

d>performance>>>>→

# Windows wonderland

WINDOWS – YOU’VE USED IT  
FOR YEARS BUT ARE YOU  
GETTING THE BEST OUT OF  
IT? WE’VE GATHERED  
TOGETHER 50 TRICKS AND  
TIPS, SO LET TIM NOTT  
GIVE YOU A REAL  
WINDOWS WORKOUT.

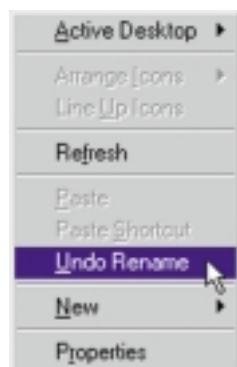
**W**HEN **WINDOWS 95** LAUNCHED it was immediately apparent that it was as far removed from the cosy old world of Windows 3.0 as the latter was from DOS. Although the ‘32bit’ buzz-phrase was much bandied, what really caught the imagination of the press and public was the way you could play around with the operating system, with shortcuts and folders being liberated from the parental control of the Program and File Managers. Since then, the subject of Windows tips and tricks has entered the mainstream zeitgeist. Interface tinkering is no longer the prerogative of the nerdy few: it’s for us all and it’s cool. So we’ve decided to look at ways of getting the best out of Windows: ways of doing things more efficiently, saving a few keystrokes here and the odd mouse click there; ways of customising Windows to suit the way you work; ways of changing things that irritate; ways of having the satisfaction of putting your personal look on Windows.

We’ve tried to include something for everyone: from those who would just like a more organised desktop, to those prepared to engage in unarmed combat with the registry. Some of these tips may be familiar, while others may evoke an ‘I never realised you could do that’ feeling. Others still, we hope, will send you hastening to the PC, ready to experiment with new ways of interaction. Although this collection is optimised for Windows 98, many of the tips also apply to Windows 95 and Windows NT4. Note that to get all the benefits of the Active Desktop update in Windows 95, such as Taskbar Toolbars or Thumbnail Previews, you need to install Internet Explorer 4, and then (optionally) upgrade it to IE5. Simply installing IE5 from scratch won’t do the job.

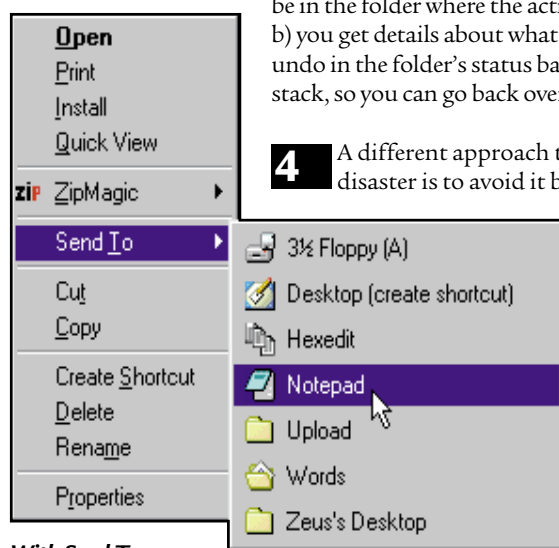


ILLUSTRATION CHRIS@REDEAL

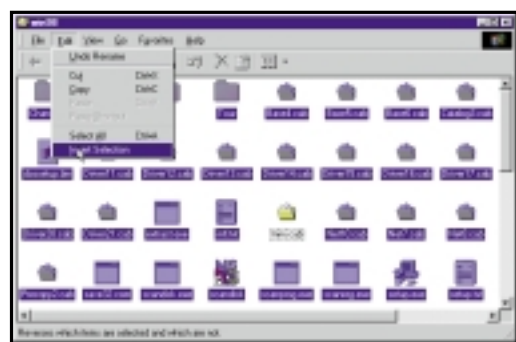




*The cumulative Undo lets you backtrack error after error*



*With Send To you can open any file in Notepad*



*Use Edit/Invert to select all but a few files*

**1** **Drag and drop** behaviour varies with context. Dropping to the same drive moves a file. Dropping to another drive copies. Dropping an executable file creates a shortcut at the destination. You can override these by holding down the Shift key to force a move, Control to force a copy, or Control & Shift to force a shortcut. If you can't remember all this, drag with the right mouse button to get a menu of choices.

