# 10 things you should do to improve every new Windows PC

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## Takeaway

This document lists 10 enhancements you should make to every new Windows PC, no matter whether it is a workstation or the family media computer.

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# 10 tweaks

Getting a new PC, whether it is at work or at home, is one of those "makes you smile" moments. Just like the "6 Million Dollar Man" we all want better, stronger, and faster. However, every new PC that crosses your path is in need of a few tweaks. This document lists 10 enhancements you should make to every new PC, no matter whether it is a workstation or the family media computer. These tweaks will bring out the best in your new PC and give you a solid foundation for future applications and operating system updates.

## 1. Prepare it for the Internet

The first step should always be to implement the necessary security measures required for connecting it to the Internet. For office workstations and PCs installed by network administrators, much of this preliminary work will have already been done, but for home PCs these steps are essential. Connecting a new PC to the Internet before taking the proper security steps outlined in a previous TechRepublic article will be construed by the nefarious citizens of the Internet as an invitation to infect your PC with a virus, worm, or Trojan horse. The scariest part of that scenario: the infection is likely to take place within 12 minutes of connecting to the Internet.
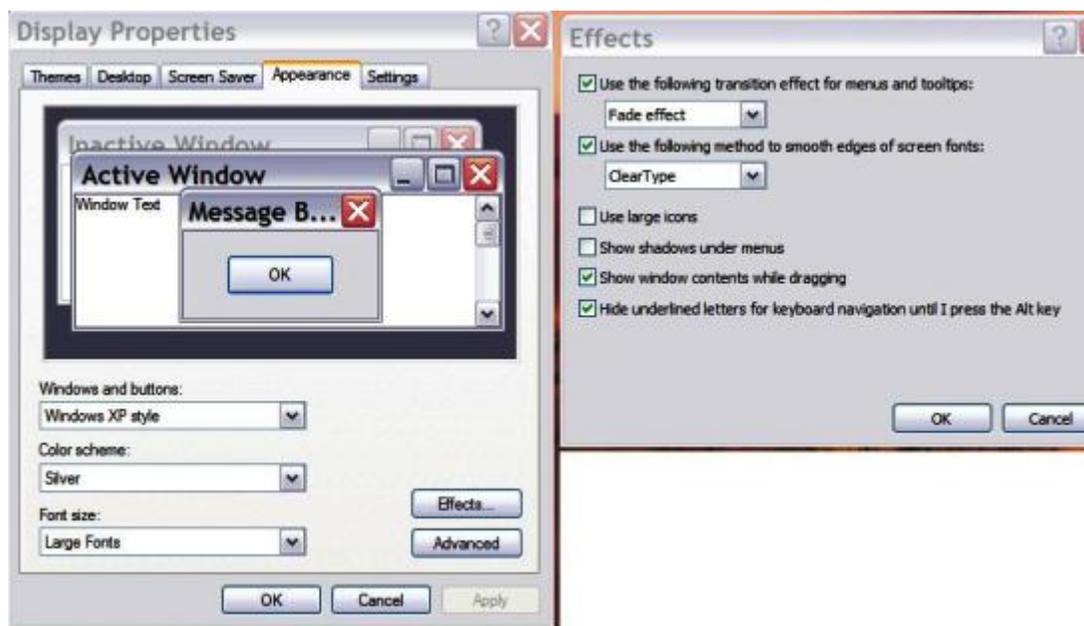
## 2. Turn on ClearType and adjust Desktop settings

One of the first things I do when I sit down at a new Windows PC for the first time is activate the ClearType effect located on the Display Properties control panel. To get to the right control, open the Control Panel and then open the Display Properties control panel. From there, navigate to the Appearance tab and click the Effects button. (See **Figure A**)

Click the second check box for smoothing font edges and choose the ClearType option. Click OK a few times and you should see the fonts displayed much more crisply on the screen. For tired eyes, like mine, this can literally save you a few headaches, especially if you have to stare at a monitor screen all day. Once you install the Microsoft PowerToys (See #9) you can adjust the ClearType settings to achieve a more personalized display.

