
Windows 2000 Tips

We present a fistful of tips to help you and your users get the best out of Win2K.

By Dennis Jarrett
IT Journalist

As usual we've divided the tips into categories to help you find those most relevant to you and your users.

System Management

Hide Administrative Tools

The Administrative Tools folder on the Start Menu contains some potentially dangerous system administration utilities that might be better hidden from the end-user. There's a registry switch which decides whether it appears on the Start Menu at all. Open your registry and go to the key: HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\Advanced. Look for a value named StartMenuAdminTools (or create one if it doesn't exist), and modify the data to read NO to hide the Administrative Tools folder on the Start Menu. The default value of YES will obviously display the folder.

Improve Core System Performance

If you have a decent amount of RAM, try amending the registry to keep the core Windows 2000 system in memory rather than having it paged to disk. Open the registry and find this key: HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\Session Manager\Memory Management.

Look for the DisablePagingExecutive value and change it to 1 to stop the core process from being paged. The default (with paging on) is 0. The result should be a noticeable improvement in system performance, but if you aren't seeing any real difference it makes sense to revert to paging.

Office SR-1 And Win2000

The SR-1 patch for Office 2000 includes a number of minor bug fixes and other tweaks that are well worth installing - after all, Office 2000 appeared before Windows 2000, and it's no surprise that the applications aren't optimised for the operating system. You can find a complete list of SR-1 fixes in a spreadsheet at www.microsoft.com/office/ork/2000/download/SR1Changes.xls. But there is an important caveat: don't attempt to install the original SR-1 if you have Windows 2000 installed over a previous Windows NT setup - some key files are not registered properly in this common enough scenario. The revised SR-1a patch fixes this problem. If you have applied SR-1 in the 2000-over-NT circumstance, there's a Microsoft Office 2000/Windows 2000 Registry Repair Utility available on the Web from download.microsoft.com/download/office2000pro/o9regfix/2000/WIN98/EN-US/o9regfix.exe. This will apparently undo the damage.

Start Menu Submenu For All

Adding a submenu to the Start Menu for an individual user is easy enough, but it's not immediately clear how to do the same thing for a group of users. Make sure you are logged on as an administrator, then right-click Start and select Open All Users. Double-click the Programs folder (or whichever folder you want to add a submenu to) and go to File | New | Folder. Type a name for your new submenu, click an empty space on the desktop, and the job is done.

Automating Security Configuration

Windows 2000 comes with a command-line utility named secedit.exe to create and apply templates automatically and analyse system security. Run it directly from a command line, or call it from a batch file or the task scheduler - very handy when you need to check or configure security templates on multiple computers out of hours. Secedit has five basic functions, and in most cases the syntax is

complicated; check the Windows 2000 Help file, which is explicit if not particularly illuminating. The functions are listed in Figure 1.

File Management

Short File Extensions

If you try to delete all *.htm files you'll kill those with .html extensions as well; Windows 2000 evaluates file extensions on the first three characters, as does NT. You can disable this attribute in the registry, however. Go the key HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\FileSystem and find the value Win95TruncatedExtensions. Set it to 0 to disable the first-three-characters-only rule; if you wish to restore the default and turn the feature back on, set the value to 1.

Previewing Images In Folders

Windows 2000 gives you the option of previewing images in folders - not just displaying them as thumbnails, but actually showing a preview of a selected file in an Image Preview window to the left of your file list. You can turn this on for an individual Windows Explorer folder by going to the View menu and selecting Customize This Folder. When the Customize wizard starts, click Next and then select Choose or edit an HTML template for this folder. Click Next again. When the template list appears, select Image Preview. Click Next then Finish.

