

Software secrets

However good you are at some aspects of computing, it's impossible to be an expert at each and every application. Tom Gorham asked industry insiders to share their most useful workarounds and shortcuts, designed to save keystrokes and recoup your time

If you subscribe to public opinion, software secrets - like birthdays, TV schedules and FA Cup finals - simply aren't what they used to be. In the days when every new application was accompanied by a manual the size of a small child, discovering an undocumented feature or secret key combination was, to the dedicated hunter of hidden software treasure, the sort of rare treat that could trigger a street party.

Nowadays, with emaciated or non-existent documentation accompanying software purchases and downloads, a feature that hasn't been fully explained by the developer will probably be found within 20 minutes of opening the shrinkwrap.

But even in this glut of little-known features, the best software secrets still thrive. We've collected hidden tips, software secrets and some plain enjoyable Easter eggs that you could go years without noticing if you didn't know where to look.

Windows wonders

Even in an operating system as ubiquitous as Windows there are some features nestling in the dusty corners of the software that the average user will be unaware of. But many can make your everyday Windows experience that little bit more rewarding - if only you knew where to find them.

Uncover NetMeeting

Sometimes even entire applications can go unobserved by the casual user. For example, a common complaint from Windows XP users is that their slim, business-like NetMeeting video-conferencing application has been replaced by Windows Messenger in the new operating system. But despite

appearances, NetMeeting is still available - it's just hidden away. To launch the program select Start menu, Run and Type conf in the Run field. The NetMeeting you know and love will appear before your eyes.

Character building

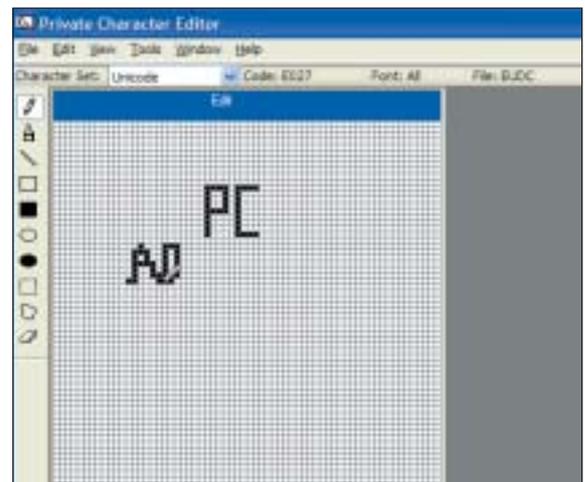
Another powerful but secret application is Windows XP's Private Character Editor, a program that creates custom items such as a company logo that can be used as a text character in any document. But you won't find this application sitting proudly in the Programs menu. Instead, you'll need to select Start, Run and enter Eudcedit to use it.

Private Character Editor gives you 250 pixels to draw a character of your own. Once you have saved your design open the Character Map by selecting Start, All Programs, Accessories. Choose All Fonts (Private Characters) and click on the character you have just created. You can then copy and paste it into any document.

Filenames revisited

Even when you are using Windows for everyday tasks some extra features may be hidden. When copying files from one folder to another, for example, the OS helpfully displays a prompt if it finds a duplicate filename in the target folder and asks if you want to overwrite this file. To avoid having to confirm Yes or No every time a duplicate is found you can automatically overwrite all the files in the target folder by clicking the Yes to All button.

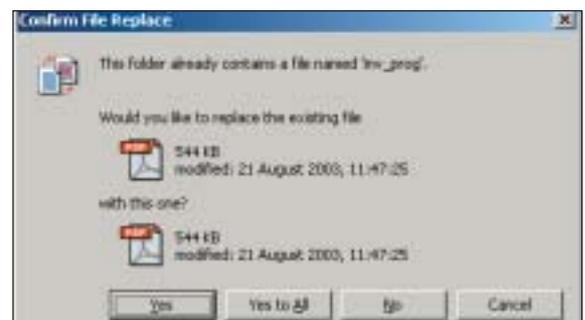
But what if you want to do exactly the opposite - leave all files with duplicate names untouched in the target folder? Even if your version of Windows lacks a No to All button you can achieve the same effect by holding down the Shift key as you