This is also where you would adjust the size of the Windows icons, choose whether to allow the screen contents to show while dragging, specify themes, and designate font style and size. Those are all personal choices and will vary, but for those of us that look at the screen all day, these setting must be adjusted.

One important thing I do is change the background color for text areas in Windows. The default is white, but that is often too bright for me. I change it to off white to reduce the intensity and the eye strain it causes. It is a small change, but I think it makes a big difference.

## Figure A



*Display Properties - Effects*

# 3. Configure file system

Sometimes large software companies like Microsoft take on a motherly role by configuring their software to protect us from ourselves. This is the case with the default manner in which the file system is displayed in Windows Explorer—system files are hidden, file extensions are hidden, and big icons are displayed instead of a detailed list. Some of these settings may be a matter of personal preference, but if you are going to truly know your PC and the Windows OS up and down, front to back, you will need to see all the information about a file displayed in every listing you see.

To set up the file display to your liking, open Windows Explorer and navigate to Tools | Folder Options on the menu and then to the View tab. Next, you want to look down the list of checkboxes and radio buttons to find the one that says "Show hidden files and folders". (See **Figure B**) I also recommend you click the checkboxes next to:

- Display the contents of the system folders
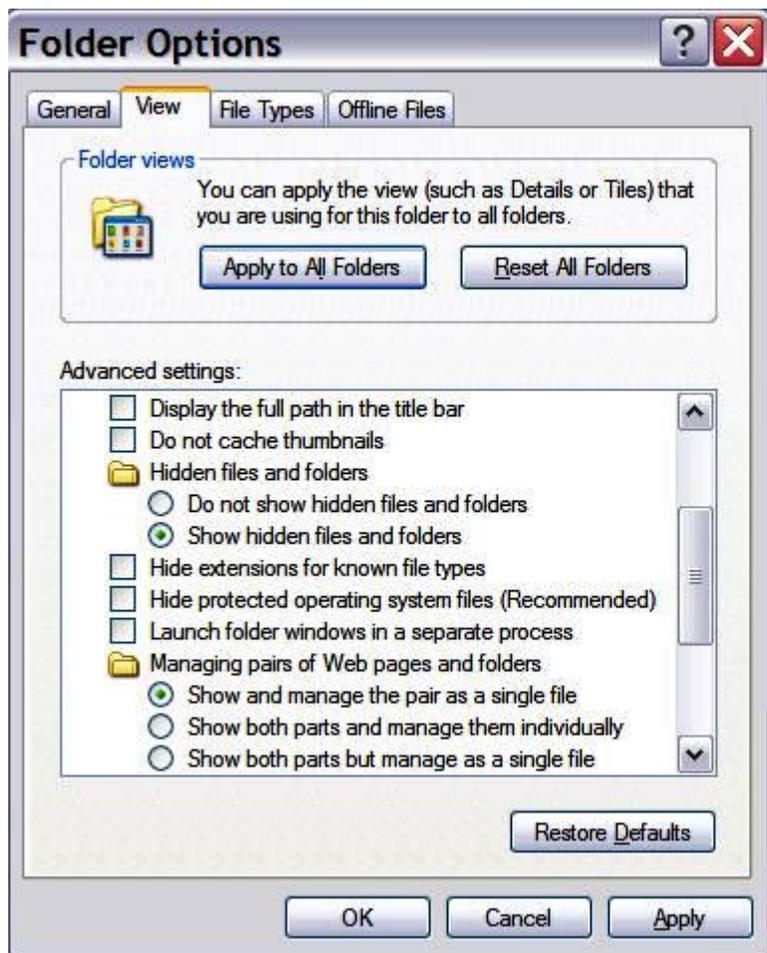- Display the full path in the address bar

You should also uncheck the boxes next to:

- Hide extensions for know file types
- Hide protected operating system files

Revealing the protected OS system files can be dangerous if you are one who likes to delete files and ask questions later, but as long as you are careful, I think the benefits outweigh the risks.

Once you get the folder view the way you want it, you should click the Apply to All Folders button to make the view common to all folders.

