

August issue: 5 pages with extra box  
Here's how to tweak Windows with freeware  
By Scott Dunn  
From Feb 05 issue PC World

[note: there's a bit I've snipped out relating to command lines for Explorer folder views. Have attached as separate text file in case you want it, but basically it demonstrates how complex Windows is]

some pics from PC World already on server. Rest coming at ya via a succession of emails.

[standfirst]

Despite its hard drive-hogging ways, there are plenty of things Win XP can't do. Scott Dunn and Rosemary Haworth show you how to extend Windows' repertoire in thoroughly useful ways using 10 great tools

[intro]

We all know Windows is far from perfect – it's far too bulky and clunky and using it can often seem counterintuitive. And somehow, whenever there's a specific task you suddenly find you need to complete, what sounded relatively simple turns out to be awkward or not possible within the standard Windows setup.

Developers – acutely aware of these setbacks – are forever coming up with ways to improve on this situation. These are the people that have the tools to fix those imperfections and share their ingenuity with us.

For example, one of the commonest gripes is that when it launches Windows doesn't necessarily like to display the folders – or even the drive – you use most often. If you store everything in My Documents on the C drive, no problem, but it takes a freeware app such as SnapFolder to get Windows to display and open your favourites from the off.

Similarly, for all its demanding system requirements, Windows isn't especially well equipped when it comes to finding files. The process hobbles your CPU and takes an age to produce the goods. Agent Ransack improves on this, dedicating itself to the task of seeking out elusive files and letting you save past searches and search preferences.

These aren't the only gaps in your computing tool kit, so we've assembled 10 fabulous freebies designed to bolster Windows might fill it. You'll find them all on our cover disc.

[boxout 1] Backing up ain't hard to do

There are many backup programs, but few as elegant and powerful as SyncBack from 2BrightSparks. Its two primary functions are backing up and restoring data (copying in one direction) and synchronising folders – copying in both directions to make the contents of two folders identical.

SyncBack works with network drives, FTP servers, and CD or DVD drives as long as you preformat the disks using the UDF (universal disk format) which is a newer way to format CDs and DVDs. The program emails you its log file automatically when your backup is done. It also shuts down any applications you specify before beginning and can launch applications before or after it finishes.

Step 1

As soon as SyncBack is installed you can set up profiles for common backup or synchronisation chores and run them automatically with the program's scheduling feature. When prompted, enter a name for your backup folder and browse to the location where you store your files. `[create profile.tif; syncback profile.tif]`

Step 2

Then specify the device you want to back up to or the location of the FTP site you use for remote storage. `[choose source folder.tif]`

## Step 2

Unlike some backup programs – including the backup software built into some versions of Windows – SyncBack can compress files using the standard ZIP format. This lets you easily find and retrieve a single file inside an archive without having to navigate through a backup program.

At the bottom of the SyncBack pane click on Expert modes [\[expert settings.tif\]](#) and tick the box on the Compression tab to zip up files and the level of compression. [\[syncback zip compress.tif\]](#)

[boxout] Open the folder you want straight away

One of the most useful shortcuts makes folders open where and how you want. But creating the shortcuts in Windows may entail setting up messy command-line switches that are nearly impossible to remember.

## Step 1

To try the Windows way, first create a submenu for your shortcuts on your Start menu. Right-click the Start button and choose Open, File, New, Folder and type a name. [\[start folders.tif; name Start folder.tif\]](#)

## Step 2

Add shortcuts to this folder by right-dragging another folder to it and choosing Create Shortcut(s), Here when you release the button.

In Windows 2000, Me or XP, this creates a cascading menu listing the folder contents, rather than a shortcut that opens the folder. To create a shortcut that will open an Explorer window in any Windows version, open the new (Xplorers) folder, right-click inside it and choose New, Shortcut.

An easier option than Windows' convoluted process for specifying which drive's contents to display as an Explorer tree menu is to install SnapFolders 2005 from our cover disc. It doesn't offer every possible tweak that the command-line approach does, but it saves time and trouble.

## Step 3

Right-click any folder to create a shortcut via the context menu, or launch the utility from its own shortcut to see a dialog box where you can specify shortcut preferences. SnapFolders puts the shortcut on your Start menu or on a submenu [\[Windows Start folder.tif\]](#)

[boxout] Taskbar tweakery

Maybe you don't like having the taskbar hide your lovely desktop wallpaper. Or you need every inch of your desktop for icons and other doodads. You can use the taskbar's Properties dialog box to automatically hide the taskbar until your mouse moves over its original position. Unfortunately, this leaves an unsightly line along one edge of your screen and, on older systems, the action isn't exactly brisk.

