



Vista Made Easy: 50 Tips And Tricks

ARTICLE DATE: 04.18.07

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Like driving a new car, adjusting to a new operating system takes time. Discovering new features and functions (so that's how you adjust the steering wheel!) helps to shorten the acclimatization period, letting you turn a mass-market product into one customized for you. Do you prefer bigger, better-looking icons? Is increased security worth a few extra clicks, in your eyes? Would you like to link all your gadgets to the new system the right way—the first time? Then we've got the guide for you. We'll walk you through Vista's many neat features and more than 50 tips on installing Vista optimally, configuring it for you and your family, improving system speed, and turning up its coolness. When we're through, you'll have made the new OS uniquely yours. — next: Tips 1 through 6

1. Command Authority

Like a scene straight out of *Kramer vs. Kramer* or *Mad Magazine's Spy vs. Spy*, Vista has two types of administrators. What gives? First, understand that there are two kinds of user accounts, Administrator and Standard. This refers to the level of privileges—the things you're allowed to do. In addition, and separately, there is an account named Administrator. It's typically used to sort out problems that keep you from logging on to your normal account. As in Windows XP, you should rename the Administrator account for security purposes (just don't forget what you've changed it to). Right-click *Computer* and click *Manage*. Under *Local Users and Groups*, open *Users*, right-click the one named *Administrator*, and choose *Rename*. Then right-click it and choose *Properties* to delete its telltale description as well.

2. Improve Your Network

There are two types of wireless networks known to Vista: public and private. Public networks are less secure, so the OS disables discovery of other devices when connected to one. But by default, Vista makes your network public. Go private instead, enabling a much more comprehensive view of the network behind your router using a new protocol called Link Layer Topology Discovery. In the Network and Sharing Center, click *Customize* under the picture of your network at top. Switch to *Private* and click *Next*. While you're optimizing things, note the various sharing options listed; it's easy to give all of your PCs access to your printer here.

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3. Truly Secure Your Files

Password-protecting your laptop is good overall security, but for added protection, start encrypting. Vista Enterprise and Ultimate editions come with BitLocker Drive Encryption, a tool that relies on a Trusted Platform Module to secure access—check your manual to see if your notebook has one and update your BIOS if needed. To make the magic happen, you'll need an extra partition on your hard drive that you can create with the Vista partitioning tool on your installation disc or with the BitLocker Drive Preparation Tool, a Vista Ultimate Extra. You'll create one small partition for essential OS files, and the rest of the drive will hold encrypted files. Format the partition as NTFS, not FAT32.

4. Run Two Operating Systems

Apple's Boot Camp software lets you run the Microsoft Windows XP operating system on an Intel-based Macintosh, but it doesn't support Vista—and it's still in beta, almost a year after its release. To run Microsoft's newest OS on your Apple, get Parallels Desktop for Mac. This virtualization software lets you run two operating systems simultaneously by taking advantage of the Intel Core Duo's built-in virtualization technology. To get Vista running smoothly in a window on your OS X desktop, be sure to boost the program's memory requirements to 2GB; Vista won't run well with only 1GB of memory for the subsystem.

5. Beautify Your Boot

The boot screen built into Windows is functionally useless. Why not make it look prettier? Microsoft designed a built-in boot screen that replaces the animated start-up bar (you'll see it if you awaken your PC from hibernation); it provides just a little information, but it looks a whole lot better. To enable it, run MSConfig from the Start menu, and under the *Boot* tab, select *No GUI Boot*.

6. Be a Mobile Power User

Windows Mobile devices are handy, but are crippled off the bat. The new operating system comes with a Sync Center that lets you sync only media files, not your PIM info. Before plugging your device in for the first time, go to the Download Center at Microsoft.com and search the Mobile Devices category for the Windows Mobile Device Center, which powers up support for syncing e-mail, calendar data, and contact info. Once you've used the Device Center to transfer your calendar to your handheld, right-click it in My Computer to see the gadget's charge state, and you'll always be fully powered.

