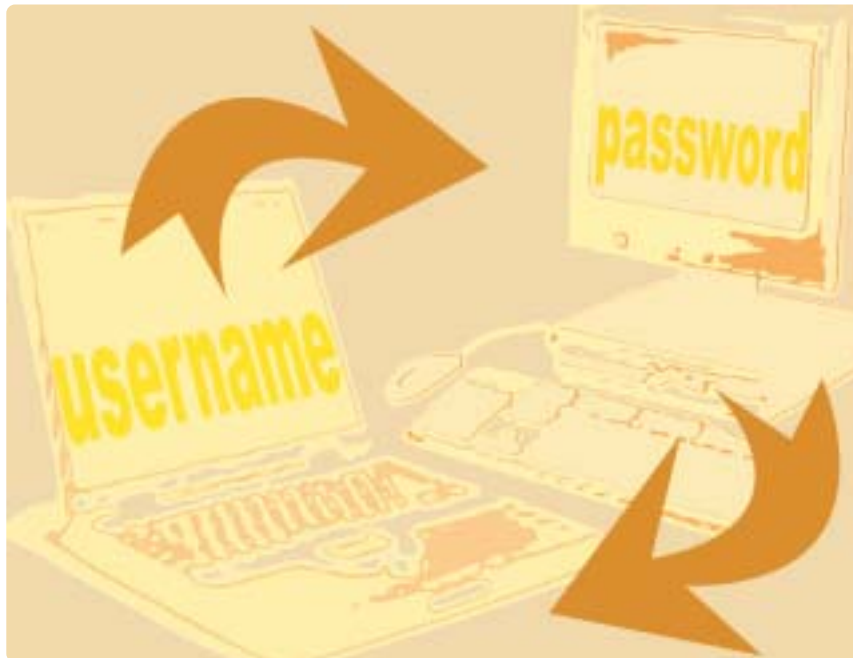# Windows^{xp}Q&As

Q I bought myself a new Compaq notebook running Windows XP Home which I move between my home network (a simple workgroup) and my workplace (on a domain). To connect to network drives at work I have to use a different username and password.

This isn't a problem but after a reboot the drives won't connect until I double-click on them and enter the username and password to access them. The 'Remember password' checkbox is not there.

A friend who has XP Professional has an option under User Accounts called 'Manage Network Passwords' and this allows him to store the passwords. This is unavailable in XP Home. Must I upgrade? Why would Microsoft take this useful option out of XP Home with all its emphasis on home networking?

A The short answer to that is: because corporates aren't going to pay the extra for XP Professional if they can find all the features they need in the cheaper Home version. XP Home is just that: a version of Windows XP for home users. Home networks don't have domains so customers are expected to use a simpler form of file sharing that Microsoft intended to be easier to get up and

running for non-technical people. So the omission of password management isn't a problem for most home users.

Since you're using your computer at work you should really be running the Professional version of XP on it. (At least that's Microsoft's way of looking at it.) It's therefore a good idea when buying a PC you intend to use at work to see if you can buy it through your company's

IT department, which may well be able to get a better price than you would get in the high street anyway.

A Windows XP Home system will connect to network shares if the username and password match those on the system containing the drives you're connecting to. This is probably what you're doing already. You might be able to overcome the problems with connecting after a reboot by running the logon script locally from the Startup menu group. But upgrading to XP Professional is going to be the most satisfactory solution.

Q I have been saving my digital photos to My Pictures and have now noticed that all these photos are shown in the list of possible background images on the Desktop tab of Display Properties. How can I remove them and stop it happening again?

A You should move the image files to another folder; don't keep them in My Pictures or a sub-folder of it. Windows is just trying to be helpful – many users want to use their digital photos as desktop backgrounds, as we have below. The operating system simply lists them, along with all its preinstalled images, to make it easy for you to find them.

← All your photos in My Pictures show as background images in Display Properties

ILLUSTRATION: SARAH AULD

Tune your broadband connection

The web offers many utilities that claim to speed up surfing, but most are designed for Windows 95, 98 or Me. Windows XP and 2000 have a more advanced version of TCP/IP. If you use a tune-up tool designed for Windows 95 or Me it will change Registry settings that Windows XP never looks at.

The most common cause of below-par internet speeds is that your PC sends data in blocks (called 'packets') larger than the maximum size a router between you and the destination site can handle. When this happens the data has to be 'fragmented' – broken into smaller packets which are then reassembled at the receiving end. This is inefficient. It's better if packets are sent at a size that enables them to complete their journey intact. This size is called the MTU (maximum transmission unit) and the first thing you need to do is determine its value.