The Image Preview is more than an oversized thumbnail, because you can use the buttons on top of the preview to zoom, pan and print the image. Hold down the Shift key to temporarily reverse the zoom direction, or hold down Ctrl to pan around the image. For example, if you've zoomed in too far, don't bother selecting zoom-out - just Shift-click in the preview to zoom out. And while you can pan around a large or magnified image by using the scroll bars, you can hold down Ctrl to achieve the same effect: just Ctrl-drag in the preview area, the pointer will change to a hand, and you can pan as much as you want.

Highlight Compressed Files

It makes good sense to highlight compressed files in the Windows Explorer. With any Explorer window open you can set this option under Tools|Folder Options|View|Display Compressed Files And Folders With Alternate Color. The default colour for this is blue, but you can select a different colour for compressed files with a registry tweak. Find the key HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer and locate the value named Alt-

Registry Caveats

- Changes to the registry might not take effect until you reboot, though changes to the desktop might be implemented if you click on an empty area of the desktop and press F5 to refresh.
- Most of the registry tweaks described here refer to the HKEY_CURRENT_USER tree which will, of course, apply the changes to the current user. In most cases you can change the same key under HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE to apply the same settings on a system-wide basis.

```
secedit /analyze /DB databasename
```

analyses system security by checking the specified database (which should contain the security template).

```
secedit /configure /DB databasename
```

applies a security template stored in the specified database. By default this information is added to any existing templates, but you can force the new security settings to overwrite the existing configuration by including the /overwrite switch. And by default all areas of security specified in the template are applied to the system; another switch, /areas, can be used to specify exactly which areas are to be included.

```
secedit /refreshpolicy
```

reapplies security settings to the Group Policy object.

```
secedit /export
```

exports a security template from a security database to a security template file.

```
secedit /validate templatefilename
```

validates the syntax of a security template you want to import into a database for analysis or application to a system.

Figure 1.

Color. The default setting is 0000FF00, the hex value for blue; change it to an alternative hexadecimal value to select a different colour.

Going Faster

Accelerated Startup

You can automatically log on to the machine and to the network with no user intervention. It's a registry tweak; you'll need to edit and add four new values to the HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows NT\CurrentVersion\Winlogon key.

- Edit or create a value labelled DefaultUserName, and set it to the username for the automatic logon.
- Edit or create a value labelled DefaultPassword, and set this to the password for that username.
- Edit or create a value labelled DefaultDomainName and set this to the relevant user domain (you can skip this if the PC is not participating in NT or Windows 2000 domain security).
- Edit or create a value labelled AutoAdminLogon and set it to 1 to enable auto logon (predictably enough, a value of 0 will disable the automatic logon).

Next time you reboot, Windows should go straight to the user's desktop without requiring a password. The obvious caveats apply about unrestricted access - and even if you set AutoAdminLogon to 0 to require a password, don't forget that the password is stored there in DefaultPassword, so anyone who has access to the machine will in theory be able to get at its password.

Optimise Level 2 Cache

By default, Windows 2000 assumes a Level 2 cache of 256 KB. These days many PCs have Level 2 caches of 512 KB or more. It makes sense to optimise Windows for the larger cache size. Open the registry and find the key HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\Session Manager\Memory Management. Locate the value named SecondLevelDataCache and change its contents to the size of your Level 2 cache in KB, using decimal notation.

Accelerated Exit On Error 1

Windows 2000 is better at handling errant applications than the non-NT versions of the operating system, but there will still be occasions when you're trying to shut down but you can't because a task is shown as Not Responding. You can proceed by clicking on End Task, but if you want to insulate end-users from such worrying messages it makes sense to close any non-responding applications automatically. Here's a registry tweak which does just that.

Open the registry and find the key HKEY_USERS\DEFAULT\Control Panel\Desktop. Look for the value AutoEndTasks and set it to 1 (if you don't want to end tasks automatically, a setting of 0 will prompt for action). If you don't want to wait too long for closure, in the same key tree you'll see a value named WaitToKillAppTimeout, which specifies the delay in milliseconds before the task is ended. The default is 20000 (20 seconds), but you can speed up the process by entering a lower value.

