

BigDesk V2.34

What On Earth Is BIGDESK?

One of the best things about Windows is that you can run several programs at once. The only real problem with this (apart, perhaps, from excruciating slowness when there are 30 or so copies of some game running at the same time) is that the screen gets awfully cluttered. Bigdesk is the answer to this problem, and we think you're going to like it once you get the idea.

Installation instructions are after the next section; first, we'll tell existing users what's changed.

Existing users: The feature list is at the end of this document!

Installation

To install Bigdesk, extract the files **BIGDESK.EXE**, and **BIGDLIB.DLL** into any directory named in your DOS path. We use C:\WINDOWS, but you may want to do something else.

Now from the Run... dialog of Program or File Manager, type BIGDESK. An icon will appear with a grid showing on it. Double click on the icon, and a window with a grid on it will appear. OK, time to explain....

Imagine that you had nine monitors attached to your computer, all hidden behind a wall. Imagine a one-screen-sized hole in the wall. Now imagine that you can move the hole to look at any of the screens or even at parts of several of them. That's the thing BigDesk is going to give you. In order to use Bigdesk to the full you will probably also need a copy of Backmenu, to provide you with a pop-up program menu on each of these 'virtual' screens.

That's all you need to know, but we'll go on to explain some of the gadgets you can use within Bigdesk if you wish.

Mouse Operations

There are several different operations which can be performed with the mouse.

Choosing a new virtual screen

These operations work on both the map and the icon.

To move to a new grid cell

click in the cell with the right button

To move anywhere on the Bigdesk desktop

drag the mouse pointer with the right button. If 'Snap Desktop To Grid' option is enabled, the desktop can only be moved in units of the grid size. If you want to place the desktop anywhere, use Shift+Right click, then drag.

You need to turn on the 'Snap Desktop to Grid?' option for the first operation to work; otherwise, the virtual screen selected will be centred on the point on the map where you click.

Choosing an application window

These operations only work on the map

To activate a particular application window

double click the left mouse button on the box representing the window

To activate an application which is iconised
double click the left mouse button on the box representing the icon

Moving an window around the Bigdesk desktop

This is only possible on the map, not on the icon.

To move an application window or icon to another place on the Big desktop drag the box representing the window using the left mouse button. If this window owns any others, they will be moved at the same time, keeping their relative positions. To override this feature, and only drag one window, hold down the control key whilst selecting the window to drag.

Menu Operations and Options

The menu operations are all to be found on the System menu. To access this, click once on the icon or, with the map window open, click on the bar in the top left corner or press Alt+Spacebar.

First, there are the menu options which appear on most system menus; we'll assume you can handle those.

The Bigdesk options follow these; they are:

Set Options...

Allows you to tweak the various options in BigDesk. For more details see the section below.

Save BigDesk Window Position

Save the current size, position and state of the map.

Check for Windows outside Desktop

Forces BigDesk to check for any windows that are outside the desktop area. If any are found, BigDesk will ask if you want them moved into the visible part of the desktop. Over to you...

About...

We'll leave you to explore this on your own.

BigDesk Options

Selecting the Set Options... menu option from the system menu will produce the following dialog box:-

Keep Window At Front

This option is either on (default) or off. To swap between on and off, select the menu item. When this option is On, Bigdesk will keep its icon or map display on top of any window you may open. It may get in the way of something like word-processing, but is a very useful option if you are switching between virtual screens often.

Snap To Grid

This option is either on (default) or off and works as above. When this

option is on, clicking the right mouse button in a cell on the map or icon will move the 'hole in the wall' to line up with the dotted lines, thus providing a repeatable view of a group of windows.

Track Active Window

This option is either on (the default) or off and works as before. When this option is on, changing the window focus with Alt+Esc and Alt+Tab results in the newly selected window being moved to give the best view (all on screen if grid snap is off, in the cell with the largest proportion of the window if grid snap is on).

Update Desktop Map

BigDesk will update its map of the desktop every second. Normally this is fine as you can see windows appearing as they are created. On some slower systems this may cause delays or slow response, so you can turn this feature off. If you do the map display will only update when you click on BigDesk.

Snap Edge

When moving application windows around on the BigDesk map, you may want them to be aligned on the grid (if you have it enabled). The value here defines how close (in pixels on the map display) the top left hand corner of the application window has to be to a grid point for the window to be snapped to that grid point. This option only works if you have *Snap Desktop to Grid* enabled. To turn off this feature, give a distance value of 0 or hold down the shift key whilst dragging the application window on the BigDesk map.

Desk Width/Height

From here, you can decide how big to make your array of available virtual screens. Don't forget they all have to show on the icon!

Window Display

Here you can decide how BigDesk'll display windows on it's map. There are three choices:-

Title Bar - displays the window's title along the top of the rectangle.

Application Icon - Displays the icon in the centre of the rectangle.

Both - Does both of these things.

Exit BigDesk

Here you can decide what BigDesk is to do with all the windows spread over the virtual desktop when you close it. There are 4 options:-

Scale To Screen - moves all windows onto the screen, giving them a position which roughly denotes where they were on the virtual desktop.

Cascade All Windows - Move all windows onto the screen offsetting each a little to the right and down from the previous.

Tile All Windows - Move all windows onto screen and arrange them so they cover the screen.

Do Nothing - Leave all windows in their current positions.