Send 'em packing

There are tools that claim to do this but it's quite easy to do manually. Open a command window (in XP, click Start, Run, type cmd and hit Enter) and then type the command 'ping www.pcadvisor.co.uk -f -l 1472'. If you see the reply 'Packet needs to be fragmented but DF set', as shown top right, try lower values until this message stops appearing.

Now add 28 to the number you used. This is the optimum MTU. The value 1500 (1472+28) is the maximum possible MTU. (Users of BT-based networks may find the maximum MTU they can use is only 1458.)

If you have an external broadband router and the MTU you determine is less than 1500, it might be the router that is limiting it to a lower value. If the router's MTU is equal to the value you obtained in the test, try increasing it and then repeat the ping test until it is clear the MTU is being limited by devices beyond your control. Consult your router's manual to find out how to change its settings – most likely, it's done using an interface that you access with your web browser.

The best way to speed up your XP internet connection is usually to enable path MTU discovery. This means that Windows tries to determine the optimum MTU value itself. The advantage of this over setting a fixed MTU value is that if your ISP upgrades its equipment so that a higher MTU can be used, Windows will automatically detect it and take advantage of it.

To do this, start Regedit, expand Hkey_Local_Machine, System, CurrentControlSet, Services, Tcpip and select the Parameters folder. Right-click in the righthand pane and select New, Dword value. Name it 'EnablePMTUDiscovery' then double-click the new value and set it to 1. Easier still, is to use the file EnablePMTUDiscovery.reg on the cover disc. Restart Windows before testing the effect of this.

If this doesn't help, it may be that Windows is discovering the wrong value for some reason. In that case, try setting the MTU value yourself. Under XP, the MTU can be set for each network interface and Windows will then use the lowest of
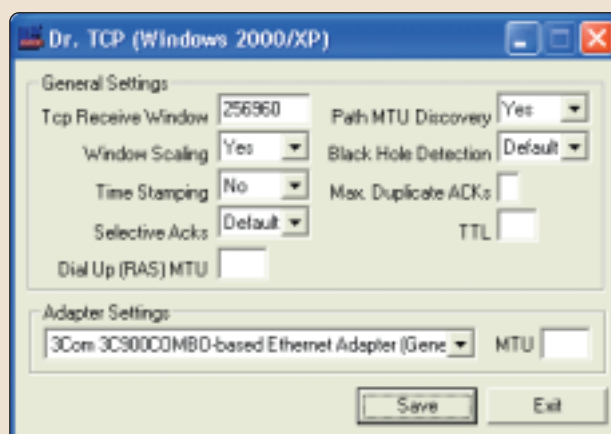
the discovered values or the one set for that device. If you don't want that to happen because you suspect that the discovered value is too low, you can turn off Path MTU Discovery by setting 'EnablePMTUDiscovery' to 0. Note that Windows will then use a low default value of 576 for any adapter whose value you haven't specifically set.

Dr TCP to the rescue

Setting the MTU for each device using Regedit isn't that easy to do as the settings are stored in folders with names that are long strings of gibberish. We recommend Dr TCP, shown above, which you can get from www.dslreports.com/front/drtcp.html. Select the adapter that connects you to the web under Adapter Settings, enter the MTU value in the adjacent field and click Save.

Dr TCP can be used to change Path MTU Discovery described above and a number of other settings too. We don't advise wholesale tweaking (and we do advise creating a system restore point before trying any of this), but you might get a further performance increase by setting a value of 'TCP Receive Window' and turning Window Scaling on.

We don't have the space to explain what these terms mean but to determine a good TCP Receive Window value to use find the largest multiple of (MTU – 40) that's less than 65535 and then multiply it by four. For an MTU of 1500 that works out to 256960.

Q I bought BackUp MyPC for its unattended backups feature, but when the scheduled task is supposed to run Windows XP's Task Scheduler tells me it has the wrong username and password. I am the only user and I don't have a password. What's going on?

A Like many programs BackUp MyPC uses the scheduler built into Windows XP by default and it only uses its own scheduler if the Windows Task Scheduler is disabled or not functioning. This makes sense. Why have more than one scheduler running at a time?

But the XP Task Scheduler won't work unless you have a system password and each task you run must know the password. There's a good reason for this, too. This way a rogue program can't use the scheduler to do something unpleasant at 2am.

To set up a password select Start, Control Panel. Double-click the User Accounts icon or select it from the Control Panel menu. In the User Accounts applet, double-click your account and then click Create a password (if you already have a password, this option isn't available). Enter a password, enter it again to confirm it and then type in a password hint to help jog your memory in case you forget it. Finally, click Create Password.