## Figure B



*Folder Options*

# 4. Set screen resolution and Hz and DPI

Once again, this suggestion may stem from my aging eyes, but the general concept is sound for all new PCs. Go to the Control Panel and open the Display Properties. While you may want to change the Appearance or activate a Screen Saver, my concern is with the Settings tab. The resolution determined by the install process (includes any OS) may not be the best resolution for your hardware or for your eyes.

For LCD monitors, the resolution settings should match the native resolution of the monitor itself. The native resolution is easy to determine, it the maximum resolution the LCD monitor can actually display.

For CRT monitors, the resolution settings should be set to values that are most comfortable to your eyes. For monitor sizes of 17 inches or more that would most likely mean settings of at least 1024 X 768. However, the actual settings available are determined by your hardware, which includes not only the monitor but also the video card.

Perhaps even more important than the resolution are the settings for Dots Per Inch (DPI) and the Screen Refresh Rate. These controls are under the Advanced button of the Display Properties. (**Figure C**) The DPI, found under the General tab, determines how large the display fonts will be on a Windows PC. The default is 96 DPI, but at resolutions above 1024 X768 I prefer a DPI of 120.

The Screen Refresh control is found under the Monitor tab. (See **Figure C**) Your monitor will determine what settings are available here, but for CRTs I prefer a relatively high refresh rate of 85 Hz. Although you may not notice it, the monitor screen is constantly flickering. This flicker can give you a headache and make your eyes hurt

if it is too slow, especially with CRTs. LCDs are a little different. They are usually limited to 60 Hz, but because they use a different technology, the strain to the eyes is much less pronounced.

## Figure C



*Advanced Display Properties*
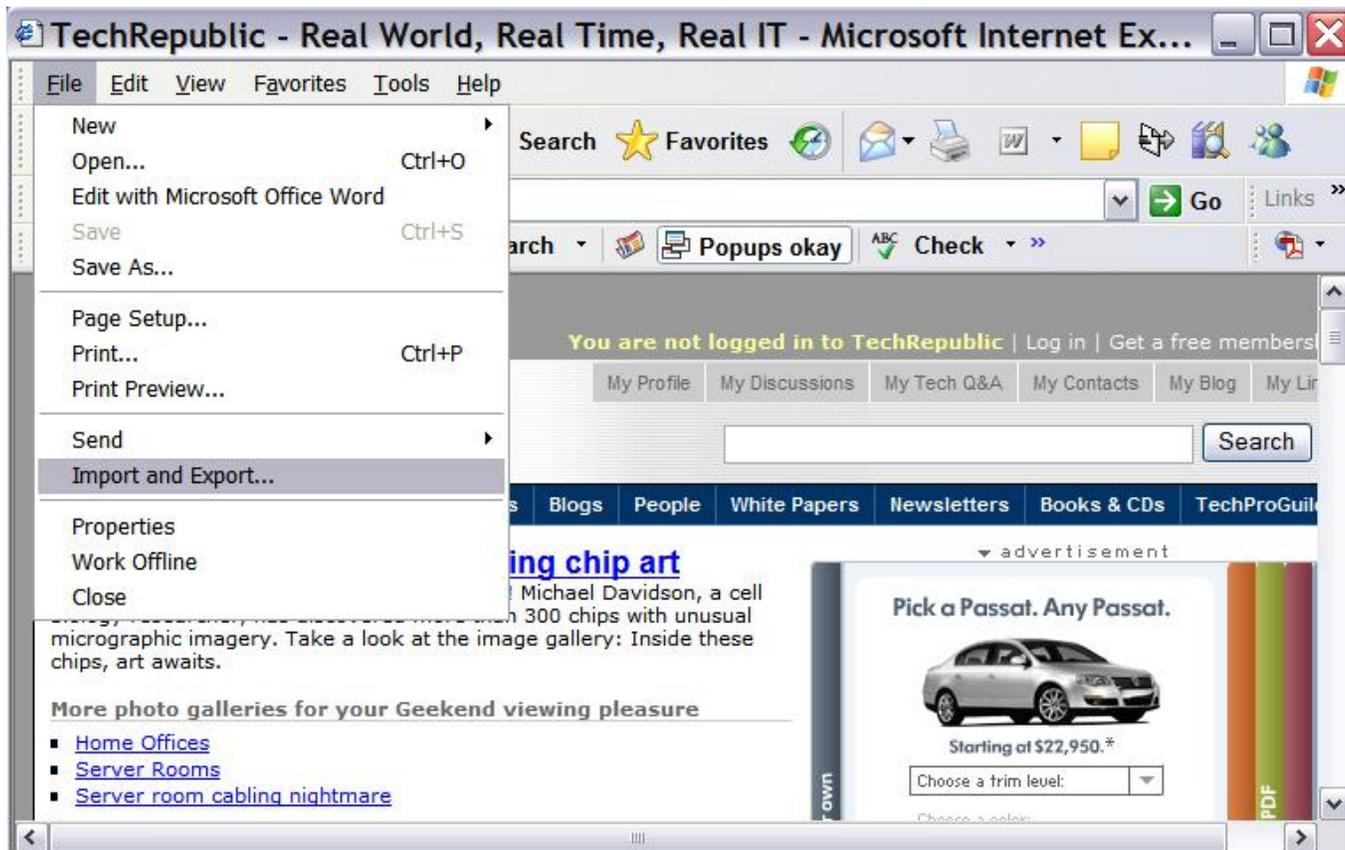
## 5. Activate Windows