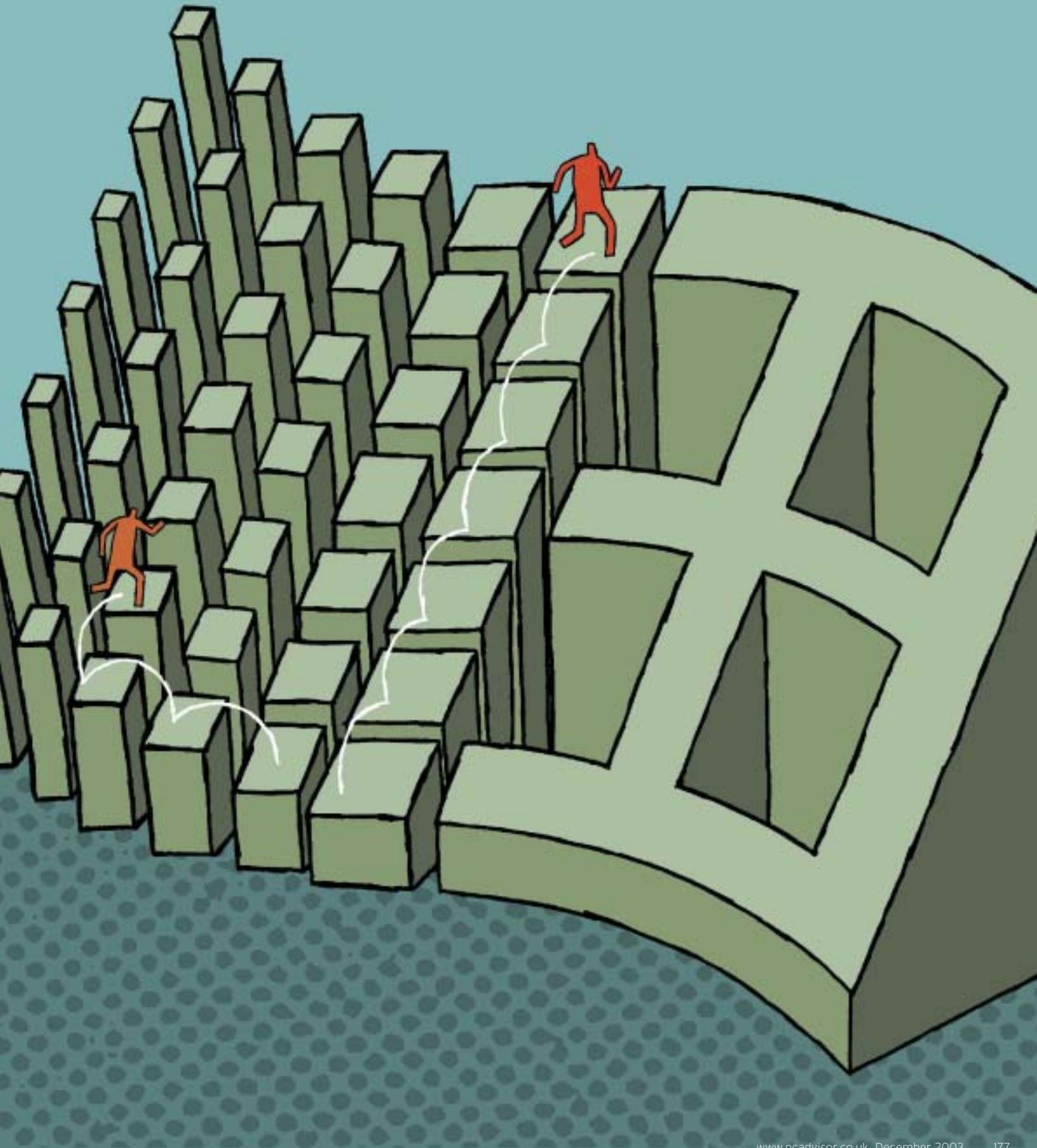


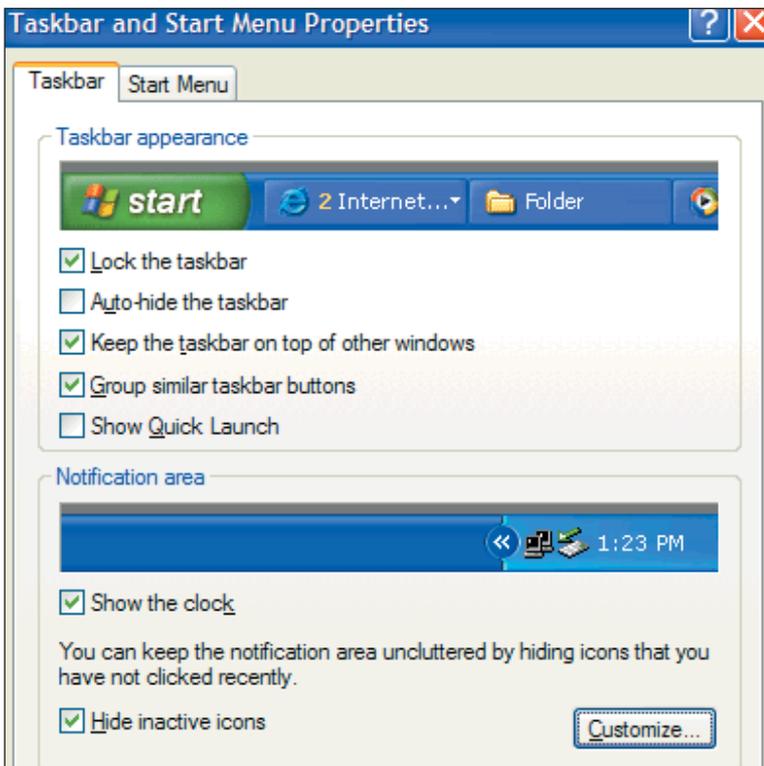
Top: uncover NetMeeting - hard to find, but it is in XP

Above: XP's Private Character Editor

Below: hold down Shift and click No to say 'No to All'







left: hide programs that aren't running and keep a tidy Taskbar

below: weed out emails with huge attachments

fiddling with arcane Registry entries. A much easier way to activate hidden settings is to download Microsoft's PowerToys. This free program includes a host of applications that allow you to tweak mouse, Explorer and Taskbar settings. Download it from www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/pro/downloads/powertoys.asp.