7. Find Your Router

To add encryption to your network, boost the speed, control access, and manipulate your bits in other ways, you'll probably need to log on to your wireless router, often via a built-in Web page served from the device. This Web page is usually given a difficult-to-remember IP address, such as *192.168.2.1*. Find your router's home page easily via the Network and Sharing Center; first click *View full map* at top right, then right-click your router or wireless access device and select *Go to Device Home Page*.

8. Enable Concurrent Sessions

Server versions of Windows let multiple users log on to a PC simultaneously; this is handy for home-theater enthusiasts who want to perform remote maintenance on a system that others might be using to watch TV, for example. To get this working under Vista Business or Ultimate editions, you'll need to replace the Termsrv.dll file with a hacked version. You can find the complete instructions and a link to the new DLL at the Missing Remote Web site, www.missingremote.com.

9. Be The Boss

In order to limit the havoc that rogue programs can cause, administrator accounts aren't totally in charge. To gain complete control (to install antispyware, for example), log on as the Administrator—but not all the time, or you'll negate this account's *raison d'être*. The Administrator account won't show up in the User Accounts control panel, however: It's disabled by default. In Vista Ultimate or Business editions, right-click it in the Management Console (as described in the first tip) and select *Properties*. Uncheck *Account is disabled* and it'll show up in the control panel. That's the super-mega-ultimate account. Don't have Ultimate? Click *Start*, type *cmd*, right-click the *cmd.exe* item at top, and choose *Run as administrator*. Type *net user administrator /active:yes* and log off. The Administrator account now shows up on the welcome screen.

10. Install From an Upgrade Disc

Past Windows versions have let you prove upgrade-readiness by inserting a CD of the previous OS during the install process. Vista doesn't; Microsoft specifically says "Windows Vista does not check upgrade compliance. Therefore, you cannot use an upgrade disc to perform a clean installation of Windows Vista." To work around this problem, insert your CD into your clean computer. Don't enter the code when Vista asks for your license key, simply click *Next*. You'll create a system sans activation code that's active for 30 days. Then reboot from the CD; you'll be able to install the OS as an update to your Vista installation. Now use the activation code. — next: Tips 11 through 20

11. Save Your Music!

We've all been buying audio and video files wrapped in DRMs from Microsoft, Apple, and others. What happens to that content when you upgrade to Vista? If you've bought digital media from stores running Windows Media Player 10, you'll be asked to reauthorize the content. With stuff from Apple's iTunes, deauthorize your PC before upgrading to Vista. Simply sign in to the iTunes store, and, from the *Store* menu, select *Deauthorize Computer*. After upgrading, reverse the process to re-enable access to your files. If you've authorized the maximum five PCs, select *View My Account* from that same menu, where you can "Clear all authorizations" once a year.

12. Extend Activation

Are you testing out Vista's features and compatibility but not sure if you want to go ahead and activate it? Microsoft understands. It has built a software licensing manager into the new OS that lets you extend the activation period. At the Start menu's search bar, simply type *slmgr -rearm* to get another 30 days. You can do

this a maximum of three times before Microsoft blocks further extension periods. And once you're locked out, that's it.

13. Prevent Vertigo on Vista

The new 3D desktop is a tremendous improvement, but not all of the features are handy, and some of the settings are downright disconcerting. Control your own 3D experience! First, right-click *Computer* and choose *Properties* to get the System Properties page. Click *Advanced system settings*. On the *Advanced* tab, click *Settings* in the Performance section. The *Visual Effects* field is where you can choose to *Adjust for best appearance*, *Adjust for best performance*, *Let Windows choose*, or go wild with your own choices.

