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Speed up Windows XP's defrag operations

Note: This tip applies to both Windows XP Home and Professional editions.

A simple way to speed up a defrag operation in Windows XP is to restart the system before you launch Defrag. This allows the operating system to clear out the swap/paging file and reset it to the default size. This lets Defrag focus strictly on the necessary data on the hard disk without having to stop and manage a huge swap file loaded with unneeded data.

Another approach to speeding up a defrag operation in Windows XP is to configure it to occur immediately upon startup. Fortunately, you can do so easily with this simple registry edit:

1. Launch the Registry Editor (Regedit.exe).
2. Go to HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\RunOnce.
3. Right-click on the RunOnce subkey and select New | String Value.
4. Name the value Defrag and press [Enter] twice.
5. Type Defrag.exe c: /f in the Value Data text box and click OK.
6. Close the Registry Editor and restart Windows.

The defrag operation will begin when you type in your password and press [Enter]. (Keep in mind that values added to the RunOnce key are removed immediately after the command has been run.)

Clear the Windows XP Run command's most recently used list

Notes: Editing the registry is risky, so be sure you have a verified backup before saving any changes. This tip applies to both Windows XP Home and Professional editions.

If you regularly use the Run command to launch applications, you know that Windows XP keeps a record in the registry, called the MRU (most recently used) list, of all the applications you recently launched. When you have the Run dialog box open, you can access the MRU list by clicking the drop-down arrow adjacent to the Open text box.

The MRU list is designed to make it easier for you to re-launch the same applications at a later date. However, this list can grow quite long, making it difficult to find what you want.

Fortunately, you can create a registry shortcut that clears the Run command's MRU list. To do so, follow these steps:

1. Launch the Registry Editor (Regedit.exe).
2. Go to HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\RunMRU.
3. Right-click on the RunMRU key and select Export.
4. Name the REG file Clear Run MRU, click the Save button, and close the Registry Editor.
5. Open the Clear Run MRU.reg file in Notepad.
6. Add a minus sign to the beginning of the key name just inside the square brackets.
7. Delete all lines that follow the line containing the key path.
8. Save the file and close Notepad.

Reboot Windows (or at least log off and then log back on) to make this change effective. Now, any time you want to clear the Run command's MRU list, simply locate and double-click the Clear Run MRU.reg file. The Registry Editor will then display two dialog boxes: one that prompts you to confirm the operation and one that lets you know the operation was successful.

Schedule a restart operation with Windows XP's Shutdown utility

Note: This tip applies to both Windows XP Home and Professional editions.

Wouldn't it be nice if each morning your Windows XP machine restarted before you got to work so you had a fresh system to work on each day?

To help you automate this type of operation, Windows XP comes with a command-line utility called Shutdown.exe, which can restart your system. To make this happen automatically, you can configure it to run at a specified time with the Scheduled Tasks tool. Here's how:

1. Go to Control Panel | Scheduled Tasks.
2. Double-click Add Scheduled Task to launch the Scheduled Task Wizard.
3. Click Next and then click the Browse button.
4. Access the Windows\System32 folder, select Shutdown.exe, and click Open.
5. Follow the wizard through the next two screens to give the task a name and choose a schedule.
6. Enter your user account name and password and click Next.
7. Select the Open Advanced Properties check box and click Finish.
8. In the task's Properties dialog box, add the /r parameter to the end of the command line in the Run text box and click OK. (Be sure to include a space between the last character in the command name and the first character in the parameter list.)
9. Enter your user account name and password and click OK.

When the Shutdown utility runs, you'll momentarily see a small dialog box on your screen before the system restarts.

Disable Windows Messenger on a Windows XP machine

Note: This tip applies only to Windows XP Professional.

If you're using MSN Messenger as your chat and videoconferencing tool, you may never use Windows Messenger anymore and have removed it from the startup group to keep it out of your way. However, you may have seen it pop up on occasion and had to struggle with closing it down. The reason that Windows Messenger makes these impromptu appearances is that Outlook, Outlook Express, and even some Microsoft Web pages can still make it load automatically. Fortunately, you can banish Windows Messenger from your desktop by making an alteration to the local group policy with the Group Policy Editor. Here's how:

1. Access the Run dialog box by pressing [Windows]R.
2. In the Open text box type *Gpedit.msc* and click OK to launch the Group Policy Editor.
3. Go to Computer Configuration | Administrative Templates | Windows Components | Windows Messenger.
4. Double-click the Do Not Allow Windows Messenger To Be Run setting.
5. In the resulting dialog box, select the Enabled option and click OK.
6. Close the Group Policy Editor.

Troubleshoot Windows XP with the Driverquery command

Note: This tip applies only to Windows XP Professional.

When you're troubleshooting a suspected device driver problem, you can find detailed information about specific drivers being used in a Windows XP system by going to Device Manager, selecting the device from the list, and drilling down to the device's properties sheet. Although this technique is fine when you're looking for information on one specific device driver, it's not very efficient when you're interested in information about a number of device drivers—it's just too time consuming.

To ease the task of gathering information on a number of device drivers, you can use a tool called Driver Query (Driverquery.exe). When you run this tool, it provides you with a detailed list of all the device drivers installed on a local system or on any system on a network—and using it is easy. Here's how:

1. Open a Command Prompt window.
2. Type *Driverquery* on the command line.

The results are displayed in a table format in the Command Prompt window. If you want to perform more detailed analysis, you can direct Driver Query to save the results in a CSV file so you can open them in a spreadsheet application, such as Excel. To do so, type the following on the command line:

```
Driverquery /v /fo csv > drivers.csv
```

Map drive letters to local folders in Windows XP

If you regularly work with files stored in shared folders on a Windows XP network, chances are that you've used Windows' Map Network Drive command to map a drive letter to that folder. Wouldn't it be nice if you could map a drive letter to a nested folder on your hard disk? Then, you could access nested subfolders just as easily as you can access shared folders on the network.

