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Windows tips & tricks

With each successive update, Windows gets more functional but also more unwieldy so that previously simple steps become complex operations. Scott Dunn's useful tricks will show you how to get more from your operating system using the Links toolbar as well as the advanced search and calendar tools

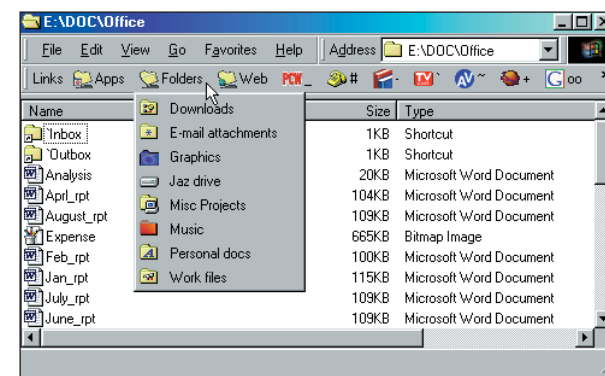
Windows has many virtues, which is why it's the PC platform of choice for most users. However, every time Microsoft releases a new version of its operating system it sees fit to change how its most intuitive tools are accessed, altering some of its handiest features beyond recognition.

In this workshop we are going to show you how to customise a variety of Windows features. Plus, we uncover useful tools and shortcuts you may not have realised you had. For example, one of Windows' most versatile features is the Links toolbar. As well as adding shortcuts to launch applications, documents, folders

and websites, it also lets you add multiple custom menus and float any toolbar anywhere on the desktop. Alternatively, you can add it to the Taskbar at the bottom of the screen. You can even put the Links toolbar at the top of all folder and Windows Explorer windows and in all Internet Explorer browser windows.

Once you've mastered Links and arranged your desktop just-so, we'll look at how to undo the changes Microsoft has made to Windows' perfectly serviceable search facilities with its XP incarnation. And, for those with an aversion to Outlook, we show you how to keep up to speed with appointments and events.

ILLUSTRATION: ALLEEN O'DONNELL



← Your Links toolbar shortcuts can have menus, custom icons and single-character names

shortcuts you added to that folder (shown left).

If you're using the first edition of Windows 98 or 95 with IE4's

Get linking

Want to know how to get the most out of the Links toolbar in the least screen space? Windows 95 users should select the Desktop Update feature of Internet Explorer 4.0, otherwise these tips will only work in the IE browser window and not on the Taskbar or in folder windows.

Right-click the Taskbar and choose Toolbars. Drag the Links toolbar off the Taskbar to make it float anywhere on the desktop or dock it on any edge of the desktop. To change its appearance, right-click the toolbar and change the text label, title and icon size options.

To place the Links toolbar in a folder or Internet Explorer browser window, open it, right-click the menu bar or toolbar at the top of the window and choose Links. You can place shortcuts to files and folders on the Links toolbar by dragging them from Explorer. Use the same principle to add shortcuts to open web pages and existing shortcuts, custom and submenus stored on the Start menu. Certain built-in Start menu items, such as Start, Help and Start, Run can't be moved.

Organise those links

Double-click the Favorites folder and choose Links to access its contents; from here you can organise shortcuts into files. Right-click an empty area of the Links folder and choose New, Folder. Type a name for the folder and click ok.

In another folder window, select one or more application (EXE) files, documents, web links or other files that you want to create shortcuts to, right-click and drag them to the new folder icon. Release the mouse button and choose Create Shortcut(s) Here. When you click the icon for your new folder on the Links bar, a menu will pop up showing the

Desktop Update, the menus appear as pop-up toolbars. When they're visible you can customise them by right-clicking and choosing the same options as you would for other toolbars.

To add a menu to your Links bar that shows the same contents as your Start, Documents menu, use Microsoft's free Tweak UI utility (which is available from www.microsoft.com/windowsme/guide/tweakui.exe or the Download Directory on www.pcadvisor.co.uk) to change the location of recent shortcuts to a folder inside the Links folder. If you can't see the custom menu you've just created, it may lie off the edge of the Links toolbar. In early Windows and Internet Explorer versions you had to scroll to view your custom folders; in later versions you just click the >> symbol to see the full Links toolbar as a menu.