**2** You can create **shortcuts** to folders as well as to files. If you use the 'New Shortcut' wizard, you need to type the folder path in the first box – you can't specify folders by browsing. An easier way is to use drag and drop. A shortcut on the Start menu, Desktop or Quicklaunch bar is an excellent way to access a folder containing the various components of a project.

**3** It can be annoying when you drop something in the wrong place, but Windows has a very smart **undo** feature. Right-click in any folder, or on the desktop, and you'll get the option to undo the last move, copy, delete or rename. Note that: a) you don't have to be in the folder where the action took place; b) you get details about what you are about to undo in the folder's status bar; and c) undos stack, so you can go back over several actions.

**4** A different approach to drag-and-drop disaster is to avoid it by selecting files as normal, then using the **Cut or Copy** commands on the right-click menu. Switch to the destination folder at your leisure, then simply right-click to paste the files or create the shortcuts.

**5** The **Send To folder** is a great timesaver. As well as the default destinations set up by Windows, you can add shortcuts to any

folder or application enabling you – for example – to open any file in Notepad, regardless of its extension, or send a file across a network to someone else's Desktop. Note that, if you want to send an .exe file to another folder, you must hold down

the Control or Shift keys, or you'll only send a shortcut.

**6** The standard PC keyboard comes with a **Print Screen** key (sometimes also labelled SysReq). This doesn't print the screen in Windows, but copies an image of the screen to the clipboard, which can then be pasted into any graphic-enabled application. Alt & Print Screen copies just the active window or dialog.

**7** If you want to **select nearly all the files** in a folder, highlight the ones you don't want, and Edit/Invert selection (see bottom left).

**8** If you hold down the Shift key when double-clicking a folder in Folder (single-paned) view, that folder will open in **Explorer** (two-paned) view.

**9** **Selection via keyboard entry** works in the Start menu, in folders and in most dialog box lists. Type 'W' in the Fonts folder, for instance, and the first font beginning with W will be selected. Subsequent letters (if typed quickly) narrow down the choice, so 'Wi' will (usually) select Wingdings.

**10** **My Documents** is one of those Windows 98 features that can be both irritating and brilliant. By default, the Windows applets such as Notepad and Wordpad will use this as their default Open and Save locations, as will MS Office and some other applications. The irritant is that for applications such as Notepad, you can't override this, even if you change the 'Start in...' folder in the Shortcut Properties. The good things about 'My Documents' are that first, you can rename it; second, you can set it to any target folder you wish; and third, you can organise all your data files as subfolders of that target, making backing up a lot easier.

**11** To **change your Startup screen**: first create a .bmp file that is 320 pixels wide by 400 high with 256 colours. Rename it as LOGO.SYS and then move it to the root of your boot drive (usually C:\). This will replace the built-in screen; note that it gets stretched to 640 pixels wide on display, so you may have to compensate to suit. The close-down screens have a similar format, but are stored in the Windows folder as LOGOW.SYS (wait...) and LOGOS.SYS (safe...).

**12** If you have a CD-R drive, you can get your own CD-ROMs to **Autorun** and give them custom icons. Create a text file in the root directory named AUTORUN.INF containing the following:

```
[autorun]
open=myprog.exe
icon=myicon.ico
```

where myprog.exe and myicon.ico point to files on the CD. A similar trick can be used on hard-disk drives: just include the icon= line to show a custom icon in Explorer.



**13** You can **drag files from Explorer** into the Start, Run... command line and also into windowed DOS sessions, which saves typing long paths for DOS commands. Note that there's an irritating 'feature' here: after dropping in a file, you need to click the mouse in the DOS window before you can type anything else.

**14** Those keys printed with the Windows logo aren't just part of an advertising-by-keyboard campaign. Hold down the **Winkey** and press: D to clear the Desktop; E to launch Explorer; F to find files; F1 for Windows help; R to show the Run... dialog and Pause/Break to open System Properties.

**15** **Alt & Tab** not only cycles between open windows, but also includes those that don't appear on the Taskbar (top right), such as Control Panel dialog boxes. **Control & Alt & Delete** gives a list of all running applications, including hidden ones. You can use this to close down background tasks or applications that have 'stopped responding'.