Email enigmas

Email communication is nearly ubiquitous in the home and office but few of us make the most of it. Many of us allow our inboxes to clog up unnecessarily with unwanted bulky attachments simply because we don't know how to filter them out

How clean is your inbox?

Checking up on your outside email in an application like Outlook Express isn't as difficult as it might appear, though you'll find little guidance in the

press No at the prompt. Windows will now move all files except those with duplicate names into the target folder.

Shortcut required

The Windows Start menu seems to have been around since the dawn of computing but few people realise that its uses extend beyond a quick way to access your applications. It also provides shortcuts to frequently opened documents, for example. To do this, select a file in Windows Explorer and drag it over the Start menu. When the menu pops up place the file in the required location.

Closing time

The Taskbar is another feature that is all too often overlooked. Did you know you could use it to close, minimise or maximise multiple windows or applications simultaneously? Just hold down Ctrl and click on the relevant Taskbar icons. If you now right-click these items and choose Close group you can close multiple items at the same time.

Hide and seek

If your XP Taskbar is looking crowded you can elect to hide applications that aren't currently running. Right-click on

the Taskbar and select Properties from the drop-down menu. Check the Hide inactive icons box and click the Customize button. In the resulting dialog box select 'Hide when inactive' and choose the applications you would like to apply this to.

Get recycling

A common irritation cited by Windows users is the confirmation dialog box that pops up as soon as you drag a file to the Recycle Bin. Most people work out how to remove this hurdle: right-click the Recycle Bin and select Properties from the drop-down menu. In the resulting dialog box, uncheck the Display delete confirmation box and click ok.

But many professional users prefer to bypass the Recycle Bin entirely. To do this hold down Shift as you click the Delete key. This is a slightly safer alternative to checking the 'Do not move files to the Recycle Bin' option in its Properties dialog box because sooner or later you'll want to retrieve something you have thrown away.

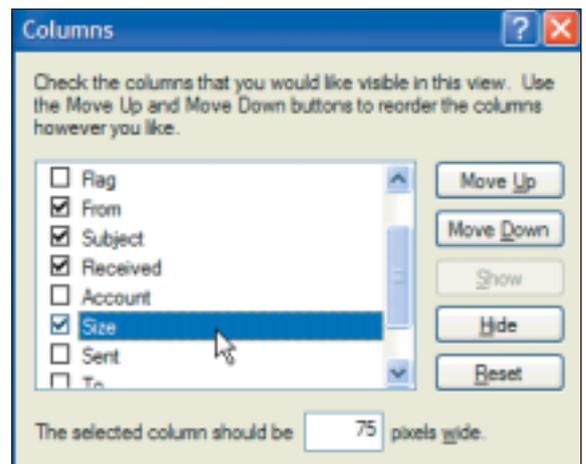
Power to the people

Sometimes, delving into the hidden innards of Windows XP requires

Personal fave: thumbnails

It can be very useful to keep a thumbnail view of an image as you work on it. Adobe Photoshop's Navigator palette displays a small thumbnail so you can still see the overall picture even when you're zoomed in on part of the image.

Popular image-editing package Paint Shop Pro lacks a comparable feature, but it's possible to achieve the same effect. Open a copy of the image, select Window, New Window and zoom out until the new image is at the desired size. You can do the same in Photoshop by selecting View, New View.



Personal fave: send him on his way

Your boss wants to change a few things in your PowerPoint presentation but doesn't have a copy of the application. Don't panic, though. You can export the PowerPoint outline directly to Word. Select **Send To** and choose **Microsoft Word** as the destination from the submenu. The content will remain fully editable so your boss' changes can easily be added to your presentation.

documentation. By default, Outlook Express displays the contents of your inbox by date or recipient. But another column header, **Size**, is also available. This helps you spring-clean your mail database easily by isolating all the emails with huge attachments.

To add the **Size** column right-click the **Column bar** and select **Size** from the checklist. Click the **Size** button at the top of the window and the messages with the largest attachments will automatically move to the top of the list.

You name it

One way to quickly locate an email from a friend or colleague in Outlook or Outlook Express is to sort the messages by **Sender** and then type the first few letters of their name. Outlook automatically jumps to that point in the email list.

Don't get attached

Having found all these attachments, how can you get rid of them without removing the entire email? A simple but effective workaround in Outlook Express is to forward the message to yourself. Before sending it, right-click on the attachment and select **Remove**. Once the forwarded message has arrived you can delete the original email.

To quickly add an acquaintance to your Outlook Contacts list, drag an email you have received from them and drop it on the **Contacts** icon. You can also drag a contact's name from the **Contacts** list - drop it in your inbox to automatically address a new message to the contact.