14. Snip at Will

Power users are comfortable using the PrintScr key to capture screen shots, but there's a better way in Vista. You can use the integrated Snipping Tool to capture any object on your screen and then annotate, save, or share the image. Simply use the mouse to capture free-form shapes, rectangles, whole windows, or full screens. After you capture a snip, it's automatically copied to the markup window, where you can annotate, save, or share it. Bonus: If you've clipped from an Internet Explorer window (not Firefox or Opera) and save the snip as an HTML file, the URL is automatically appended to your image. Neat!

15. Play Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon

Love him or hate him, Kevin Bacon is a name you'll never forget. Now you can play "find the actor" anytime (not officially, that is, but bear with us) using Windows Vista. First, launch Windows Media Center from the *Start* menu. Navigate to *TV + Movies* and select *Recorded TV*. Select the movie you are interested in (Vista comes with snippets from *Apollo 13* and *Vertigo*, just to get you started). Select *Cast + More*, pick a cast member, and repeat until you find Mr. Bacon.

16. Work With The SideShow

Vista supports a secondary display (ideally on your laptop's lid, as on the cool Asus W5FE) for you to get quick access to e-mail, photos, calendar info, and music files. And that's just scratching the surface. SideShow info can be stored and accessed in two ways: either from the hard drive, which takes longer and involves caching, or directly from a flash component in your system—quicker, but space is limited. The flash component shows up as a separate drive in Windows Vista that you can drag and drop MP3s and photos to. Some gadgets require use of the hard drive; you won't be able to access them if the system is off. Instead, put it to sleep, and set Vista to wake every 5 minutes, updating e-mail, calendar, and other gadgets that rely on an Internet connection.

17. Pick Your Feeds

The Sidebar's RSS Feed Reader is handy, but by default it picks up feeds only directly from Microsoft. Making it work for you is a two-stage process. First, find a Web page with an RSS feed on it using Internet Explorer—the orange feed icon at the right of the status bar lights up to indicate the feed's presence. Click it, and select *Subscribe to this feed*. Then right-click on the module and select *Options*; you'll be able to choose which feeds and how many items are displayed. Want to find feeds using Firefox instead? Download the Common Feed List tool from www.netcrucible.com/blog.

18. Be a Better Parent

Kids need structure, otherwise they'll spend hours browsing the Web for dirty limericks. Turn to Vista's parental controls for a quick and easy way to monitor how long they're online—and who goes where. First, create an account for each child in the User Accounts control panel. Then click *Set Up Parental Controls* to create and set limits. Don't forget to enable activity monitoring as well. It's okay—you're Dad, not Big Brother. You can view them later by visiting the same section of the control panel. But be forewarned: Parental controls are available only to PCs on a workgroup, not those on a domain.

19. Reduce Power Consumption

As laptops became more popular, consumers became aware of Win XP's power settings. Standby left your computer running at low power; hibernate saved all memory to disk and then shut down your system—but often balked at problem programs. With Vista, Microsoft redrew the rules, adding an "away mode" and defaulting to "sleep" rather than off. Sleep mode starts off like standby but saves memory like hibernate. Then after 15 minutes it just shuts off, with no back talk from programs. Nicely done, Microsoft! To shut down completely, skip the *Start* menu's orange power button in favor of the right arrow next to it.

20. Get help

The Help and Support Center built into Windows XP was a good start but far from ideal. Though it appears similar to Win XP's, Vista's Support Center is much improved. Besides the usual documentation on core OS functionality, Vista's integrated system can get the latest help info from the Web, allow a friend to help by remote assistance, or search in "Windows communities." Type a word or phrase into the main search field and hit enter. At the bottom of your returned results is a useful link to these other sources of assistance. — next: Tips 21 through 30

21. Boost Your System Speed

Hybrid hard drives, which embed a cache of flash memory inside a hard drive's 3.5-inch shell to improve its performance, aren't on the market yet. But they're just one way Vista uses flash memory; ordinary thumb drives can, cheaply and easily, let your PC read small, random bits of frequently accessed data, a Vista feature called ReadyBoost. Here's the thing: To maximize its efficiency, a ReadyBoost thumb drive should have the same amount of memory as is built into your system. In other words, match your 2GB of RAM with a 2GB flash drive for best performance.