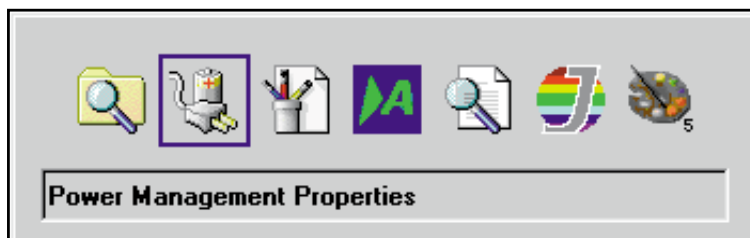
**16** There are a lot of things you can do in **Explorer's Details view**. Clicking on a heading that sorts by category – eg name, size, date. A second click reverses the order. Double-clicking on the crack between headings resizes the adjacent column to suit the width of the longest entry. Control & + (on the numeric keypad) optimises all column widths.

**17** **Four shifty tricks:** Shift & Delete sends a file straight to oblivion, bypassing the Recycle Bin. Shift & Restart saves time by restarting Windows rather than rebooting from scratch. Shift when you insert a CD or CD-ROM stops it autoplaying and Shift & right-click on a file gives an extra option – 'Open with...'

**18** You can **make folders open in a new window**, or in the same one. In the original Windows 95 this is an option in Explorer's View, Options menu. In later versions you'll find it in View, Folder Options, General: select Custom, then click on the Settings button. Whichever option you choose, you can override it by holding down the Control key as you navigate up and down. On a related note, Shift & Close shuts the current folder and all its direct ancestors.

**19** You can **create new folders** on the fly when saving a new file – click on the folder-with-a-star button in the common Open/Save dialog (middle right).

**20** Regularly **defragmenting your hard drive** is essential for maintaining performance, but this can be frustrated by background tasks writing to the hard disk,



which makes it restart from the beginning. Culprits can include anything from indexing software, such as MS Office FindFast, to screensavers. You can disable the screensaver from Display properties, and close down other programs from the Control & Alt & Delete list.

*Alt & Tab lets you cycle through hidden windows using the Taskbar*

**21** For the ultimate in unhampered **defragging** you first need to activate a log-in, so if you don't have a Windows password, go to Control Panel, Passwords and give yourself one.

Now insert the Windows 98 CD-ROM and go to Tools\Mtsutil. Right-click on the file DEFRAG.INF and select Install. This will add a 'once-only' defrag command to the Registry. Reboot the PC and wait: the defrag will take place before the log-in is completed. When the defragging is complete, you can log in, go back to Passwords and change back to a blank password, which will remove the log-in screen on subsequent boots.

**22** You can get the contents of **Control Panel** as a sub-menu of the Start menu. Right-click and Open the Start button then create a new folder. Give this the following name:

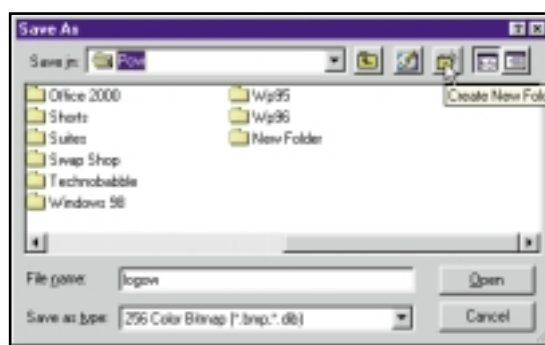
**Control Panel.{21EC2020-3AEA-1069-A2DD-08002B30309D}**

(Key: ✓ code string continues)

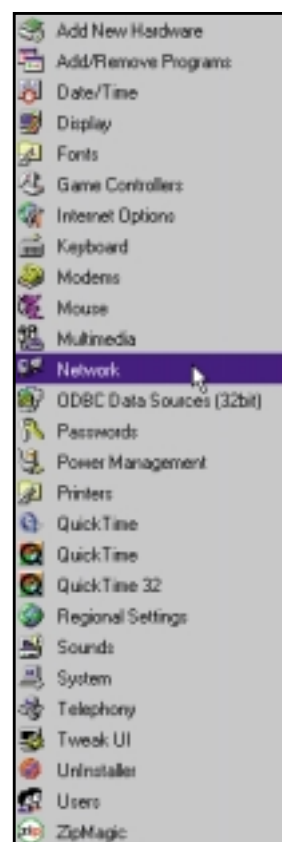
The extension will not appear on the menu.

**23** If you have **Toolbars** enabled in your Taskbar, then you can get the contents of any folder (including Control Panel) visible as a **cascading menu**. First, right-click on the Taskbar; Toolbars, New Toolbar and browse. Alternatively, drag a folder straight on to the Taskbar. Next, right-click on the new toolbar and make sure Show Title is checked. Finally, drag the toolbar by its handle to the right until just the title and a double arrow are visible. Clicking on the latter opens the menu.

