

Introduction

Windows XP is a great operating system. It is faster and more secure than any other version of Windows. However, for some, it is not fast and secure enough. By picking up this book, you have started a three-part journey that will guide you through all of the steps of customizing, optimizing for performance, and securing Windows XP. I am not talking about minor little tweaks; this book is going to show you how to conduct major surgery on your Windows XP box.

Visually, Windows XP is superior to all other Windows versions. No other version of Windows has ever looked this good. So how could you make it look better? Customize it! Impress your friends and refresh your dull desktop with a cool new look. I am going to show you how to completely change the way Windows XP looks during all stages of its operation.

Performance-wise, Windows XP has made great advances. However, for some computer users of older hardware, running Windows XP can be like trying to pull a 100-foot yacht behind a tiny import car. Although Windows XP will not bust your CPU quite so much as a yacht would, it can slow down the operation of your computer because there are so many new features. To help you out, I am going to show you how to get the new features under control; I'll also tell you about some tricks that I have found to speed up the operation of Windows XP. If you already have the V12 4 x 4 of computers, and you have no problem pulling the 100-foot yacht, then you will still benefit from the performance tips.

Windows XP is a lot more secure than prior Windows operating systems. However, as we all know from recent history, it has not been doing very well. This book is going to show you how to use some of the new features of Windows XP Service Pack 2, as well as many other cool security tips, to make Windows XP much securer. Congratulations on starting your journey. Your computer will be in better shape than ever in no time!

About This Book

This book is the result of several years of research into the subject of the Windows operating system. It is a more polished and portable companion to the author's Web site, TweakXP.com, which is located at www.TweakXP.com. Most of the information contained in this book is completely new content that was never before published on TweakXP.com.

This book is meant to be read from start to finish in order. However, it was also written so that it can be used as a reference manual of different hacks. Feel free to skip around if you do not want to take the full journey of customizing, optimizing, and securing Windows XP.

Assumptions

This book is aimed at the intermediate to advanced Windows XP user. If you are a beginner computer user, then this book may not be for you. If you understand the basic operations of Windows XP, then dive right in.

You will need access to a computer running Windows XP Professional or Windows XP Home to perform the hacks listed in this book. Attempting to use the information in this book on any other version of Windows may result in a headache.

How This Book Is Organized

In this book, you will find 14 chapters spread across three parts. Each part covers a different theme, and each chapter is broken down into sections supporting the chapter's topic. The first two parts are laid out in logical operating system event order, such as boot, logon, and interface. The third part is laid out in order of steps.

Part I: Customizing Your Computer

Chapter 1 will start off by customizing the very first part of Windows XP that you see, the boot screen, and will finish up by customizing the logon screen. Then, Chapter 2 will pick up where Chapter 1 left off and will cover how to customize the Start menu and the new Start panel. Chapter 3 will cover customizing your desktop, and Chapter 4 will discuss how to use themes and visual styles as well as how to create your own. To wrap up customizing Windows XP, Chapters 5 and 6 will cover how to customize Windows Explorer and other methods to enhance the Windows Interface using cool special effects.

Part II: Increasing Your Computer's Performance

Chapter 7 will kick off Part II by covering methods that analyze your computer to find possible bottlenecks. Then, Chapter 8 will pick up by speeding up the boot time. Chapter 9 is dedicated to reducing the sign-on time and Chapter 10 will show you how to increase system responsiveness by adjusting many hidden settings. To wrap up Part II, Chapter 11 will cover hacks that speed up the loading time and execution time applications and will also cover how to speed up your network and Internet connection.

Part III: Securing Your Computer

Chapter 12 will mark the beginning of Part III by covering how to protect your computer from intruders. It will show how to analyze your computer's level of vulnerability, as well as how to use firewalls. It also gives you several security tips on how to make Windows XP rock-solid. Chapter 13 will cover how to make Windows XP more secure against SPAM and Spyware and viruses. Finally, Chapter 14 will wrap up *Hacking Windows XP* by discussing ways to protect your privacy by removing recorded user information from various parts of the operating system.

Conventions Used in This Book

In this book, you will find several notification icons—Caution, Tip, and On the CD—that point out important information. Here's what the three types of icons look like:



Provides valuable information that will help you avoid a disaster.



A brief tip that will provide help or other useful information.



Refers you to links, files, and software that are on the companion CD in the back of the book.

Hacking Precautions

Although all of the hacks and tips mentioned in this book have been tested, if a step is accidentally missed or a typo made, your computer could experience severe problems. To make sure that your computer is protected, I highly recommend that you use the Windows XP system restore feature.

Windows XP system restore is a great program that monitors all of the changes to your computer. If you make a change to the system registry as one of the hacks in this book requires you to do, you can always undo the change by reverting to an earlier system restore point. By default, Windows XP creates a restore point once per day. But if you are making a lot of changes to your computer, it is a good idea to create a restore point before every computer modification. The following two sections will show you how to use system restore to create a restore point, and how to restore your computer to an earlier checkpoint.

Creating a System Restore restore point

1. Click the Start button, expand All Programs, Accessories, and System Tools, and select System Restore.
2. When System Restore loads, select Create a Restore Point and click Next.
3. Type in a short description for the checkpoint in the box and click Create.
4. Once the restore point is created, just hit Close.

Restoring your computer to an earlier restore point

1. Click the Start button, expand All Programs, Accessories, and System Tools, and select System Restore.
2. When System Restore loads, select Restore My Computer To An Earlier Time and click Next.
3. Browse through the calendar and select the restore point that you want your computer to revert to and click Next.
4. The Confirm Restore Point Selection screen will be displayed. Click Next to proceed. Keep in mind that you may lose any files that were created when you revert to an earlier restore point. Make backup copies of important documents and files on a floppy or network drive of important documents just in case.

Once you click Next, your computer will reboot and revert to the earlier restore point.