Fortunately, you can do just that. Unbeknownst to most Windows users, an old DOS command called Subst is designed to associate a drive letter with any local folder—and it's still a viable tool in Windows XP. Here's how to use the Subst command:

1. Open a Command Prompt window.
2. Type the following command and press [Enter]:

```
subst x: C:\{pathname}\foldername}
```

where *x*: is any available drive letter and *{pathname}\foldername* is the complete path to your selected folder. For example:

```
Subst K: C:\Downloads\Windows\Drivers
```

Now, instead of typing the full path, you can reach the Drivers folder by accessing drive K: in Windows Explorer.

Alter Windows XP's most frequently used programs list

Note: Since editing the registry is risky, be sure you have a verified backup before saving any changes.

The Start menu in Windows XP features the most frequently used programs list, which is designed to provide you with quick access to the programs you use the most.

XP provides you with only two configuration options: the ability to completely clear the list and the ability to specify the maximum number of programs that can appear on this list at any one time. However, you may also want to prevent certain applications, such as Calculator and Notepad, from appearing on the list.

Fortunately, you can prevent an application from appearing in the Start menu's most frequently used programs list by adding a special key to the registry. Here's how:

1. Launch the Registry Editor (Regedit.exe).
2. Go to HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT\Applications.
3. Right-click on the Applications key and select New | Key.
4. Give the key the same name as the application's executable file.
5. Right-click your new key and select New | String Value.
6. Name the string value *NoStartPage*.
7. Close the Registry Editor.
8. Reboot or log off and log back on for the change to take effect.

Instantly create Restore Points in Windows XP

Note: To use this script, you must have Administrator privileges.

Windows XP's System Restore utility continuously monitors your system looking for changes to the system files and certain application files. This utility will automatically create a Restore Point if it senses a change.

If you want to manually create a Restore Point, you can launch the System Restore utility by clicking Start | All Programs | Accessories | System Tools | System Restore and then following the steps in the wizard. You can simplify the launching process by copying the System Restore shortcut to your desktop, but you still have to walk through the wizard.

However, there's a great method for creating a Restore Point with just the click of your mouse. All you have to do is create a simple two-line VBScript file that uses the WMI (Windows Management Instrumentation) moniker to access the SystemRestore class and create a Restore Point. Here's how:

1. Launch Notepad.
2. Type these two lines:

```
Set IRP = getobject("winmgmts:\\.\root\default:Systemrestore")
MYRP = IRP.createrestorepoint ("My Restore Point", 0, 100)
```

3. Save the file as InstantRestorePoint.vbs.

Now, when you're ready to create an instant Restore Point, all you have to do is launch the script. System Restore will run in the background without displaying its interface, and it will create a restore point called My Restore Point.

Specify Disk Cleanup configuration settings in Windows XP

If you run Windows XP's Disk Cleanup utility regularly to keep your hard disk free from clutter, you may have wished for a way to save your settings so you wouldn't have to reconfigure the utility each time you run it. There is a method for saving your settings, but the steps are undocumented. Here's how:

1. Access the Run dialog box by pressing [Windows]R.
2. In the Open text box, type the following command:

```
Cleanmgr /d x: /sageset: #
```

3. In this command line, Cleanmgr is Disk Cleanup's executable file name; /d x: is the letter of the drive you want to clean; /sageset is a special configuration command that tells Disk Cleanup to save the settings in

the registry; and # is a unique number from 0 to 65,535 that designates a unique configuration settings file. For example, you could create your first configuration settings file for drive C by typing `Cleanmgr /d C: /sageset:1` in the Open text box.

4. When you see the Disk Cleanup Settings dialog box, select the check boxes next to the categories of files you'll want to remove from your hard disk.
5. Click OK to save the settings in the registry.
6. To run Disk Cleanup using the saved settings, type the following command:

```
Cleanmgr /sagerun:#
```

In this command line, Cleanmgr is Disk Cleanup's executable file name; /sagerun is the configuration command that tells Disk Cleanup to retrieve the saved settings from the registry; and # is the number you used to designate your configuration settings file.

Get system info from Windows XP's Help and Support Center


When you need to investigate Windows XP system hardware and software, you probably use the System Information tool found on the Start | All Programs | Accessories | System Tools menu. However, Windows XP's Help and Support Center provides an alternative System Information tool that you definitely should investigate.

Instead of the tree-like structure found in the main System Information tool, the Windows XP's Help and Support Center essentially creates a Web page, complete with tables and graphics. Here's how to access the Help and Support Center's System Information tool:

1. Go to Start | Help And Support.
2. Under the Pick A Task heading on the Help And Support Center page, click Use Tools To View Your Computer Information And Diagnose Problems.
3. On the Tools page, select My Computer Information in the Tools column.
4. On the My Computer Information page, select any of the links to view a graphical report of your system.

This interface not only makes the details easier to digest, but you'll also find links to other resources, both in the operating system and on the Internet, that will help you gather more information or solve problems.

Additional resources

- TechRepublic's [Downloads RSS Feed](#) 
- Sign up for TechRepublic's [Downloads Weekly Update](#) newsletter
- Sign up for our [Windows XP newsletter](#)
- Check out all of TechRepublic's [free newsletters](#)
- ["Maximize the Performance of Windows XP"](#) (TechRepublic download)
- ["Windows XP services that can be disabled"](#) (TechRepublic download)
- ["10 customization tricks to save you time in Windows XP"](#) (TechRepublic download)

Version history

Version: 1.0

Published: November 8, 2006

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