## Step 1

Transbar lets you make the taskbar wholly or partially transparent in one percent increments. Another is TaskbarHide which instantly pops the taskbar on or off screen (minus the ugly line, thank you very much) whenever you move your mouse over or away from it. Move to slider to the left to make the taskbar more opaque [\[transbar opaque 1 and 2.tif\]](#)

## Step 2

If you want to eliminate your taskbar altogether, try GeoShell. This open-source taskbar replacement offers floating toolbars that you can group and rearrange to your heart's content. Your desktop will be cleaner because its icons go into a menu instead of cluttering your screen. The menus can be more compact than a typical Windows desktop arrangement, though some clutter remains. [\[geoshell dropdown menu.tif\]](#)

## Step 3

An alternative to floating toolbars is to anchor them to an edge of the desktop. GeoShell's skin feature gives you more control over your desktop's look and feel. You can even download plug-ins to extend its

features. [note: attempted to get a screenie of this bit can't get Paint Shop Pro to capture the menu itself – will try again next week if you need the screenshot]

#### [xhead] Destroy duplicates

Does your hard disk have duplicate files? By this we don't mean backups but, rather, useless copies of the same file you may have unknowingly downloaded or created multiple times. DoubleKiller can help.

##### Step 1

There are some quirks in its interface. You need to start with the second tab, Options, before you can use the first one, so click on this to begin. Now get DoubleKiller to search various drives for the file types you specify. It will hunt for files of the same name, size, date and/or CRC32-checksums (a means of checking file contents). [doublekiller options.tif]

##### Step 2

After completing the search, uses DoubleKiller's tools to launch, move or delete the duplicate files it's found. [doublekiller delete files.tif]

#### [xhead] Right-away renaming

Having dumped 10,000 photos from your digital camera on to your hard drive, including a potpourri of memories from birthdays, weddings, holidays and those oh-so-funny snaps of your mates doing their best to out-gurn each other, keeping tabs on which ones are where becomes a bit of an issue. Bulk Rename Utility can rescue you from this nightmare scenario. Launch BRU from its Start menu icon, or right-click the folder containing the files you want to rename.

##### Step 1

The utility's settings look a little complicated, but the numbered and highlighted sections indicate the order in which options (if any) will be applied. You get a great deal of power, not just for searching and replacing or for adding dates or numbers, but also for such features as appending the folder name or placing renamed copies in a folder of your choosing. BRU's Tip of the Day helps you learn features gradually. [BRU date and folder.tif; BRU copy filename.tif]

Like most good file utilities, BRU shows you a preview of your new file names to avoid unhappy surprises.

#### [boxout] Super sorting

Now that you've renamed all your photos and other files, do you really want thousands of them to occupy the same folder? You can organise a large number of files by creating folders for each letter of the alphabet – a folder named A, another named B and so on. You can then move your files into those folders based on each file's name. File Sieve can automate this tedious work.

The program creates 27 folders (one for each letter of the alphabet, plus '#' for files starting with numbers and symbols) in the location of your choice, and it copies or moves files into the alphabetically correct location. Once you've created the folders, you can run File Sieve to move or copy additional files, without creating the folders anew. [files to sieve.tif; file sieving.tif; file sieve alphabetical.tif]

#### [boxout] File management muscle

Long ago a Windows program called File Manager showed multiple drives and folders in its parent window so we didn't have to keep switching between – and manually rearranging – multiple Explorer windows. FileAnt takes us back to this golden age with a powerful yet nimble file-management tool that opens multiple folders at once (accessible via tabs) and displays two at a time via its tiling option.

The program has built-in viewers for previewing files without opening separate application windows, as well as its own FTP client, a pie chart diagram that shows the size of folders, custom folder icons, and folder synchronization. It even has an MP3 player you can access from its tray icon menu. Prettier file utilities are available, but few are as powerful as FileAnt.

Click on the icon under Viewer to get FileAnt to preview a selected file without opening it. If the thumbnail is too small, choose Max panel for viewer under the Viewer dropdown menu options.  
[fileant preview image file.tif]

For a visual overview of the space available on a local or removable disk or drive, choose Pie and select Percent or Megabytes in the Label format options list.

[xhead] Find that file

Looking for a needle of a file in a hard-drive haystack? Sometimes Windows' built-in search tool simply isn't up to the job. Fortunately, Mythicsoft has given us Agent Ransack, a free version of its FileLocator Pro file-search utility. Agent Ransack relies on the usual DOS wild cards or on more robust regular expressions to search for your files. The Search wizard explains what regular expressions are and walks you through specifying the necessary parameters.

Step 1

Enter your search parameters or keyword. Here we've asked Agent Ransack to locate all files containing the phrase Creative Zen. Windows' Search assistant would eventually find most things relating to our MP3 player, but Ransack was much faster.

Click on the Expert User option to get Agent Ransack to save search criteria and hunt through your past search results.

[begin ransack search.tif; ransack by text.tif]

[end all]