At some point during the setup process you will likely be asked to activate Windows. (Linux you would similarly be asked to register your particular distribution.) This is a good time to get that out of the way. Taking this step assures your operating system is legitimate and opens up a new set of support features including community forums and FAQs.

## 6. Copy over browser shortcuts

For many of us, our list of favorite Web sites is a reflection of our lives. It is more than a mere list of places on the Word Wide Web; it is our connection to a dynamic virtual world. However, once a link is placed into your browser, you don't really have to worry about remembering what can often be a cryptic URL. However, because you don't have to remember, you may actually forget what it is. This is why porting over your browser favorites is so important.

It is a two step process. First, export your browser favorites to a file. In both Internet Explorer and Firefox, the Export and Import features can be found under the File menu. (**Figure D**) Once you have exported to a file, copy that file to the new PC and then import that file to your browser of choice on the new PC.

## Figure D



*Export and Import*

## 7. Install needed applications

If your new PC is at work, chances are that all of the "necessary" applications are installed already. But for home PCs, there is still work to do. Everyone's idea of what applications should be installed is going to be a personal choice, but there are likely to be some selections common to us all. Here are some of the applications I have to install with each new PC:

- Office Suite, including e-mail client
- Money, QuickBooks or some other money management application
- RSS Reader
- iTunes
- Graphics/Paint program beyond Paint for Windows
- VPN client (for connecting to the office)
- CD/DVD burning applications beyond what shipped with the PC
- HTML Editor
- Application developer IDE (often two—VS and Eclipse)

I'm sure you can think of some others. Of course there are always the entertainment applications like World of Warcraft, Call of Duty and Civilization.

## **8.** **Set up e-mail and home page**

Now that you have your e-mail client and browser installed, it is time to configure them. Specifying the browser home page is an easy thing to do, but it is also quite necessary. The default home page for browsers is not where you want to go every time you fire it up. The e-mail client configuration will be dependent on the client application and the service provider. In Outlook, the configuration is under Tools | E-mail Accounts, which starts a wizard that will walk you through the process.

## **9.** **Install PowerToys**

One of the more important things you can do to enhance your new PC, especially if it is a Windows PC, is to install the Microsoft Windows XP PowerToys. These free applications can simplify your Windows PC life by making it easier to change default configurations, synchronize across computers, and manipulate files and photographs.

## **10.** **Save system and registry, back up**

Once you have your new PC setup the way you like it, you take a few moments to backup your hard drive and save the system files and the registry. Taking these steps to establish a restore point now will create a new base configuration for your PC. This is a state you can return to if something goes wrong in the future.

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# Version history

**Version**: 1.0
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