When your PC boots up, Windows will now ask for your password. If you're not worried about the wrong people logging in, use Microsoft's free Tweak UI for Windows XP to prevent password requests. If you don't have it, go to www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/pro/downloads/powertoys.asp to download a copy of PowerToys for Windows XP.

Defrag automatically

XP TIP

You probably already know how to create a shortcut and set up a task in Windows' Task Scheduler. You might even know how to write a batch file. But if you want that shortcut, task or batch file to defrag your hard drive automatically, you'll need a command line that automatically loads, runs and then exits Disk Defragmenter. In Windows XP the command is: defrag c.

After you have installed Tweak UI, select Start, All Programs, PowerToys for Windows XP, Tweak UI for Windows XP. In the left pane, double-click Logon and click Autologon. In the right pane choose Log on automatically at system startup. End by clicking ok.

Now tell your scheduled tasks about your password: select Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Scheduled Tasks. Double-click a task. On the resulting dialog box's Task tab, click the Set password button. Type the password twice and then click ok twice. Repeat for each task then close the Scheduled Tasks window.

Q How do I save Windows updates? There must be a faster way to update multiple computers than by downloading the same huge files repeatedly.

A Microsoft has web pages for corporate Windows updates where you can download the files to disk rather than install them automatically. The hitch, of course, is that you have to remember what updates each PC has already installed, since you lose the convenience of the standard Windows Update. This program looks at your system and knows instantly what needs to be changed.

Microsoft's take on corporate downloads varies with the version of Windows. All the updates are free, however. Go to http://v4.windowsupdate.microsoft.com/en/default.asp for more information on all of them.

Microsoft provides a good update tool for the XP operating system. Click Windows Update (but not the Windows Update Catalog link that appears earlier on the page) as if you were just updating that machine.

In the left pane, click Personalize Windows Update. Check 'Display the link to the Windows Update Catalog' under See Also and then check Save Settings. The Windows Update Catalog, where you download the files, appears as an option in the left pane (see below left).

Q In Windows 98, the command rundll.exe user.exe, exitwindows is used to quit the operating system. Can you tell me what the command line for exiting Windows XP is?

A Closing Windows with a DOS-style command line gives you all sorts of options for shutting down your computer. You can create an Exit Windows shortcut, for example, or set up a batch file that performs one or more maintenance chores – defragment your hard drive, back up your data and so on – before shutting down your system.

If you want something fancier such as a shortcut that will defrag your hard drive and then shut down, create a simple batch file. Select Start, Programs (or All Programs), Accessories, Notepad. The commands you enter in the batch file will depend on which version of Windows you use, but the first line should launch
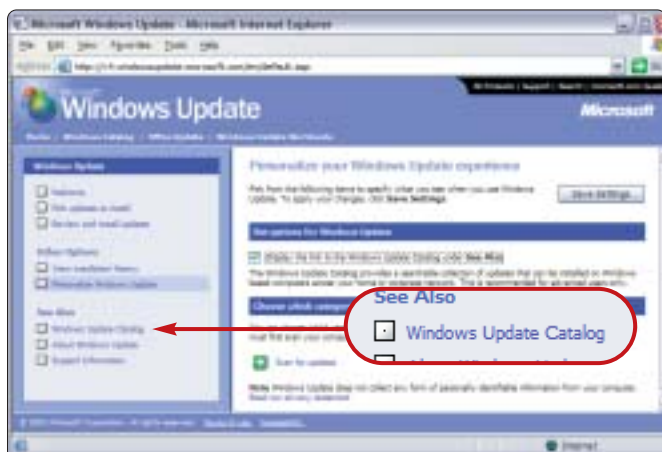
← Save your Windows 2000 and XP updates to disk, rather than auto-updating via this page on Microsoft's site
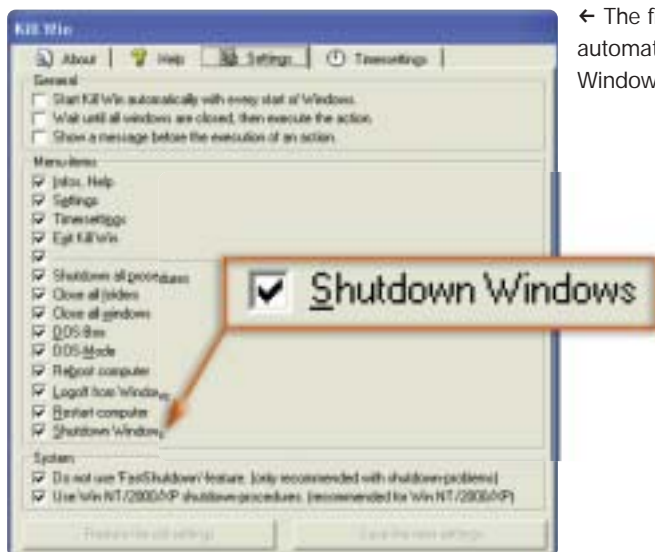
← The free Kill Win program automates exits in Windows 2000 and XP

