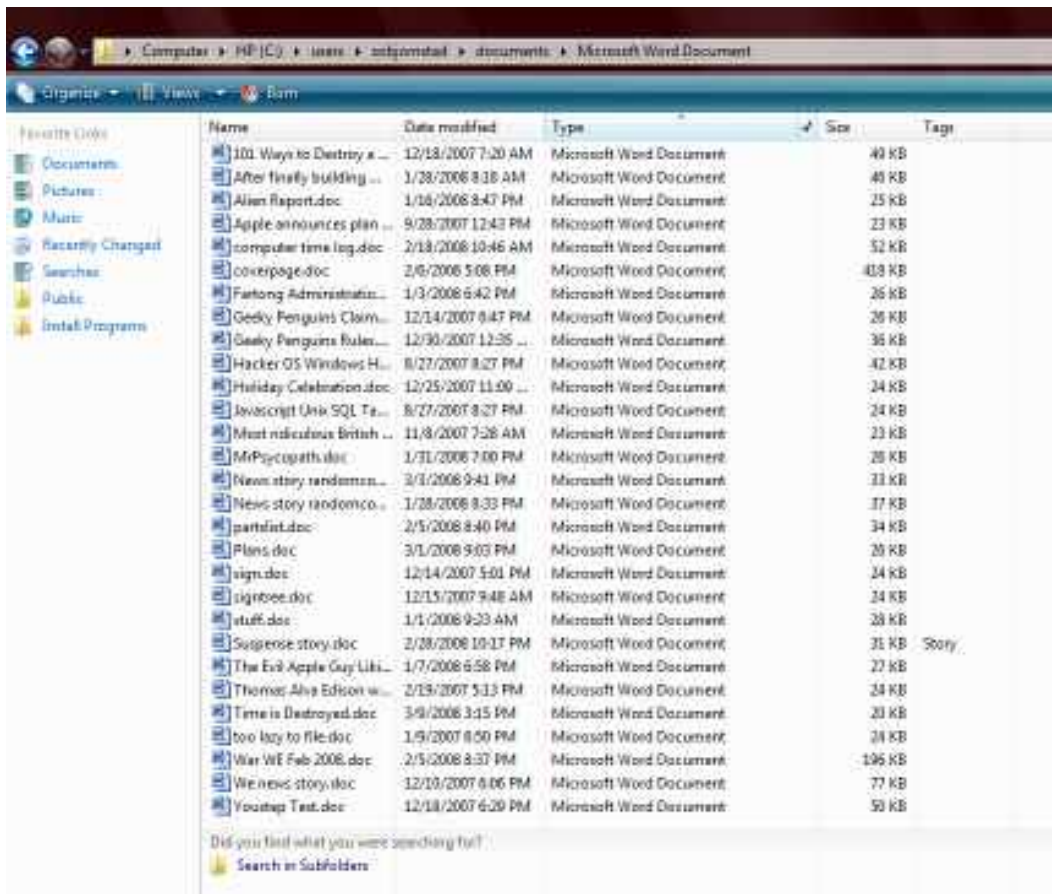versions.

At 1.9"   Ln 6   Col 78   REC TRK EXT OVR En

Screenshot 4
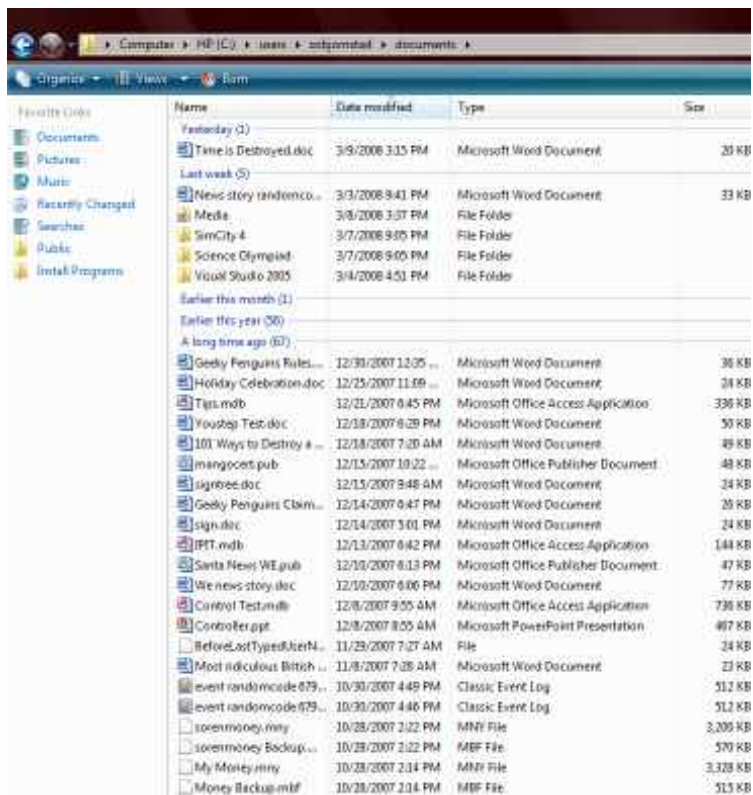

Screenshot 5

Screenshot 6

Screenshot 7

Screenshot 8

Screenshot 9

Screenshot 10

Screenshot 11

Screenshot 12