Accelerated Exit On Error 2

Windows 2000 is not immune from the famous NT "blue screen of death". Normally that causes Windows to freeze, but you can force an automatic reboot instead. Open the registry and look for HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\CrashControl. There you should find a value labelled AutoReboot. Set it to 1 for automatic reboot, or 0 to disable the function. Restart Windows for the change to take effect.

Power-Off On Shutdown

In general, you'll want to power-off the computer once it has finished the shutdown process. There's a registry setting for this. Look for the key HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows NT\CurrentVersion\Winlogon and find the value PowerdownAfterShutdown. The default setting is 0, which disables the automatic power-off; change it to 1 to enable power-off. This

Launching The Task Manager

You can do this in three ways:

- Press Ctrl-Alt-Del and click on the Task Manager button
- Right click on the taskbar and choose Task Manager
- Press Ctrl-Shift-Esc.

feature won't work unless it is supported by the computer's BIOS, but with most modern PCs that shouldn't be a problem.

Save Space With Roaming Users

A roaming user profile is downloaded from the server when the roaming user logs onto a particular computer on the network. The profile is cached locally, and the cache won't normally be deleted. When there are many roaming users on the system, the cached data can take up a fair chunk of disk space. One tweak to the registry can solve the problem. Find the key `HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows NT\CurrentVersion\Winlogon` and edit or create a value named `DeleteRoamingCache`. Set it to 1 to enable the function so that, whenever a roaming user logs off, the system will automatically delete the cached copy of their profile.

Windows In Use

Automatic Command-Line Completion

Unix fans will appreciate the command completion option which lets you type only part of a file name, with the rest being added automatically when you press a specified key. Open your registry, go to the key `HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\Command Processor` and find (or create) a value called `CompletionChar`. The value decides which key produces the command-line completion; Tab is generally quite a useful option, selected by setting the value to 9. Now when you type the first part of a filename, press Tab to have Windows fill in the rest for you. Press Tab again to scroll through all the options. You can apply a similar result to directory paths entered on the command line. Go to the same `HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\Command Processor` key and find or create a value called `PathCompletionChar`. Again, setting the value to 9 allows the user to hit Tab to have Windows complete the path name.

DIY Characters

The Private Character Editor is a poorly-documented but often frequently-used tool for creating custom characters such as special symbols and even logos - up to 6,400 of them, any or all of which can be linked to one or more existing fonts (so that your private characters will appear as part of a standard font set). The Private Character Editor is a program called `eudcedit.exe` in `c:\winnt\system32`. Set up a desktop shortcut to it, or enter `eudcedit` in the Start | Run box. The editing grid is easy enough to use, with ellipse and angled line drawing tools as well as the more predictable rectangles and dot-by-dot fills. There's also an eraser. You can start from scratch, but you can also load in an existing character from any font installed on your PC and modify that. See Figure 2.

Cascade Options

Buried in the registry are four settings that decide whether useful system folders are shown on the Start Menu as a cascading menu or as a simple folder link. The toggles apply to the Control Panel and Network And Dial-up Connections folder (which are cascaded by default) and Printers and My Documents (which aren't). Open your registry and find the key `HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\Advanced`. You'll see the four string values: `CascadeControlPanel`, `CascadeMyDocuments`, `CascadeNetworkConnections` and `CascadePrinters`. In each case you can change the setting to Yes to enable cascading or No to disable it. Exit your registry and log off for the changes to take effect.

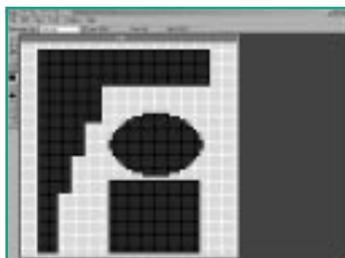


Figure 2 - The Private Character Editor allows you to create custom characters which can be linked to existing fonts.

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