However, it's best not to overdo the Links and shortcuts – they'll only end up as a hindrance rather than an aid to navigation. Instead, make an Applications menu for often-used programs, a Folders menu for folder shortcuts and a web menu for favourite internet sites (as shown above).

Create links of distinction

It's easier to locate icons on your Links toolbar and its menus if they have a distinctive look. To change a shortcut's icon, right-click it and choose Properties. With the appropriate Shortcut,

→ Make it easier to distinguish between your web and folder shortcuts by assigning them custom icons

Internet Shortcut or Web Document tab in front, click Change Icon and select another icon (shown below). If you don't see one you like, click Browse then Locate and open other files that contain icons. These include progman.exe, moricons.dll and pifmgr.dll (look for them in your Windows, System or System32 folders) as well as icon files downloaded from the web.

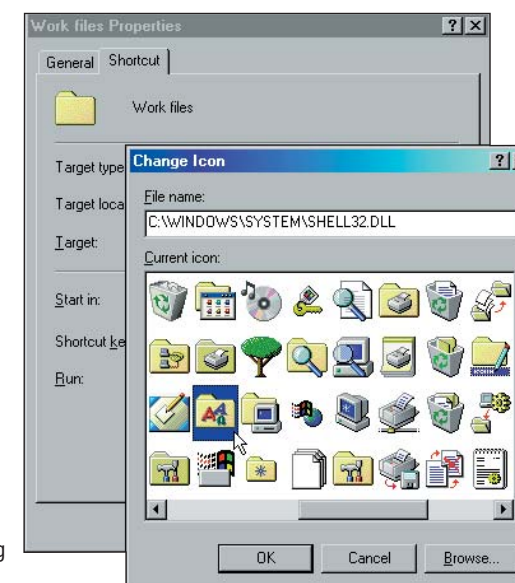
If you want to change the icon for a menu you added to the Links bar (or for any folder, for that matter), a utility such as Changelcon (available on this month's cover disc) makes it far simpler.

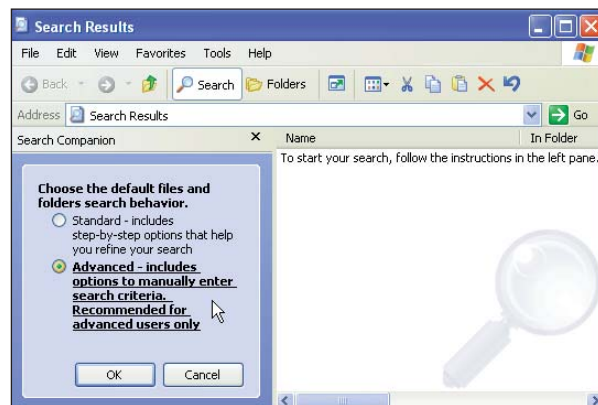
Plain and simple icons

Keep icon names short by eliminating their descriptions. With free-floating Links bars and those on the Windows Taskbar, right-click an empty part of the toolbar and deselect Show Text. With a Links bar on a folder or Internet Explorer browser window you can name each icon with a single punctuation mark. In IE5 or later, right-click the icon and choose Rename, type your new name and press Enter.

Open folder links in the same window

Differing Windows and Internet Explorer configurations mean folder shortcuts don't always open in the folder that's currently active. To ensure they do, choose View, Folder Options (in Windows 9x) or Tools, Folder Options (in 2000 and Me) and make sure the General tab is in front. In some versions of Windows, you have to click the Settings button. Select 'Open





← Choose Advanced options in Preferences to make Windows XP's Search tool more like it was in previous Windows versions

but Windows XP's Search feature is handicapped by annoying animations, the loss of valuable features present in the Find and Search tools in earlier versions of

each folder in the same window' and click ok as many times as needed. Note that shortcuts you open from the Links bar must be folder shortcuts, not applications. Check this by right-clicking the relevant icon and choosing Properties.

Smarter searching with XP

Now you've got a few navigation aids under your belt, it's time to address the mountain of data and media files accumulating on your hard drive(s). A good file-searching tool is a necessity,

Windows, as well as outright bugs.