22. Uncover Send To

The *Send To* menu is a handy way to quickly move files into frequently accessed locations. The default locations are Microsoft's favorites, however, and they might not be yours. In Windows XP it was possible to add to the *Send To* menu by putting a shortcut in the *SendTo* folder. But try that trick with the *SendTo* folder in your Personal folder and you'll be hit with an "access denied" message. That's because it's just a pointer to the real one, which you will find at C:\Users\username\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows\SendTo. You can add shortcuts to that one.

23. Launch Apps Faster

When you place items in the Quick Launch bar (the little icon bar next to the *Start* button), Windows Vista automatically assigns shortcut key combinations to them—well, it assigns keys to the first ten, anyway. Just hit the Windows key plus a number key corresponding to the icon's position in the bar. For instance, to launch the third application in the Quick Launch bar, press Windows-3. Don't see the bar? Right-click an empty part of the Taskbar and select it under the *Toolbars* menu.

24. Add 3D Sound

If you're having trouble getting full 3D sound in Windows XP games from your SoundBlaster sound card, use Creative's ALchemy tool. Windows Vista uses an audio API called OpenAL for its game audio, and some DirectSound games won't use anything beyond two stereo speakers, ignoring EAX and other APIs. Download the Creative ALchemy beta from preview.creativelabs.com/alchemy, install it, and run it. The ALchemy tool will cause Windows XP games that lack OpenAL support to pipe their DirectSound calls through OpenAL, giving you full 3D audio support.

25. Restore Your Menus

Vista's own windows and many new applications lack the familiar *File*, *Edit*, and *View* menus. But we've gotten used to them after all these years! You can enable them through each application—if they're included at all. To turn them on in Vista proper, open any window (such as Computer, or Documents), click *Organize*, and click *Folder and Search Options*. Select the *View* tab and fill in the check box next to *Always Show Menus*. Click *Apply* and then *OK*. Alternatively, to show the menus temporarily, just hit the Alt key with any given window in the foreground.

26. Eliminate That Warning

Windows Vista hates it when you don't use an [antivirus program](#), a firewall, or some other security feature. But if you don't need one part of the built-in security, you also don't need the Security Center shield icon to pop up constantly in the system tray. Right-click the icon and click *Open Security Center*. Then, in Security Center, click *Change the Way Security Center Alerts Me*. You want to select *Don't Notify Me* and *Don't Display the Icon* (even though Windows tells you it's "Not Recommended").

27. Add Photos Faster

Most digital cameras come with proprietary software for importing pictures into Windows and cleaning off the camera's memory card, generally a two-stage process. You can do it all in one step with Windows Photo Gallery, which has an auto-erase feature. It lets you dump photos and erase your camera's memory card with one click, preserving a bit of battery life and simplifying yours. Select *Options* from the *File* menu, and under the *Import* tab, select *Always erase from camera after importing*. Good? Maybe. Potentially dangerous? Definitely. Proceed with caution.

28. Get The Power Prompt

The Command Prompt, though buried in the *Start* menu, is an enduringly versatile application. Too bad it's hampered by User Account Control, which will prevent certain apps from running properly because of a lack of permissions. To upgrade its capabilities, navigate to the Accessories folder in the *Start* menu, right-click on *Command Prompt*, and select *Run as Administrator*. If you find yourself doing this frequently, try this shortcut: The search box in Vista's *Start* menu can serve the same function. Simply enter a command, hold the Shift and Ctrl keys, and press *Enter*.

29. Be An Icon Artist

You may have noticed that by simply holding down the Ctrl key you can use your mouse's scroll wheel to resize a folder's icon. But you may not have noticed that this works on the desktop itself. You can resize from standard 48-by-48-pixel icons to full 256-by-256 photo quality renditions. Power users: Go to *Computer* and click the arrow to the right of the *View* menu, where you'll find a slider with an endless selection of icon sizes.