**24** Having got your **Toolbars**, the next trick is the arrangement. First, you



*Create new folders as you save with the folder-with-a-star button*



*Add Control Panel to the Start menu for quick access*

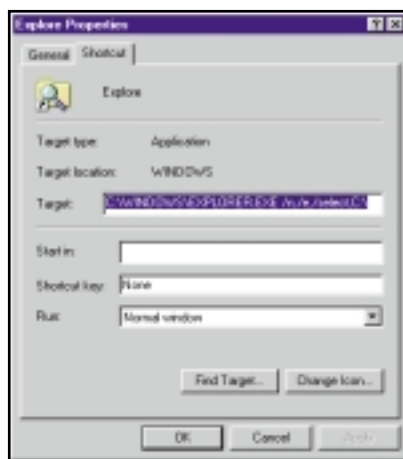


**Trial and error is the key, but tidying your toolbars gives a clean desktop**

can drag the Taskbar to any edge of the screen. Second, you can drag the edge nearest the centre of the screen to create additional rows for toolbars and task buttons. Third, you can drag the handles of each toolbar and pull it around so as to divide up the available space horizontally or vertically, making more efficient use of space. The key here is perseverance: dragging is somewhat unpredictable in this little corner of the interface.

**25** You can **exit Windows** without the confirmation dialog by creating a shortcut with the command line:

**C:\WINDOWS\RUNDLL32. EXE ser.exe,ExitWindows To restart Windows (98 only), use a shortcut with the command:**  
**C:\WINDOWS\RUNDLL.EXE user.exe, ExitWindowsExec**



**Expansion prevention**

rather as if you'd copied and pasted into a new

file. A Document Shortcut acts as a bookmark, opening the file at the place it was dragged from.

**27** You can **install a printer** that isn't physically connected to your computer, by clicking on the 'Add printer' icon in the Printers folder. Some applications, notably Microsoft Word, won't display TrueType fonts unless a supporting printer driver is installed, so even if you transfer Word files from a laptop to a desktop PC to print, you'll still need the printer 'installed' on the laptop.

**28** Another **non-existent printer** worth installing is the 'Generic/Text only' one: when prompted for a port, choose FILE: rather than a physical LPT or COM port. This will let you create text files of things that can't normally be saved, such as the contents of Device Manager.

**29** By default, Explorer expands the contents of C:\ when opened, which can make **accessing other drives** awkward. If you alter the target of the Explorer shortcut to read:

**C:\WINDOWS\EXPLORER.EXE /n,/e,/select,C:\**  
 then all folders and drives below the Desktop will be shown unexpanded (see left). Keyboard virtuosos can use Winkey & E to the same effect.

**30** You can **run a screensaver on demand** by creating a shortcut to the screensaver

## Windows Registry: a mine of information

The Windows Registry is a database designed to hold a variety of information: definitions of file types and 'objects' such as folders; settings particular to the hardware of a PC, such as the properties of a modem or display card; and software settings, which can include anything from the

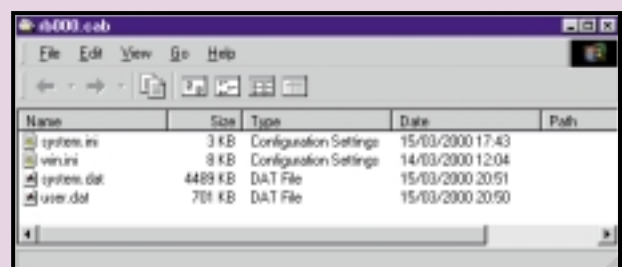
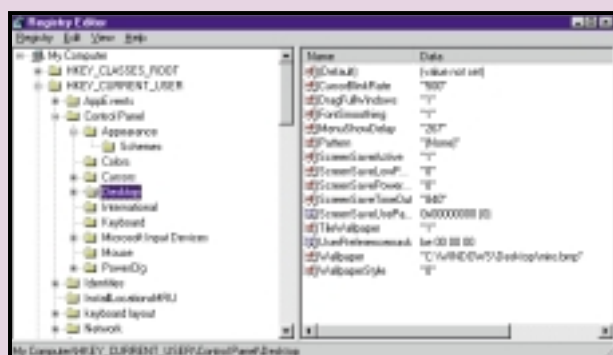
arrangement of Explorer toolbars to the most recent files opened in your word processor.