To give Search a much-needed facelift, choose Start, Search or Start, Search, For Files or Folders (depending on your Start menu settings), or simply open any folder window and press F3. Rather than going through the rigmarole of messing with annoying animated animals you can specify search parameters right away by clicking Change preferences and, in the next pane, choose either 'Without an animated screen character' or 'With a different character'.

For faster local document searches, click With Indexing Service. If you've never used Indexing Service before, choose Learn more about Indexing Service on the next screen. Back on the Main Preferences pane (headed 'How do you want to use Search Companion?') click 'Change files and folders search behavior'.

Choose the Advanced option, click ok, (shown left) then More advanced options and select preferences such as searching subfolders, system folders, hidden files and folders. To save your Search settings, you need to conduct at least one search so that Windows XP remembers the new rules for future searches.

See what I've found

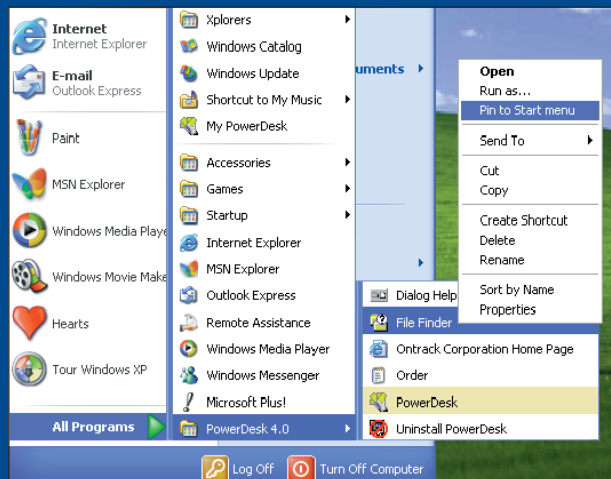
Unlike Windows Me and 2000, XP omits the Web View pane when it displays search results. This pane provides quick file size information, image thumbnails and (in Windows 2000) a mini player for previewing some sound and movie formats. It also has a link to open the folder containing the selected file and other useful features.

Get more out of PowerDesk File Finder

Ontrack's free PowerDesk file management utility is far more customisable than Windows Explorer. One of its most useful tools is File Finder, which resembles Windows 95's Find feature, but has several unique capabilities. For example, it lets you search for files with specific attributes and print all or a selected portion of the results list. Here are some tips for getting more out of File Finder.

- **Fix File Finder's shortcut** On the default Windows XP Start menu, you can make File Finder more accessible by choosing Start, All Programs, PowerDesk. Right-click on File Finder in the PowerDesk menu, and then choose Pin to Start menu (shown right). File Finder will be on the first menu that you see when you click Start. To remove it, choose Unpin from Start menu.
- **Launch File Finder fast** If you like to launch searches from the folder you're currently in by pressing F3, you'll discover that this shortcut key launches the searches appropriate to the application you're in – Windows Search tool in Windows Explorer, and File Finder in PowerDesk – no surprise there. Here's how to launch File Finder from Windows Explorer.

First, locate the file pdfind.exe in the folder in which you installed PowerDesk. Make sure the Links toolbar is displayed in the folder window (if it isn't, you can display it by choosing View, Toolbars, Links). Finally, drag pdfind.exe on to the Links toolbar. That's it – you've just created a button that will launch File



↑ Put File Finder on your Start menu by choosing this context-menu item

Finder from any window that displays the Links toolbar. Unfortunately, while this will make File Finder more accessible in your Explorer folder windows, it still won't launch File Finder in the current folder.

To launch File Finder from anywhere, right-click any drive or folder and choose File Finder. File Finder will open with the path set to the current folder.