All of the option settings are saved in WIN.INI in the [Big Desk] section along with the window position and whether Bigdesk was iconised or not. The items are saved every time you click the OK button.

It's safe to add Bigdesk to your Backmenu, as subsequent invocations just activate the existing Bigdesk display.

The Pop-Up Menu

As of V2.34, BigDesk provides a handy little pop-up menu that can be accessed from the desktop map window. To activate it, simply move the mouse cursor over a map representation of a window you're interested in and press ALT+left mouse button. A menu will appear containing some handy operations you might wish to carry out on that window.

The menu is divided into two parts, separated by a line. The upper section has options which mimic those on the system menu - Maximise, Minimise, Restore and Close. These act in exactly the same way as their system menu counterparts. The interesting option (or options if you're running Windows 3.1) appear below the line.

Stay with Viewport allows you to make a window "float" and maintain its position relative to the viewport. As you move your view of the virtual desktop around, this window will move with it. This is useful if you're running applications that you always want to remain on screen, like the clock. "Floating" windows show up as grey on the desktop map. Note: you can make *any* window float, even ones which are not visible as they exist on some other part of the virtual desktop. But, they will move and maintain their position relative to the viewport which may cause them to be moved off of the desktop completely. Take care when deciding which windows are to be sticky! (If you do lose any windows, you can always use the handy "Check for windows outside desktop" option on the system menu. That should find any errant windows.)

If you're running Windows 3.1 you can also make a window keep-to-front, in much the same manner as BigDesk itself does. A second menu option allows you to enable and disable this feature. Currently, it is impossible to tell the difference between a window which is in keep-to-front mode and one which is not so the only indication you'll see is in the behaviour of the window itself. If you're having trouble selecting the enable/disable option from the pull-right sub-menu, try letting go of the ALT key but keeping the left mouse button pressed. You can then select the "Keep window to front" option and let go, the highlight will move to the enabled/disabled sub-menu. If you keep the ALT key pressed, you have to make the selection *without* letting go of the left mouse button (don't blame us, we didn't write the menu code ;->).

Both of these properties are recent additions to BigDesk and are not saved between sessions as yet. This is planned for a future release.

Hope you like Bigdesk. It's become indispensable for us. We welcome suggestions and comments by electronic mail to **ih@ecs.soton.ac.uk** or to **sphipp@cix.compulink.co.uk**; as ever, these addresses will need reversing, munging and otherwise manipulating to make them work on the network. We will always send a reply to your note; if you don't get one, send it again trying an alternative (reverse the bit after the @; drop the cix bit; add a gateway name to the end; ask your local mail guru; etc). No promises of support or implementation but we're all fairly nice people (or so our mothers say).

Postal contact should be to:

SP Services
PO Box 456
Southampton
United Kingdom
SO9 7XG

Sorry, we don't take phone calls (apart from registrations on +44 703 550037!)

Documentation © 1991-2 SP Services
Software © 1991-2 Ian Heath

What Is and Was New?

V2.34

- * More bug fixes. This time to do with windows disappearing in the middle of being dragged confusing BigDesk.
- * New feature time. There is a pop-up menu that can be accessed for each window on the map. To activate it, press ALT+Left mouse button with the cursor over a window representation on the map. More details above.
- * Keep-to-front and stay-with-desktop options now available (via pop-up menu).

V2.33

- * Fixes a problem with dragging icons that was introduced through the feature added in 2.32
- * Changed the Options dialog to a more friendly layout suggested by Jenifer Lindsay (thanks!)

V2.32

- * BigDesk has a new dragging feature and help for those who have lost windows into the void. When dragging, if a window owns any other windows on the desktop, these will be moved as well. This can be overridden by using the CONTROL+left mouse button, which will only move the window under the cursor. BigDesk will also detect if any windows are outside the bounds of the desktop. This is done automatically when BigDesk starts up but can be performed at any time through the *Check for Windows outside Desktop* menu item.

V2.31

- * Some minor bug fixes, visual enhancements and speed improvements.

V2.30

- * BigDesk is now BackMenu aware. With older versions of BackMenu and BigDesk, the menu would be obscured if BigDesk's keep-to-front option is enabled. With this version, BackMenu can stop BigDesk coming to the front if its menu is being displayed. Requires BackMenu V2.21 or greater.
- * BigDesk can display your application windows a number of ways. There is now a choice of displaying the window caption, the application's icon or both on the BigDesk map.

V2.22

- * BigDesk has snap to grid for applications. If you move an application window around with BigDesk and it's top left corner is within a certain number of pixels (as displayed on the map) of a grid point, the window is snapped to that grid point. This distance is user configurable.

V2.21

- * BigDesk has desktop dragging on the icon working again (a bug fix).

V2.20

- * The user interface has been changed. If you are using grid snap, then right clicking and/or dragging will move you in whole screen sized units. If you want to move the desktop in smaller units, shift+right click will do this.
- * You can now decide what BigDesk is to do with the desktop when you close it down. There are four options:-
 - Scale desktop onto screen
 - Cascade all windows
 - Tile all windows
 - Do nothing

V2.00

- * Bigdesk is now Shareware. We don't like to be bugged for money by the programs we use, so we won't bug you for money in our stuff, but registering will make Ian very happy. Go on, open ORDERNOW.WRI and do it!