Practically all the changes you can make to the interface, whether from the Control Panel, menus or 'tweaking' tools are stored in the Registry, and it is possible – if you know what

you are doing – to edit settings directly, using the Registry Editor, REGEDIT.EXE (below left).

A damaged Registry can render Windows completely unusable, so it's vitally important to back it up regularly. Windows 95 has two tools for this, the Emergency Recovery Utility and Configuration Backup, but both have their shortcomings.

Windows 98 obligingly maintains a set of five backups (or more if you want) as CAB files in the Windows\Sysbackup folder (below right). A new backup is created at daily or reboot intervals, whichever is the longer. Should the worst happen, you can happily restore from a backup by booting to an MS-DOS prompt and typing SCANREG.



## System Information tool: the unsung hero

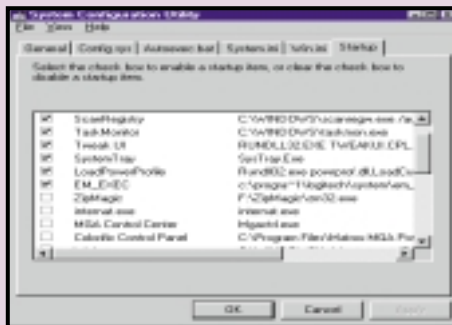
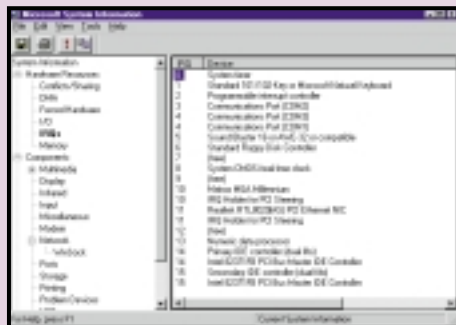
One of the unsung heroes of Windows 98 is the System Information tool (below), which you can find in the Accessories,

System Tools menu. It can tell you everything you ever wanted to know about your system – and probably even more things you didn't.

Where it really earns its keep, however, is in its Tools menu. This provides access to various utilities, some of which, like the Registry and

Disk checkers, are covered elsewhere.

Its two star turns are the System File checker, which will detect and repair alterations to crucial parts of your Windows installation, and the System Configuration Utility (left) which can be used to fine-tune Windows start-up. The latter's killer feature is one-stop access to all the programs loaded when Windows starts, which can be from a variety of sources (see tip 48): these can be undo-ably disabled.



file and opening it. Most screensavers have the .scr extension and live in the Windows\System folder – note that you can run any saver this way, not just the current one, and that you can also right-click on an .scr to configure the options.

**31** There are 13 **extra fonts** in Windows 98, some of which come in bold and italic versions as well. However, these normally only get installed with Desktop Themes. If you want the fonts, but not the themes, you can wrinkle them out by opening WIN98\_63.CAB and WIN98\_64.CAB (or in W98 SE, WIN98\_69.CAB) in the Win98 folder on the CD-ROM, then right-clicking on the font (.ttf) files to extract them to a temporary folder of your choice. You can then open the Windows Fonts folder to add them from their temporary home – don't try to extract them straight to the Fonts folder.

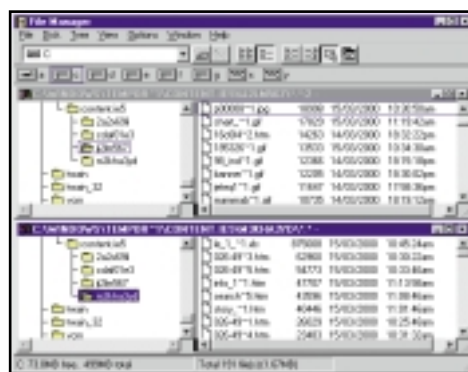
**32** Don't forget the old Windows 3-style **File Manager** (Start, Run, WINFILE.EXE). It exposes the no-frills DOS directory structure on your hard disk, without any of the 'special folder' sophistry, and can be an extremely useful diagnostic aid in resolving problems such as a Recycle Bin that won't empty or files left behind in the browser cache. Do make sure, however, that you can see everything by going to View, By File Type. The Name box should contain \*.\* and all other options should be checked (see screenshot to page right).

