

# Larry's newsLETTER

**It's that time of year when many PC users are buying new machines and — ready or not — making the leap to Windows 7.**

**Get off on the right foot: save time, trouble, and frustration by performing these 10 simple Win7 tweaks.**

It's happened to me, and I'll bet it's happened to you: weeks or months into using a new OS, you find yourself saying, "Geez, I wish I'd known that at the beginning!"

I've worked with Win7 for a year now, and in that time I've learned more than a few tricks and tweaks for setting up and getting started with this new OS. Here are the 10 best that can help you improve Windows 7's stability and recoverability, make the OS work faster, increase its ease of use, and maximize your on-screen real estate.

Feel free to pick and choose the ones that appeal to you. Even if you don't use any, I'll bet you'll learn a few things about Windows 7 that you didn't know before!

Let's get started. The first four steps help you prepare for unexpected system failures and security breaches:

## **Build a rock-solid safety net for Win7**

►**Create a system repair disc right away:** When you're starting out with a new OS or a new PC, things sometimes go awry. That's why it's always smart to make an emergency boot disk before you do anything else.

An emergency boot disk lets you start your PC and perform repairs, even if the hard drive is trashed or the operating system is otherwise unbootable. Having an emergency boot disk on hand can be the difference between successfully completing a quick do-it-yourself repair and having to send your system off to the repair shop!



## **Techie Term:**

### **Defragment**

**Defragmenting your hard disk is a great way to boost the performance of your computer. Though the term "defragment" sounds a little abrasive, it is actually a simple and helpful process. After all, a defragmented hard disk is a happy hard disk.**



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Windows 7's built-in system repair disc tool creates emergency boot disks, and the whole process takes just a couple of minutes. Click the Win7 Start orb and type the phrase system repair into the search text box. At the top of the search results you'll see Create a System Repair Disc (under Programs). Click it and follow the prompts. That's all it takes!

Put the new disk in a place that's safe but where you can grab it quickly if it's ever needed.

►Use the new "Create a system image" tool: Windows 7 is the first Windows to include an app that makes a complete image backup of your setup. Unlike a conventional file-by-file backup, an image backup is a compressed, byte-for-byte clone of your entire hard drive's contents.

Restoring a saved image puts your hard drive back into exactly the same state as when you made the image. It's the gold standard of backups and is the only way to absolutely, positively roll back a system to a prior state.

Win7 makes image backups a snap. Open the Control Panel and, under System and Security, click Back up your computer. In the left pane, select Create system image and follow the steps.

Should you ever need to restore a system image and you'd like some pointers, see the MS article, "Restore your computer from a system image backup."

►Fully automate your routine backups: Image backups are great for rolling back an entire system. But file-by-file backups are best for restoring one or more individual documents, photos, or other files you accidentally delete or destructively alter.

Open the Control Panel and click System and Security, then Backup and Restore. In the right pane, select Set up backup and follow the steps.

At the end of the process, before clicking Save settings and run backup, you can change your backup schedule by clicking Change schedule.



## This Month's Quote:

**"I've finally learned what 'upward compatible' means. It means we get to keep all our old mistakes."**

**(Dennie van Tassel)**



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Couple Win7 backups with the OS's built-in Restore previous version feature, and you may never lose a file again — ever!

►Install Stop-Sign Antivirus. Most security suites come with a lot of bloat. This simple effective antivirus comes with unlimited FREE tech support should you get infected.

## **Make Windows 7 run faster, work better**

►Give Internet Explorer 8 better speed: As the gateway to the Internet, our browser might well be our most important app. Win7 ships with Internet Explorer 8 and by default is preconfigured with many nonessential add-ons and ancillary features that could slow it down. (These default settings might be one of the reasons why IE8 is slower than Firefox and Chrome in most performance tests.)

### **I recommend turning most default options off, and here's how:**

When you first launch IE8, you'll be asked to choose your settings. Select Choose custom settings.

When asked whether you want to turn on IE8's suggested sites, select No, don't turn on.

When asked to choose a default search provider, select Show me a webpage after setup to choose more search providers. Making a manual selection helps ensure that you bypass any associated initial default settings. I prefer Google over the default Bing anyway, but you can choose Bing or any other provider you wish. The point here is to avoid accepting the initial, built-in defaults.

When asked to download search provider updates, select No.

When offered a choice of accelerators, select Turn off all Accelerators that are included with Internet Explorer.