Email on the go

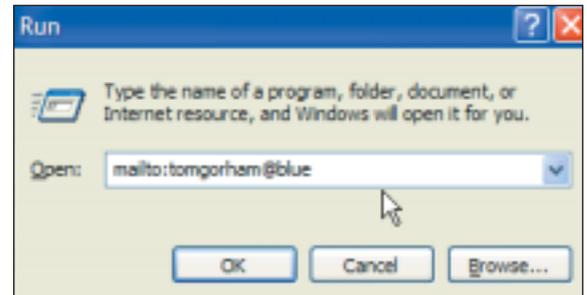
If you want to send an email quickly, you don't even have to find and launch your email client. Go instead to **Start, Run**. Type 'mailto:' followed by

the full email address of the recipient in the text field. Click **Enter** and Windows will automatically launch your default email application and create a blank email message with the recipient's details already filled in.

Many happy returns

Few users are aware that Microsoft Outlook offers a method of recalling an email message that you have sent inadvertently. Go to Outlook's **Sent Items** folder and double-click on the message to recall so it opens in its own window. Go to **Actions, Recall This Message**. Select 'Delete unread copies of this message'.

Outlook can also inform you whether the recall succeeds or fails.



above: create an blank email instantly

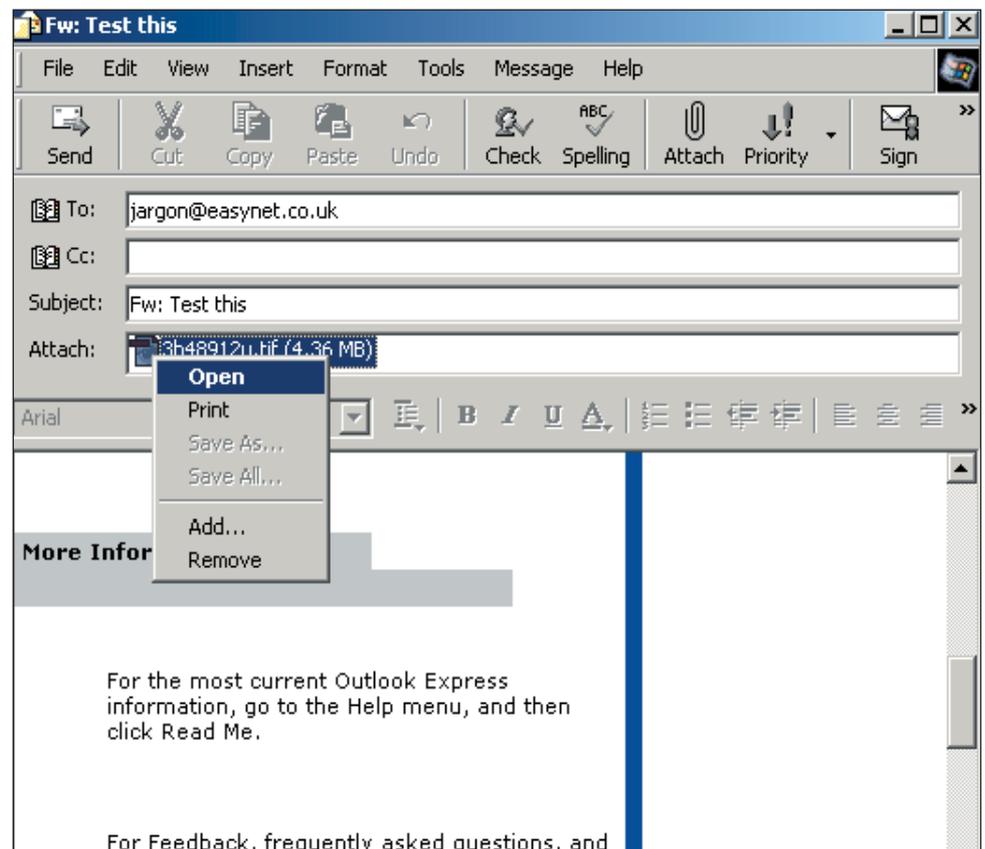
below: get rid of attachments but keep the email

The only caveats are that you must be using Microsoft Exchange Server as your email server and the recipient must also be an Outlook user.

Access downloaded messages

Most ISPs now offer the ability to access your mail over the internet alongside a standard POP3 email application such as Outlook Express or Eudora. It's a handy method of accessing your email wherever you are, but usually you can't read emails you have already received at home.

Changing this behaviour only requires a few tweaks in Outlook Express. Select **Tools, Accounts**. Click the **Mail** tab and select your email account. Click the **Properties** button.



Personal fave: as if by magic

Easter eggs in Adobe Photoshop are few and far between, although in every version we've tested (including Photoshop 7.0) this quirky one remains: **Alt, Click the right arrow at the top of the Layers palette and select Palette Options from the submenu. An utterly pointless pop-up window featuring a wizard and a flower will appear.**



below: tick this box to keep read messages

bottom: click Clear Forms to wipe AutoComplete's memory

Choose the Advanced tab in the resulting dialog box and, under the Delivery heading, select the 'Leave a copy of messages on server' checkbox. This will make sure any email you received isn't removed from your mail server when Outlook Express connects to it.

It's a good idea to limit the number of days that mail is kept on your server, so make sure you also enter a figure in the 'Remove mail from server' checkbox. A value of one will keep the last 24 hours' worth of email accessible from anywhere.