30. Know Your Velocity

Everyone knows about the Windows Experience score, but a power user won't find the information there as comprehensive or useful as one could wish. Skip it in favor of Microsoft's Management Console. Right-click on *Computer* and select *Manage*. Then select *Reliability and Performance* and take a look at your system's Reliability Monitor in the collection of monitoring tools. This system stability index gives a weighted value of how stable your PC is based on data collected over its lifetime. Little red X's show where specific failures occurred. It's a great troubleshooting tool. — next: Tips 31 through 40

31. Create an XPS Document

XPS (which stands for XML Paper Specification) can be very useful; it's effectively an open-standard version of the popular-but proprietary Adobe Acrobat format. What does it all mean? You can create, edit, print, and save the documents without paying Adobe for a license. To create an XPS document, create a file in any word processor (Notepad, WordPad, Word, and so on) and click *Print . . .* Then select the automatically installed XPS Printer to "print" the document to an XPS file.

32. Sync Everything!

Need to sync to something that's not supported? Say, to a digital camera, across folders, or even between different computers? SyncToy 1.4, a PowerToy from Microsoft, now supports Windows Vista and will let you sync a folder to a removable hard drive, a network share, and other things. You can pick up the tool for free from Microsoft's Download Center.

33. Set Affinity

Multitasking is an efficient way to spread resources across multiple CPUs—or the multiple cores of a dual-core CPU (or quad-, or octo-, or whatever!). But if you have a single application that consumes a large amount of the system's resources, such as Norton AntiVirus, bypass the multitasking and set it to run exclusively off a single core, potentially improving its efficiency. Bring up the Task Manager, find the resource-hogging process (for Norton, it's called *nprotect.exe*), right-click it, and select *Set Affinity*. Then deselect one of the cores, isolating the process and boosting its efficiency.

34. Move Your Stuff

Personal folders are handy, but they may not live where you want them to. Fortunately, you can relocate your own folders fairly easily. Click your username at the top right of the *Start* menu to open your profile. Right-click *Documents* and choose *Properties*. Then click *Location | Move* and select the new location, or even create it at this time. You'll be asked if you want to move your documents; hit *Yes*, of course. Don't try this with the Public folder, though: There's a *Location* tab, but no *Move button*.

35. Know your Autoplay

XP's Autoplay functionality was merely a thing the OS did, but Vista makes it useful with a control panel applet (including Blu-ray and HD DVD support!). Type *Programs* in the *Start* menu and hit *Enter* and you've got complete control.

36. Create zipped files (again)

Vista opens password-protected ZIP files, but it no longer creates them (Microsoft says passwords don't afford serious security). Your best bet: Download SecureZIP. It's a stable—and free!—alternative.

37. Restore your files

In XP, System Restore fixes OS problems but won't do squat if you accidentally save a file rather than quitting. In Vista, it creates "shadow copies" of your files daily; just right-click a Word, Notepad, or Wordpad file to roll it back to earlier versions.

38. Improve Windows Sidebar

Though the Sidebar is handy, an overcrowded Sidebar merely adds desktop clutter. For gadgets that don't provide "glanceable" data, right-click the gadget and set opacity to 40 percent. It'll fade out when not in use.

39. Go International

Need to know the time in Lima? Or Monaco? Searching for time zones in the control panel will reveal an option to add clocks for different time zones.

40. Gain Speed

Does Vista seem slower than XP to you? A default power setting in the "Power Saver" plan limits the CPU to 50 percent. Open the *Power Options* control panel and change it to "High Performance" to give it full throttle. — next: Tips 41 Through 50

41. Search Elsewhere

Internet Explorer's default search engine is MSN.com. Boo! Click the drop-down menu next to IE's magnifying-glass icon and select "Find More Providers..." Adding Amazon, eBay, and MTV make searching much more fun.