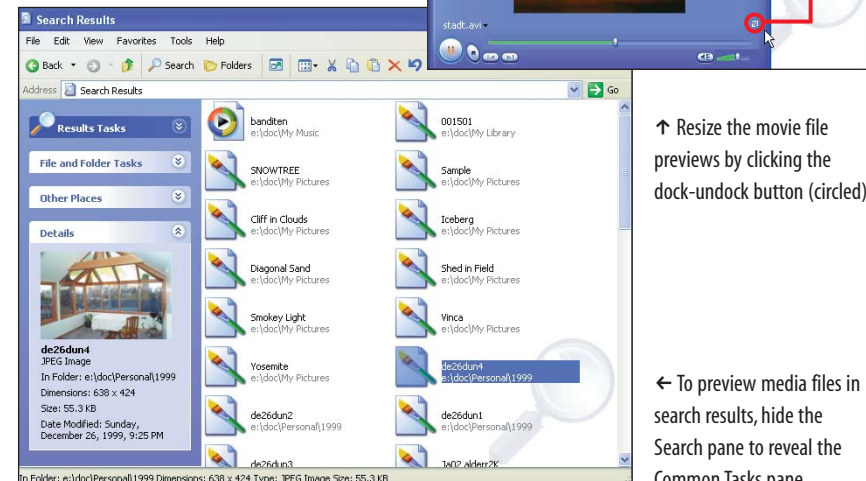
To get information about your search results, hide the Search Companion pane (or Search Explorer bar) by clicking to close it, choosing Search on the toolbar or pressing Ctrl, E or F3. This reveals a Common Tasks pane (shown below, left), also accessible from Tools, Folder Options, General, Show common tasks in folders.

Select a file from the search results list and you'll see information about it in the Details section of the pane on the left. To get information about a number of files, perhaps to see if you can cram them on to a CD, drag over the files and the total size of the selection should be displayed. If not, try Ctrl-clicking to select multiple files or Shift-clicking to select a range of files.

I like the sound of that

Though there's no sound and movie player in the Common Tasks pane, you'll find one under View, Explorer Bar, Media. (Alternatively, press Alt V, E, M.) Select a file Windows Media Player supports and click Play. To enlarge the movie playback area click the icon on the right above the progress bar (shown below, right). Drag the display pane's edges to resize it. You'll need to click the Stop button when the track is over to prevent the Media bar automatically playing the next file in the search results list.

You can get the Media Preview feature to sort through files to be played. Choose View, Arrange Icons by and then select the required category. Choose the file you want to start with and click Play. The Media bar will play each file in the displayed order starting from your selection; it will then return to the top of the list until each file has



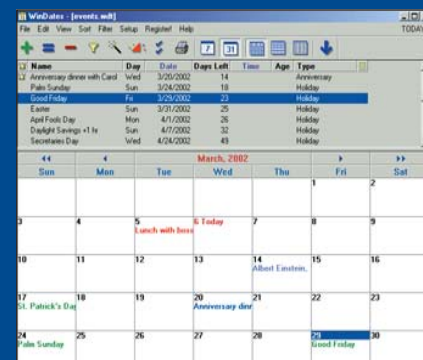
↑ Resize the movie file previews by clicking the dock-undock button (circled)

← To preview media files in search results, hide the Search pane to reveal the Common Tasks pane

Make a date with WinDates

If you're not a fan of Microsoft Outlook, but need a simple calendar to remind you of forthcoming events, deadlines and anniversaries, try Rockin' Software's WinDates.

This elegant program has a built-in holiday list, the ability to colour-code and filter different types of events (holidays, work, birthdays, meetings and more), appointment alarms and customisable calendar views. WinDates is well worth the \$20 registration fee and can be downloaded from www.rockinsoftware.com.



↑ Keep your business and personal life in check with this handy reminder tool, WinDates

Ease the pane

If you don't like bouncing between the Search Companion pane and other Explorer bars to see information about your search results, a shorter path is available. Click the View menu and ensure that the status bar is checked. It won't tell you anything about the combined size of the files, but it will tell you the number of files found or the number in the current selection. If a single file is selected, the bar will list its location and size as well as specific information for certain file types – the same details you'd see in the Details area of the Common Tasks pane, if it were visible.

To view this information for individual files, hold the mouse over a filename until a tool-tip-style pop-up menu appears. Alternatively, choose View, Details. For file-specific information, such as sound bit rate or image dimensions, choose View, Choose Details, check the items you want and click ok. You can also view information categories by right-clicking the category heads at the top of the files list in Details view and ticking or unticking items on the pop-up menu. If you would rather preview files than see details about them, choose View, Thumbnails. And to hear MP3, WMA and other sound files, or to watch movies, simply double-click an item to preview it in Windows Media Player or another associated application. ■



Load up our PDF of *Tips & Tricks* from the cover disc and get even more hand hints on using Windows