There are similar options in other email apps. You can leave mail on the server in Eudora by selecting Tools, Options and clicking on Incoming Mail.

may have been hijacked. No Explorer user should be without Ad-Aware (www.lavasoftusa.com or see this month's cover disc). This handy application scans your Windows and hardware components for datamining, aggressive advertising and tracking components and offers the ability to remove them.

Another excellent tool is Spyware Blaster (www.wilderssecurity.net/spywareblaster.html). Rather than removing existing spyware this program prevents it being installed in the first place. The packages should be used independently of each other.

For the forgetful

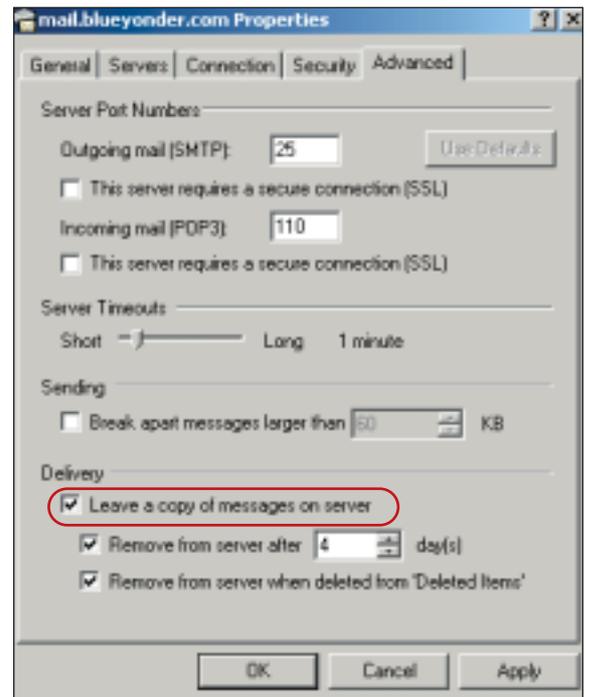
Want to revisit that site you stumbled across yesterday but have forgotten its address? If you remember a distinctive word from its URL, or one of the pages on the site, you can search Explorer's History for that word to recover its full address.

In the History bar on the left of Explorer's window, click the Search button. In the Search field, type the phrase you're looking for. Click Search Now and Internet Explorer will list all recent web pages that include that term.

AutoComplete explained

Explorer's AutoComplete function (available in version 5.0 or above) is another excellent way of finding web pages that you can only partially remember. If you type in the first few letters of the website Explorer will automatically complete the rest of the entry for you.

However, sometimes AutoComplete works against you. If you've ever entered erroneous text into a web form's text field, it's frustrating when Explorer keeps offering it as an option in the drop-down AutoComplete field. But these entries are easy to remove. When in a text field, select the item



Confident browsing

Internet Explorer is probably the most heavily used application on any PC and any method of tailoring its behaviour to work more effectively is welcome.

IE go home

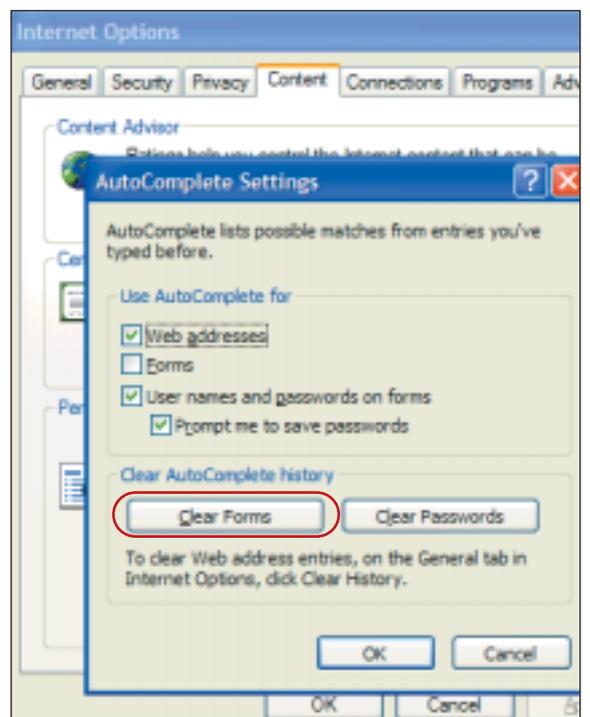
Most of us rarely change our default home page, perhaps because it requires too many mouse clicks. There is an easier way. To make the active web page your new default home page in Internet Explorer, don't bother going to Tools, IE Options, Use Current. Instead, simply drag the Explorer icon at the start of the address field over the Home icon on the Standard Buttons Bar.

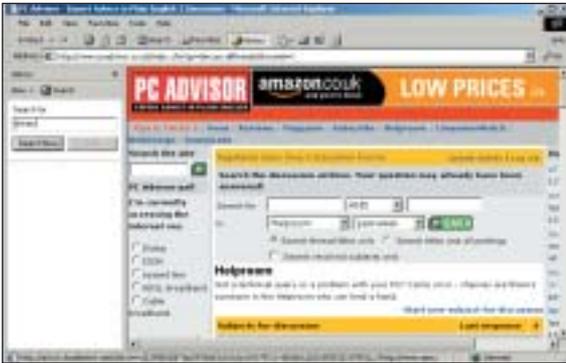
Language of the web

Software secrets aren't restricted to applications themselves. Did you know that you can search the Google engine in Klingon? Go to www.google.com/intl/xx-klingon.