the defragging and the second should shut down Windows. For defragging commands for Windows XP, see *Defrag automatically,* opposite. Here are the various commands for shutting down Windows XP.

• Windows XP Home shutdown –s
• Windows XP Pro This OS doesn't have a dependable shutdown command, so we recommend BK-Soft's free Kill Win (shown above). Go to www.borgking.de/bk-soft/killwin.htm to download your copy. If you install Kill Win to its default C:\Killwin folder, the command c:\killwin\killwin.exe /s will shut down Windows.

So, for example, if your PC is running Windows XP Home edition, your shutdown batch file should read:

    defrag c:
    shutdown –s

Save this file in a convenient folder as defragnshutdown.bat. When you're ready to shut down simply use it like a shortcut.

Q Windows XP's Disk Cleanup utility tells me that I can regain more than 1.5GB of space by selecting 'Compress old files'. Will I regret it?

A This feature is available in Windows XP and 2000, but exclusively on NTFS-formatted drives. To find it in XP, select Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Cleanup (Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Cleanup in Windows 2000).

It compresses files older than 50 days. If you need the extra disk space, compressing old files is a good idea.

The compressed files are still accessible as Windows decompresses them on the fly when you access them but they may take a little longer to open. You can tell a file is compressed because its filename is blue in Windows Explorer.

Is compressing files safe? The technology has been around for about a decade now and it's well supported by utilities so, yes, it's probably safe.

Whenever you want to return a compressed file to its uncompressed state, right-click it and select Properties. Click the Advanced button, uncheck Compress contents to save disk space and click ok.

Q What's the best way to back up and – just as important – restore the Windows XP Registry?

A XP backs up the Registry automatically at regular intervals. However, it's still safest to back up your

Registry manually before you make any major changes to your system. Select Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, System Restore to bring up the System Restore Wizard. To back up your Registry, choose 'Create a restore point'. To restore the Registry, select 'Restore my computer to an earlier time'. (This method also works in Windows Me.)

Q In previous versions of Windows I could quickly Alt, Tab between open programs. But Windows XP shows each open program in a kind of preview mode, slowing down the whole process. Can I turn off this preview mode?

A That overly graphical version of the Alt, Tab pop-up is not part of Windows XP but of Microsoft's PowerToys for Windows XP. This free collection of utilities has several useful tools including the oft-recommended Tweak UI. The PowerToy that's slowing you down is called Alt-Tab Replacement. Below you can see both the old Alt, Tab window and the PowerToy version.

It's not surprising that you mistook this optional add-on for a part of Windows. Accidentally installing more PowerToys than you want is quite easy. Some systems even have PowerToys preinstalled. What's more, the Alt-Tab Replacement tool doesn't show up on the Start menu with the rest of the PowerToys.

To get rid of it, select Start, Control Panel then double-click Add or Remove Programs. On the list of currently active programs, choose PowerToys for Windows XP and click Change. In the resulting wizard, click Next, select Modify and click Next again. Choose the icon to the left of Alt-Tab Replacement and select 'This feature will not be available'. Click Next, Install, Finish and reboot Windows. ■
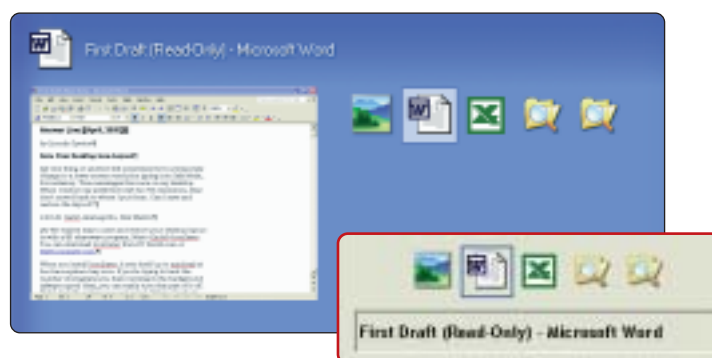
→ PowerToys replaces Windows' simple Alt, Tab with a fancier alternative