When asked whether you want to use Compatibility View updates, answer Yes; compatibility view is useful on older and nonstandard websites, and having it enabled doesn't seem to slow down normal browsing.

At some later point, IE8 will ask whether you want to turn on autocomplete. Select Yes; it is a time saver.

►Resize the recycle bin downward: Windows 7 has finally reined in the formerly voracious appetites of the caches used by Internet Explorer and System Restore.



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But the recycle bin can still be ridiculously large when Windows is installed on a large hard drive. A needlessly large bin size creates unnecessary Windows housekeeping overhead and wastes disk space.

Right-click the recycle bin, select Properties, and set a more reasonable Custom size — typically 250MB to 500MB.

►Improve Explorer's folder options: By default, Windows tries to keep novices out of trouble by hiding some system-related settings and features. For example, Windows normally hides system-level folders and files. But most experienced Windows users find these safety features annoying. So when setting up a new system (or upgrading an older one), I make four changes to the default folder view options.

Click the Start orb, Control Panel, Appearance and Personalization, then Folder Options.

Check (enable) two items that are normally unchecked: Always show menus and Show hidden files, folders, and drives. The latter is under the Hidden files and folders subsection.

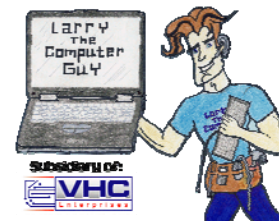
Uncheck (disable) two items that are checked by default: Hide extensions for known file types and Hide protected operating system files, as shown in Figure 4. (The latter will generate an "Are you sure?" warning.) Click the Apply to Folders button at the top of the dialog, and these changes will propagate throughout your system. (Note: When you unhide system files, a desktop.ini may appear on your desktop. It's fine to delete this file, if you wish.)

## Organize your new Windows 7 desktop

►Put frequently accessed items on the desktop: Although I don't like needless clutter, I appreciate having frequently used features and functions — such as shortcuts to Computer, Network, Control Panel, and the default User's files — instantly available.

Right-click on any empty spot on the Desktop and select Personalize. On the upper-right side of the pop-up setting box, click Change desktop icons. In the ensuing dialog box, check whatever frequently accessed items you wish.

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►Ultra-customize your desktop icon size: You can make your desktop icons almost any size you want with your mouse's scroll wheel. First, make sure the desktop has the focus (i.e., no other window is selected); then press and hold the Ctrl key while rolling the mouse wheel up or down. The desktop icons will step through many sizes, from huge to tiny. Select any size that works for you. (I like 'em very small, to save space.)

►Adjust the taskbar properties: Windows 7's new taskbar is one of its best features. We'll get to actually using the taskbar in a moment, but first let's tweak its basic behavior.

Right-click on any empty spot on the taskbar and select Properties. Under the Taskbar tab, uncheck Lock the taskbar and check Use small icons. This makes the Taskbar smaller and less obtrusive yet keeps it visible, easily accessible, and fully functional.

Want to explore the other Taskbar options? See Microsoft's "The taskbar (overview)" page and the more detailed "The new Windows 7 taskbar" article.

►Bonus tip: Learn to really use the new taskbar: Once you get the hang of the new taskbar, you'll love it! It's a major time-saver.

Gleaned from Windows Secrets 12/16/10

## Computer Quotes

A computer does not substitute for judgment any more than a pencil substitutes for literacy. But writing without a pencil is no particular advantage.

**Robert McNamara**

A computer once beat me at chess, but it was no match for me at kick boxing.

**Emo Philips**

At our computer club, we talked about it being a revolution. Computers were going to belong to everyone, and give us power, and free us from the people who owned computers and all that stuff.

**Steve Wozniak**

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## Types of computer viruses

**Airline virus:** You're in Dallas, but your data is in Singapore.

**Arnold Schwarzenegger virus:** Terminates and stays resident. It'll be back.

**Congressional Virus:** The computer locks up, screen splits erratically with a message appearing on each half blaming the other side for the problem.

**Gallup virus:** Sixty percent of the PCs infected will lose 38 percent of their data 14 percent of the time (plus or minus a 3.5 percent margin of error).

**Ted Kennedy virus:** Crashes your computer but denies it ever happened

**Warren Commission virus:** Won't allow you to open your files for 75 years.

**PBS virus:** Your PC stops every few minutes to ask for money.

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