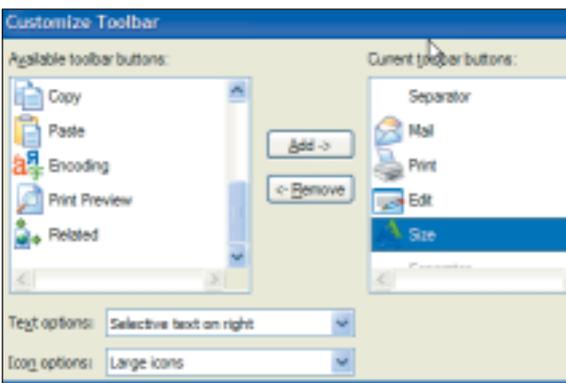
Get rid of spyware

If you're having problems retaining a home page your browser start page





top left: search IE's History for that forgotten web address



left: add the Size button to Explorer's toolbar

A little application

Possibly Word's most prized secret is its hidden ability to track where you are in a long document. If you can't remember where you made your last changes select Shift, F5 and the cursor will move to the place where you last made an edit. Word keeps track of your last three locations so continue to press the same key combination to toggle through your last three edit points.

Looking good

Word could never claim to be a dedicated page layout program. But as it can lay out text in columns and tables, it can fulfil basic desktop publishing needs. Developing a good layout can be hit and miss, so use Word's hidden ability to generate random text to give you a feel of how text will look on the page.

In any Word document, type =rand(10,20) and press Enter. The document will now be filled with

you want to delete in the drop-down list and press the Delete key.

In order to remove batches of AutoComplete entries you'll need to edit the Registry (go to Start, Run and type Regedit. The entries can be found in Hkey_Current_User\Software\Microsoft\Internet Explorer\TypedURLs.

You can also remove your entire AutoComplete collection for web forms in Explorer 6.0 and above if you go to Tools, Internet Options. Under the Content tab, click the AutoComplete button and select Clear Forms.

One size doesn't fit all

Not happy with the font sizes on an Explorer web page? Go to View, Text Size and choose your preferred text size. If you have a mouse with a scrollwheel there is a secret option: hold down Ctrl and scroll the wheel towards you to make the text bigger.

For standard mouse users there is another hidden gem: you can add a text resize button to the Toolbar. Right-click the Toolbar and select Customize from the drop-down menu. The button with the letter A and the arrows underneath is the Text Resize button.

Personal fave: as you like it

Perhaps the best of Explorer's secrets - and one that will also work in just about any modern browser - is the ability to open a web page in your Favorites menu at a defined size and position. For example, to open www.pcadvisor.co.uk at a set size right-click its entry in the Favorites menu and select Properties. Edit the address in the URL field, replacing it with the following code:

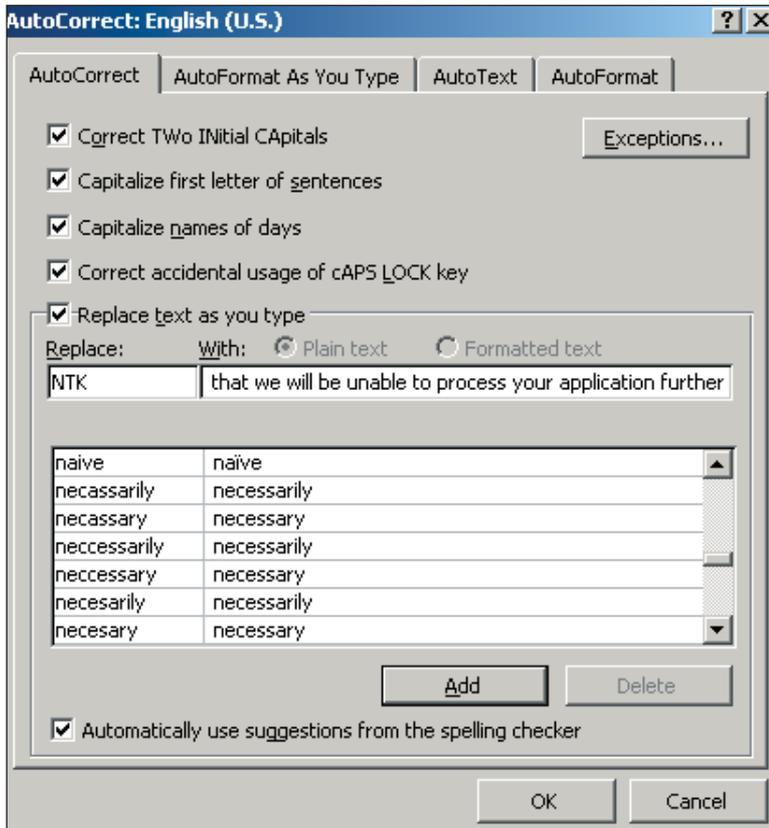
```
javascript:resizeTo(800,600);
moveTo(0,0);document.location.href='http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk'
```

When editing different Favorites, simply change the URL. The first figure in the 'resize' parenthesis represents the window's horizontal width, the second is its height. Change these to suit your requirements. Click ok and, in Explorer's case, ignore the warning given. Every time you visit the *PC Advisor* website it will now open at the same size and in exactly the same position.