42. Launch Apps Faster

Want to find that program? Don't search through all those menus on the *Start* button, just type the first couple of characters into the bar at the bottom and the name will appear.

43. Keep Personal Data Private

You can add titles, ratings, and more to songs and photos. But you want to share files, not your personal notes. Right-click a file, choose *Properties*, click the *Details* tab, and click the link at the bottom to "Remove Protection and Personal Information."

44. Search By Voice

Enable the built-in natural language search feature; it's on the *Search* tab in the *Folder Options* control panel. Now you can type, say, *files created last month* or *music by Tom Lehrer*.

45. Take a Meeting

Vista has a calendar that lets you share your schedule with others online. Type *Calendar* into the *Start* menu to launch it. Add a few appointments and click the *Share* menu and you're off!

46. Send Faxes

You may have a cable modem, but the odds are good that your PC has an integrated fax modem, too. Take advantage of it with Vista's built-in fax-center software.

47. Improve Compatibility

Stuck with an old program you love that just won't run in Vista? Search *Help* and *Support* for compatibility mode, and start the wizard to get that program going in the new OS.

48. Get a Digital Keyboard

Windows Vista comes with a virtual keyboard, handy if your real one breaks. Simply punch OSK into the *Start* menu's *Search* field and hit enter to bring up the on-screen keyboard and use your mouse to "key" in data.

49. Hire a Robot Secretary

Get CDYNE Corp.'s [Phone](#) Notify sidebar gadget from Microsoft's gadget gallery. Then type a sentence and a phone number into its sidebar field and the tool will instantly translate your text into speech and place the call. Cool!

50. Get Animated

Vista Ultimate users are privy to an Extra called DreamScene, which adds video desktop wallpapers. Buy Stardock's DESKScapes instead, which lets you set computer-generated animations as wallpapers too.

The Other Next-Gen OS: Apple's Leopard Looms over Vista

ARTICLE DATE: 04.18.07

By Nick dePlume

By the time you read this, Apple may have announced a ship date for Leopard, the company's new operating system formally labeled Mac OS X 10.5. Or not. The super-secretive firm offered users a first glimpse of Leopard, more than two years in development, in August 2006 and has said only that it will ship in spring 2007.

Unlike Microsoft, which releases beta versions of Windows to millions of testers, Apple keeps its cards close to the vest, sending new OS builds only to trusted developers roughly once every 45 days. Based on public information and months of testing by sources, it's apparent that Apple faces the same challenge it encountered with the release of Tiger (Mac OS X 10.4) two years ago: improving on an already highly regarded OS.

Apple bills the new Time Machine feature as a major improvement over other approaches to backing up your data because of its seamless integration and slick interface. Once you've initially backed up, you specify how often Time Machine should troll for changes. If you need something you deleted a week ago or a draft of a document from a month ago, Leopard can "go back in time" and browse your hard drive as it was back then, retrieving the desired file.

Time Machine's comprehensive approach to backup is also its biggest flaw, however, requiring substantial hard drive space. Casual users with modest media libraries will encounter few difficulties, but those with meatier collections will either need to invest in additional hard drives or instruct Time Machine to ignore particular folders, leaving them without backups.

Spaces is another compelling new feature, letting you operate several desktop environments simultaneously. Instead of running applications side by side, you can instead run photo-related applications in one Space while placing e-mail and Web browsing software in another. A simple key command switches Spaces, akin to switching between applications. This way you don't have to minimize what you're working on when you receive notification of a new e-mail—or juggle business and personal tasks in the same screen.

The biggest improvements in Leopard are those consumers won't see, at least not directly. Among the most notable: Core Animation, which lets developers add slick animations to their software without taxing system resources.

— Nick DePlume and the Think Secret staff, who cover Apple, the Macintosh, and related software with a mix of news and other inside info at www.thinksecret.com

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