**33** If you just don't get on with the IE5 default search, then Web Accessories (free from Microsoft at [www.microsoft.com/Windows/IE/WebAccess/ie5tools.asp](http://www.microsoft.com/Windows/IE/WebAccess/ie5tools.asp)) provides multiple, **customisable search shortcuts**, so you can, for example, type 'av haddock' or 'goo turbo' to search for those fish from AltaVista or Google. Other goodies in the bundle include turning off the display of graphics or zooming in on them.

**34** Don't tear your hair out looking for the option in Internet Explorer that **stops**

**downloaded files (such as ZIPs) from opening automatically** rather than getting saved to disk, as it isn't there.

Instead go to the View menu of Windows Explorer and choose Folder Options, File Types. Scroll down to the offending filetype; click the Edit button; then check the box marked 'Confirm open after download' (below right).

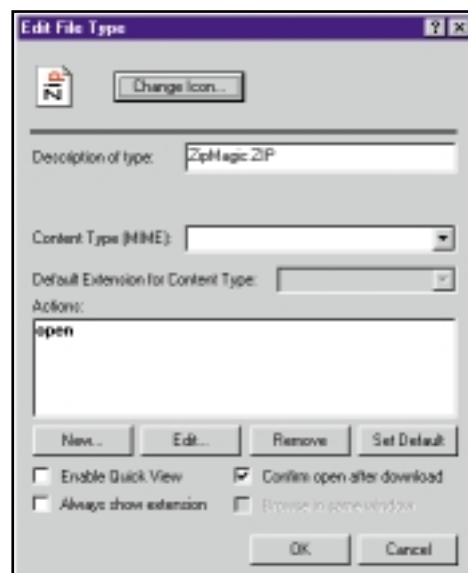


*The File Manager lets you see what's going on behind the scenes*

**35** If you are using dial-up networking to access an ISP, then you can **speed up**

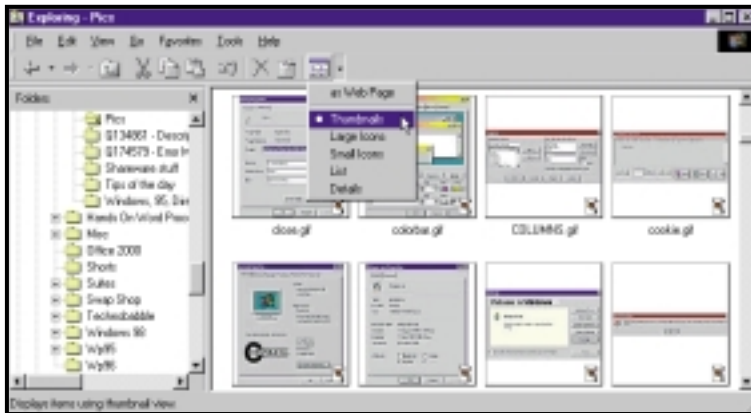
**log-ins** considerably by opening the properties of a connection in the DUN folder, then clearing the 'Log on to network' option and all 'Allowed network protocols' except for TCP/IP.

**36** The **Windows Scripting Host** comes with Windows 98 and is available as a free download for Windows 95. It's a long-awaited Windows answer to the DOS batch file language. However, it's a lot more powerful and will run scripts created in either Visual Basic or Java. If you want to experiment with this, make sure it is



*It's good to be asked*





**You can see all graphics files as thumbnails**

installed in Control Panel, Add/Remove, Windows Setup, then check out the sample scripts in Windows\Samples\Wsh.

**37** A clear desktop is a sign of efficiency – or perhaps just under-employment. But in either case, if you've set up the Taskbar and Toolbars as in tips 23 and 24 do you really need any of those icons? You can achieve a **clean desktop** in two steps. Right-click on the Desktop, Active Desktop, Customise my Desktop. Tick 'View... as web page' and untick 'Internet Explorer Channel Bar'. Now click the Folder Options button, which will jump straight to Explorer's View, Folder Options dialog. Go to View tab, tick the 'Hide icons...' box and OK the dialog.

**38** If you don't want to take such a drastic approach as that mentioned in tip 37, but

would like to **change system icons** such as My Computer and the Recycle Bin you, can do this in the Effects tab of Display properties.

**39** With Windows 98 you can see a **thumbnail of the selected graphic file** in 'Web page' view. To see all graphic files (not just the one selected) as thumbnails, right-click on the containing folder, select Properties and tick the Enable Thumbnail View option. You'll then get an extra 'Thumbnail' option on the View menu and toolbar button (see left).