You can expand this trick to add a one-click resizing tool to Explorer - handy for any web designer. First, create an HTML page in your web editor with links along the lines of the following:

```
<a href="javascript:resizeTo(1600,1200)">1600 x 1200</a>
<a href="javascript:resizeTo(800,600)">800 x 600</a>
<a href="javascript:resizeTo(640,480)">640 x 480</a>
```

Open the page in Explorer and test the links by clicking on them - they should all resize the page. Drag each link to Explorer's Links. You now have one-click access to a number of common screen resolutions, so you can test how a web page will look in each.



Left: let AutoCorrect finish your sentences

correctly. You can alternate between viewing the values in the cells and displaying the formulas. To toggle between the different views, press Ctrl and ` (single quotation mark).

Excel eggs

Microsoft has recently cut down the number of hidden Easter eggs in its programs in order to keep code size manageable. So if you want to see the most impressive Microsoft Office Easter eggs you will have to go back in time.

Perhaps the best we've seen is the one that appears in Excel 97. If you open a new workbook in that program, select Edit, Go To and type X97:L97 in the Reference field and click Enter. Press the Tab key, then Ctrl, Shift, and click the Chart Wizard button on the toolbar.

A full-screen animated image will appear that you can navigate with your mouse. The left button moves you forward through the landscape while the right one moves you backwards. As you pass a stone pyramid, the program's credits will scroll past. Press the Esc key to return to the active worksheet.

Managing MP3s

There are plenty of clunky and often expensive programs available to organise your MP3 collection. But if your management needs are simple - say, you just want to weed out any shady or poor-quality MP3s from your collection - you can do it all from within Windows XP.

If you keep your MP3 collection in your My Music folder you can opt to view your tunes by bit rate and easily isolate and delete the lowest quality MP3s. To view by bit rate open the My Music folder, go to View, Details and right-click the column headings. Select Bit rate from the

random text corresponding to the numbers in the parentheses. The first number (10) represents the number of paragraphs that will be created and the second number (in this case, 20) shows the number of sentences in each paragraph.

Case in point

Changing text from all capitals to lowercase can be tortuous - particularly if the whole document is in uppercase. There is a surprisingly easy way to toggle text in Microsoft Word, though. Simply select the letters you want to change and press Shift, F3. Each time you press the F3 key, the text case toggles between initial capitals, uppercase and lowercase. You can access this function under Format, Change case, too.

The long and the short of it

Word's AutoCorrect function is useful for correcting common spelling mistakes as you type. But it can also be put to use in a more sophisticated fashion by converting your shorthand or acronyms to lengthier phrases or sentences, so you type less.

Select Tools, Autocorrect and, under the Autocorrect tab, enter a brief acronym in the Replace text field and an expanded entry in the With field. Now, whenever you type your acronym, it will be replaced by the longer entry.

When I'm closing Windows

A little-known Office secret is that you can save and close all your Word, Excel or PowerPoint documents from a single window. In the currently active document, hold Shift and Select File, Close All or Save All.

Cell searching

Here's a little known tip that comes in very useful if you need to debug an Excel spreadsheet that isn't calculating



Personal fave: a discrete exit

A less well-known key combination in QuarkXPress is one that adds a bit of panache to deleting a text box. Select a text box and, while holding down the Alt, Ctrl, Shift, press the K key. The text, together with its surrounding text box will melt gracefully from your screen. On the Mac, your text box is zapped from existence by a colourful little alien.



drop-down menu. Now click the 'Bit rate' tab to view your files in ascending or descending order.

An alternative method of finding and sorting your MP3 collection is to right-click on the folder or volume containing your music tracks and select Search from the drop-down menu. In the 'Search for files or folders named' field, enter '*.mp3' to find all files with the MP3 extension and click the Search Now button. Windows XP will display your MP3 files in the righthand pane. Perform the same method described above to sort them.

