Windows ^{xp} Q&As

Q I'm running Windows XP Home. When I open the My Pictures folder in My Documents it opens for 10 seconds or so then vanishes back to the desktop, which at first has no icons although they all return after a second or two. I managed to move the pictures to a new folder and this works fine. Why does My Pictures close after 10 seconds?

A You've just described Windows Explorer crashing and restarting. The My Pictures folder (shown right) displays thumbnails and information about image files and is therefore treated differently from ordinary folders. The software that displays these images may crash if it encounters a file that it doesn't like. There is often a connection between this problem and the use of Adobe Photoshop, which installs a viewer that takes over the production of thumbnails from Windows. There is also a bug in Windows XP concerning the display of certain Tiff image files.

Move the pictures to a new location, delete them from My Pictures and you should be able to open the now-empty folder. You could then determine whether a particular file or file type is causing the problem by copying them back a few at a time. If the problem is caused by the quantity of files, organise them into subfolders.
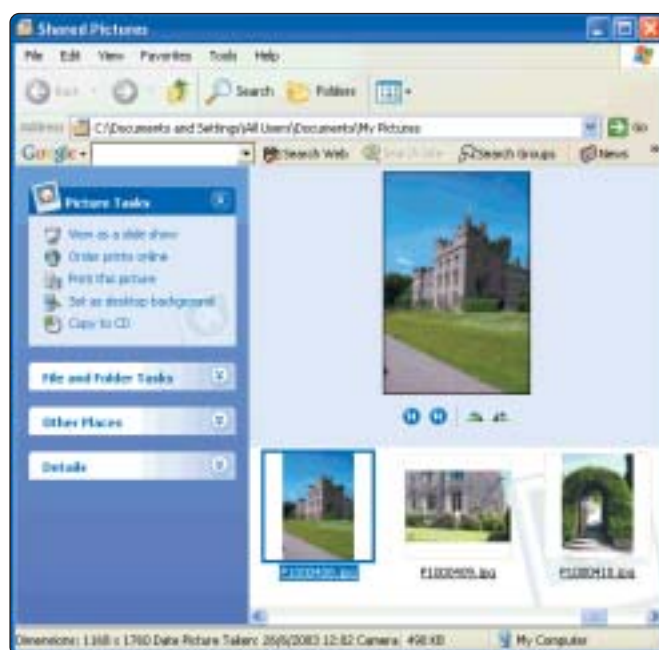
You could also try disabling thumbnail caching, which will reduce the chances of crashes due to lack of memory. Click on Tools, Folder Options, select the View tab and, under Advanced settings, place a checkmark beside the 'Do not cache thumbnails' option.

If you're running Photoshop try uninstalling it to see if the crashes stop.

If they do, reinstall it but tell the installer not to automatically associate image files with Photoshop.

Alternatively, change the associations for the crash-prone file types so that Photoshop isn't their default viewer. Do this manually from Folder Options or download the freeware IrfanView (from www.irfanview.com or see this month's cover disc) and let that be the default image viewer.

➔ A corrupt image file can cause Explorer to crash when viewing the My Pictures folder

Pass it on

Windows backup woes

John James upgraded from Windows 98 SE to XP Home and was mortified to find that the backups he created using the Windows 98 backup tool couldn't be restored using the one provided with XP. John was fortunate in that most of his files were duplicated on another PC, but others may not be so lucky. We've mentioned this ludicrous situation before but, as people continue to replace old computers with new ones running XP, it's worth reiterating.

Mafia active again

Regarding the game Mafia not working in Windows XP SP1 because of a missing Indeo codec, Andrew Bennett wrote to advise that there is now a Windows update to SP1 '327979: Recommended Update' that solves the problem. Unfortunately, this was not available at the time we answered the query.

Q **I'm using Windows XP Home. If I right-click a file and choose 'Send to Notepad' the file is successfully opened in Notepad unless the file has no extension. In that case, Explorer crashes and Notepad isn't launched. If I drag the file on to an already open Notepad it displays perfectly. How can I resolve this?**

A This isn't a Windows bug – it's the result of something that has happened to your system configuration. It's impossible to say precisely what, but from analysis of similar problems it would seem that it is the result of a faulty 'drop handler' – software that handles what happens when you drag and drop a file on an application.

This might be a file installed by a current application or it might be one that was installed and subsequently removed, but which didn't remove all traces of itself from the Registry.

Without seeing the contents of your Registry and your hard disk we can't say precisely what's causing the problem. All you can do is restore back to a date before this started happening or reinstall Windows.

Q **I have always backed up by taking an image of my C drive which contains my operating system. Under Windows XP this is enormous as it contains about 600MB of page file. The file remains at this size even after defragging and reducing the minimum**

size to 4MB. Windows 98 would shrink the swap file to zero after a defrag. Is there anything I can do?

A This is one of the disadvantages of using imaging tools for backups. The whole point of them is that they can recreate an exact image of the original drive, right down to things like the page file.

If you're concerned about the size of your backups you'd be better off using a conventional file backup tool that gives you greater control. This would allow you to achieve even greater economies by, for example, not backing up the Recycler folder (containing the Recycle Bin contents) or the System Volume Information folder (containing all the System Restore backups).

Your page file is unusually large, so your system may be short of RAM for the applications you are running. Increasing the amount of memory may reduce the page file size. You could also consider partitioning your hard drive and moving the page file on to the new partition.

This isn't an ideal configuration from a performance point of view, but it would stop the page file from being included in your C drive image backup.

→ Locking the Taskbar: is this the solution to vanishing icons?

Q **My PC runs Windows XP Professional. A couple of months ago my System Tray icons began disappearing, leaving only the ones for my firewall, antivirus software and printer. In Taskbar Properties I've deselected 'Hide inactive icons' and in the Customize dialog box I've selected 'Always on' but it makes no difference.**

I find that if I log off and then on again after startup without rebooting the icons return. Sometimes I have to do this twice to get all of them and it's a real pain. Do you have any suggestions?

A According to Microsoft, if you use the Windows Classic theme and select a high-contrast colour scheme then icons in the System Tray may disappear. Microsoft acknowledges that this is a bug in Windows. The suggested remedy is to right-click the Taskbar and select 'Lock the Taskbar' (shown below). Alternatively change the size of the Taskbar and then restore it.

However, we're not convinced that the problem is restricted to the use of Classic theme with a high-contrast colour scheme. Many people find an icon or two occasionally failing to appear at startup – it's an entirely random event.

Our hypothesis is that if one application takes a long time installing its icon then it could potentially prevent several others from appearing. This is probably what is happening in your case and you might be able to determine the culprit by elimination. Having done so, though, there's little you can do about it unless you're prepared to live without the errant application. Fingers crossed that Microsoft fixes this problem quickly… ■