**40** You can **rename My Computer**, Network Neighborhood, My Briefcase and most other Desktop icons, but not, it seems, the Recycle Bin. However, you can rectify this with a little Registry editing. Go to HKEY\_CLASSES\_ROOT\CLSID\{645FF040-5081-101B-9F08-00AA002F954E} and double-click on the (Default) entry in the right-hand pane to change the name. For a more sophisticated approach, go down a level to the ShellFolder key, and change the Attributes value from 40 01 00 20 to 50 01 00 20. This will add the rename option to the Recycle Bin's right-click menu.

**41** Quickres is another of the free Microsoft Powertoys that were an unofficial add-on for Windows 95. It lets you **change the desktop resolution and colour depth** from the System Tray. Windows 98 users have this built in: it can be turned on from Display Properties, Settings, Advanced.

## Tweak till you freak

**T**weakUI is an absolute must for those who like to reach the parts that Control Panel can't,

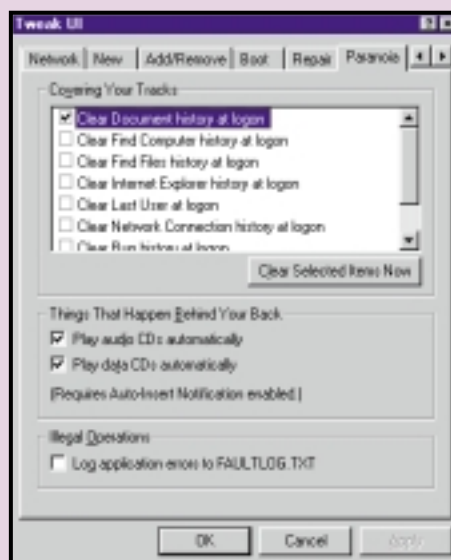
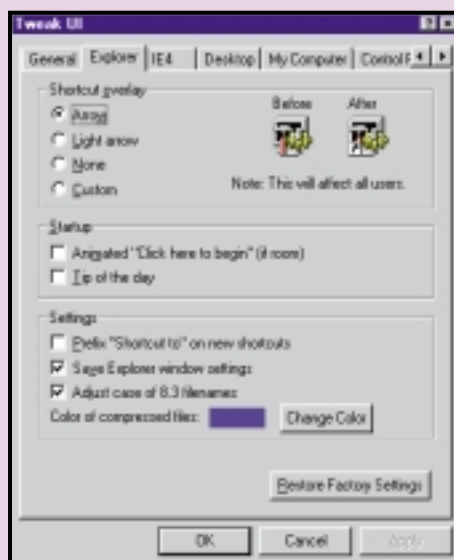
without having to hack the Registry. It can hide drives; customise shortcuts; repair font and icon problems;

automatically empty the recent documents list and much more.

Originally, it came as part

of the Powertoys package, a free – but unsupported – set of Windows 95 add-ons from Microsoft. Windows 98 came with many of the Powertoys, such as QuickRes and CAB viewer, built in, and discreetly tucked TweakUI into the Tools\Reskit\Powertoy folder on the CD-ROM.

In the second edition of Windows 98, it disappeared, and appears to remain an 'unprogram' as far as the commissars of Redmond are concerned. However, it can still be spotted on a number of non-Microsoft websites, and there are also several rival versions out there, such as TweakAll ([www.abtons-shed.com/](http://www.abtons-shed.com/)) and ItweakU ([www.jockesoft.com/](http://www.jockesoft.com/)).



**42** It's not new – in fact it dates from Windows 2 days – but not many people know that any **Notepad file** with .LOG as the first line will automatically add the date and time to the end of the file each time it's opened. And if you have upgraded to Windows 98, you may not have noticed that at last you can change the Notepad font.

**43** Many 95 to 98 upgraders complain that the **Start menu** no longer sorts itself alphabetically. However, it's much more versatile than the original. You can drag items around the menus (or into other folders and toolbars) or right-click anywhere in a menu level and choose Sort by Name for a traditional folders-first alphabetical list.

**44** If the name and company shown in System Properties are incorrect then you can change these with a simple piece of **Registry editing**. Run REGEDIT and browse down the HKEY\_LOCAL\_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion. In the right-hand pane you will see two entries: RegisteredOwner and RegisteredOrganisation. You can double-click on each to change its value.

**45** The picture in the **Display Properties, Appearance** is interactive – you can click on it to access some (but not all) of the contents of the Items list. The Active and Inactive Window items have two Color buttons, which can be used to create shaded title bars (see right).