Working with hyperlinks

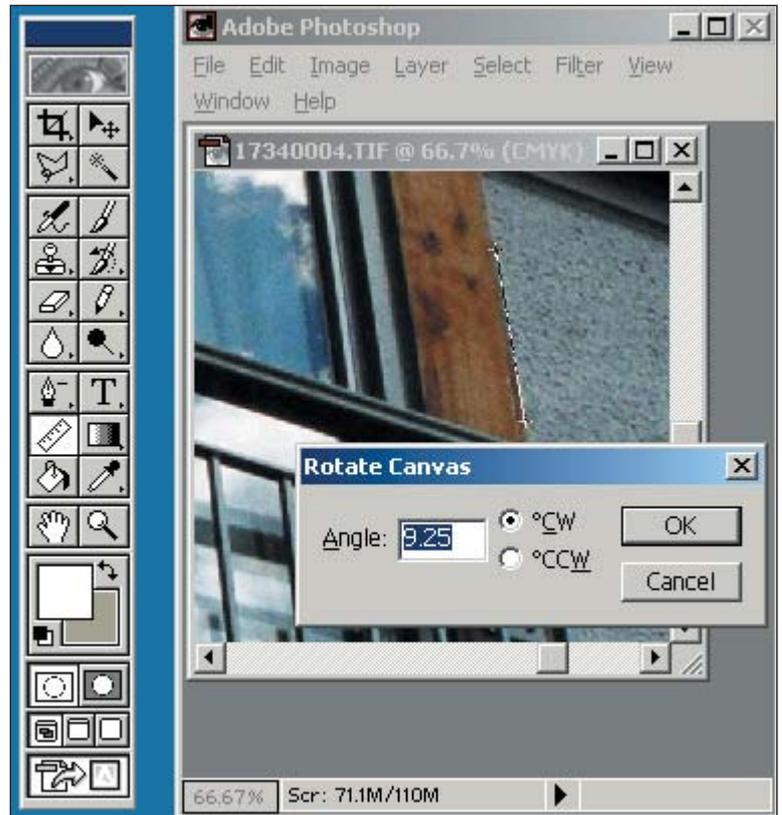
Microsoft created the ability to embed hyperlinks in its Office applications as a way of integrating the software more fully with the internet. But they can be more of a hindrance than a help, especially when you have created them accidentally.

You can remove a hyperlink easily enough (right-click the link and from the Hyperlink submenu choose Remove Hyperlink), but how do you stop them appearing in the first place? Select AutoCorrect Options from the Tools menu then, under the AutoFormat As You Type tab, deselect the 'Internet and network paths with hyperlinks' checkbox.

In Word 2002 and 2003 you at last have the option to follow

Above: correct crooked scans with Photoshop

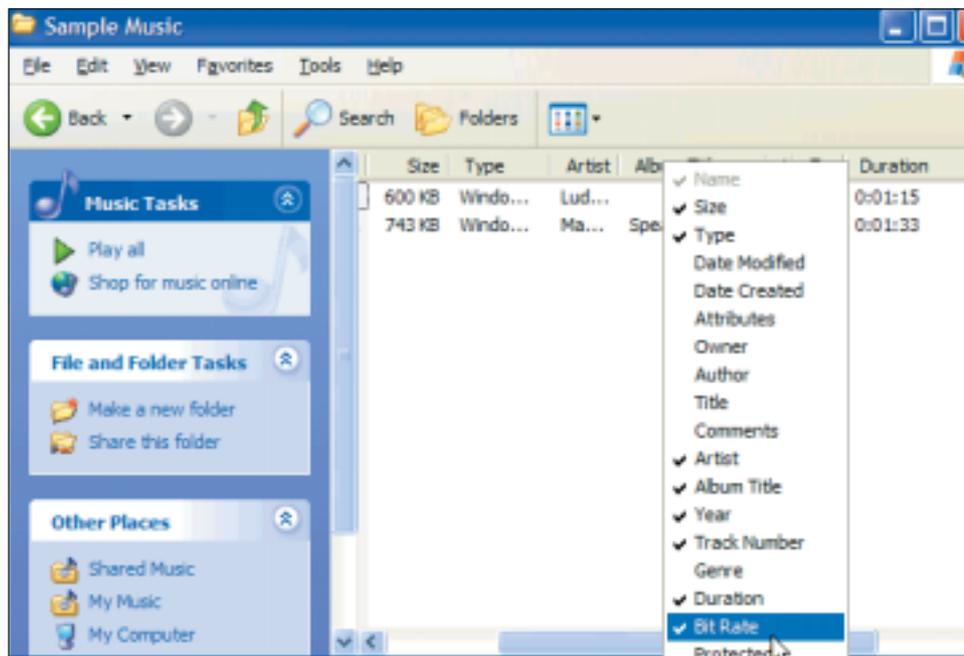
Below: XP has simple MP3 organisation tools built in



hyperlinks in a document. Select Options from the Tools menu and click the Edit tab. Check the 'Use Ctrl+click to follow hyperlink' checkbox and click ok. Now hold down the Ctrl button while clicking a hyperlink to open it in a document.

While Word can be an irritating piece of software, Excel can be a

real pain in the posterior when it comes to editing or removing hyperlinks. As soon as you click in a cell containing a link, your internet browser is launched. To avoid this, use the Arrow or Tab keys to navigate to the cell containing the link and press the F2 key. After you have finished editing, press Enter.



Let's get this straight

Photoshop Elements has its own dedicated tool for correcting crooked scans - something that's missing in its big brother, Photoshop. But our favourite Photoshop secret is the way in which you can easily and accurately straighten any image using just a couple of mouse clicks. It's an ideal way to make sure scans aren't skewed.

Select the Measure tool (it's in the same group of tools as the Eyedropper tool) and drag a line along the length of anything that you know to be vertical in the image, such as the corner of a building. Go to Image, Rotate, Arbitrary and the angle field is already filled in for you. All you need to do is press the ok button and your image will magically correct itself. ☒