**46** If you've accidentally instructed Windows to '**remember**' a password that you'd rather keep securely uncached, then you need the Password List Editor. Use Control Panel, Add/Remove, Windows Setup, Have Disk, then browse to Tools\Reskit\Netadmit\Pwledit\Pwledit.inf on the Windows 98 CD-ROM. Once installed, run the program from Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools and you will see a list of services that have cached passwords – but not the passwords themselves. You can delete (but not add) services.

**47** The **Windows Resource Kit** is a mine of useful information and utilities. These are essential for the power user but too numerous to list here. It isn't, however, presented as an option on Windows Setup. You have to install it explicitly by going to the Tools\Reskit folder of the Windows 98 CD-ROM and running SETUP.EXE.

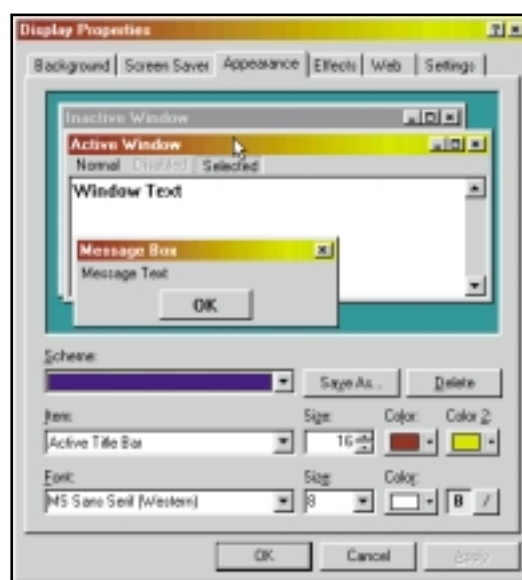
**48** Many applications and utilities consider themselves so indispensable that they load at Startup, often putting an icon in the System Tray. This can make Windows slow to start. Windows 98 users can take back control by using the **MSCONFIG utility** to control what runs at Startup. Windows 95 users have a

harder task: look for entries in the Startup branch of the Start Menu, any run= or load= lines at the start of the file WIN.INI, and in the following registry keys:

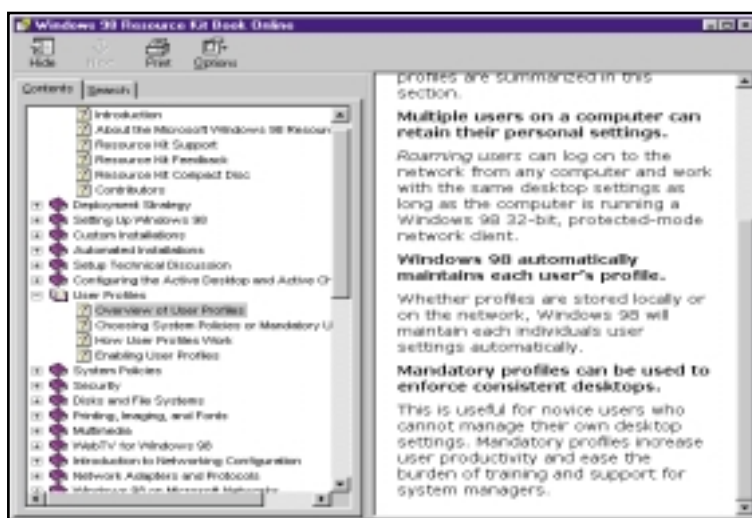
HKEY\_LOCAL\_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run and RunServices

HKEY\_CURRENT\_USER\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run

**49** Sometimes shortcuts start showing the **wrong icons**, particularly on the Desktop and Quicklaunch bar. The first thing to try is right-click, Refresh. If that doesn't work, then either use TweakUI's Repair tab to rebuild the icon cache or force a rebuild manually by increasing the icon size in Display Properties, then clicking Apply, then changing it back to the original size and OK. If the problem crops up regularly, then run REGEDIT, go to HKEY\_LOCAL\_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\explorer and add a new string value with the name Max Cached Icons and the value 2048.



*Customise your title bars in Display Properties*



**50** The **Windows Update** tool in Windows 98 provides an easy way of keeping your system up to scratch with all the latest OS enhancements, bug fixes and plugs for security leaks. If you download the Critical Update Notification, then you'll be kept informed if there are any important new updates, without having to check the update site.

*You have to install the Windows Resource Kit yourself, but it's worth it*