



Fast Windows Fixes

From bullet-fast startups and shutdowns to automatic data protection, here are 31 tweaks to make Vista and XP smarter, more reliable, and more efficient.

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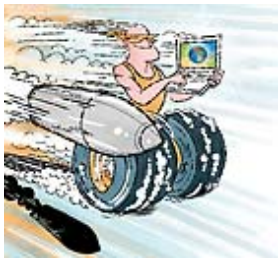


Illustration: Edwin Fotheringham

Despite years of refinement and the collective experience of millions of users, Windows remains as buggy, enigmatic, and failure-prone as ever. Each new release of the operating system adds a little glitz and a handful of new features, but also just as many new headaches. Sometimes Vista's new features and improved functions seem to be more trouble than they're worth, and older sibling XP certainly isn't getting any easier to live with as it ages.

Fortunately, you don't have to spend hours researching the cures for Windows' ills. We've distilled the most important fixes, and slick improvements, into steps that you can implement in mere minutes. These tips will accelerate your startups and shutdowns, automate your system maintenance, and even get you browsing at full throttle.

Put Some Sizzle in Your Startups

Problem: Windows never seems to start fast enough for me.

Fast Fix 1: Your computer could be loading device drivers for hardware you no longer use. To save on system resources, uninstall those drivers. Since a careless choice can cause your machine to lose an important function, however, create a restore point in System Restore before proceeding.

By default, Device Manager doesn't show devices that aren't currently connected to your system. To make them visible, press **Windows-R** to open the Run box, type **cmd**, and press **Enter**. At the command prompt, type **set devmgr_show_nonpresent_devices=1** and press **Enter**. Leave the command-prompt window open.

Now press **Windows-R** again, type **devmgmt.msc**, and press **Enter**. In the Device Manager window, choose *View, Show Hidden Devices*. Click the plus sign (+) next to each of the branches to examine all of the drivers on your system. Devices that are not currently connected appear with a pale version of the icon. If you come across a device that you're sure you no longer use, right-click it and choose *Uninstall*. Then follow the prompts shown on screen to complete the process. When you're done, close the command-prompt window to rehide your unconnected devices.

Fast Fix 2: Once you have mapped a network drive to a letter on your computer, Windows will automatically restore that connection by default whenever you log on. Since resuming network connections takes time, you can speed your startups by dropping the connections you aren't using.

Press **Windows-E** to launch Windows Explorer, and type **Alt-T, D** to open the Disconnect Network Drives dialog box. Pick the drives to disconnect, and click **OK**.

In the future, if you connect a drive only for the current session, simply enter its UNC path (this appears in the address

bar when you select the drive in Explorer, and in the Run box). Or, if you use the Tools, Map Network Drive command in Explorer, make sure *Reconnect at logon* is unchecked before you click *Finish*.

Fast Fix 3: You'll free your system's memory and recover processor cycles by clearing out the clutter that starts each time you log in to Windows--and you may even discover some malware in the process. Check out the free [Autoruns](#) program from Microsoft-owned Sysinternals.



How do you distinguish the useful startup programs from the useless ones? You can consult Autoruns' built-in research tools, or you can visit [Paul Collins's Startup Applications List](#). This searchable and downloadable list of common startup items provides a description and rating for each one, indicating how likely the item is to be required on a typical system.

Stifle Shadow Copies' Wastefulness

Problem: Vista is saving my data, but won't let me recover it.



Fast Fix: Vista's Business, Enterprise, and Ultimate Editions include Shadow Copies (or Previous Versions), which lets you recover a file's older version. Vista Home Basic and Home Premium lack this feature but save the data anyway, wasting CPU cycles and disk space. To stop the waste, put all of your documents and other files on a drive or partition other than your Windows disk. Then click *Start*, type **SystemPropertiesProtection**, and press **Enter**. In the list of disks, uncheck the one that contains personal data. Click *Turn System Protection Off* when prompted, and click *OK* to close System Properties. Note that having your data on a separate partition also speeds up backups by allowing you to copy only your own files rather than your programs, which change much less frequently and thus need fewer backups.

Use Windows' Own Speed Tweakers

Problem: My computer is relatively new, but it's not nearly fast enough.

Fast Fix: Use the performance tools built into Windows to maximize memory, disk space, and other resources. See "[Shift Any Version of Windows Into High Gear](#)" for a handy guide to these utilities.

Reduce the Power That Apps Have Over Your System

Problem: I don't want a Trojan horse or other malware to be able to take over my computer, but logging in as a standard user is too restrictive.

Fast Fix: Even if you log in as an administrator, you can launch your applications with limited privileges. Begin by [downloading Microsoft's free PsTools utility](#) collection. Unzip the contents to a folder, and move the folder where you normally store your apps. The PsExec tool was intended for launching apps remotely, but you can use it to launch programs with reduced privileges as well.



To create a shortcut that opens Internet Explorer 7 or any other app with restrictions, right-drag its shortcut to a new location. (You might want to use the normal, high-privilege version of the shortcut, so leave that original unchanged.) Choose *Copy Here*. Right-click the copied shortcut and select *Properties*. With the Shortcut tab active, click at the beginning of the Target box and type the path to PsExec before the existing command line. Then type a space, followed by **-l -d** (a hyphen, the letter *l*, a space, a hyphen, and the letter *d*). Finally, type another space. The **-l** switch reduces the program privileges, while the **-d** switch causes the command-prompt

window to close as soon as the app is launched. When you're done, the text in the Target box should look something like "**C:\Program Files\Pstools\psexec.exe**" -I -d "**C:\Program Files\Internet Explorer\iexplore.exe**" (your paths may differ). Click *Change Icon*, *OK*. Specify the path to the original file (**iexplore.exe** here) and click *OK* until all dialog boxes close.

To avoid restrictions on such activities as installing plug-ins for your browser, you will have to run the browser in its normal, high-privilege mode.

Repeat these steps for each shortcut you want to run with fewer privileges.

Diagnose Your Internet Connection

Problem: I pay every month for an Internet connection, but if my router isn't up-to-date, I may not be getting all the speed I'm due from my ISP.



Fast Fix: [Microsoft's Internet Connectivity Evaluation Tool](#) can tell you whether your router supports technologies for faster connections. (The tool won't give accurate results if you're behind a corporate firewall.) The test can interrupt running connections, so try it at a time when you aren't actively using the Internet.

If the results show that your system doesn't support many of the technologies listed, you might want to look into the possibility of purchasing a newer router or (if you are an XP user) upgrading to Vista. The Microsoft site just happens to include links to routers that have earned the Windows Vista logo.

Take IE Back in Time

Problem: Internet Explorer has become completely unusable for browsing the Web.

Fast Fix: If you've tried other repair measures and are ready to take a drastic step, reset all of IE's options to their original state. Your list of Favorites, your toolbar configurations, and other customized changes will be unaffected, and your browser add-ons will be only disabled, not deleted. However, IE temp files, cookies, browsing history, stored passwords, sites added to your trusted zones, and more settings will be obliterated or returned to their default values. If you don't mind any of that, open IE and choose *Tools, Internet Options*. Select the *Advanced* tab, and click the *Reset* button. Click *Reset* again to confirm your decision, and then click *Close*, and *OK* twice. Finally, restart your revitalized IE.

Automate Your Disk Checking

Problem: Plenty of programs can protect my data by checking my PC's disks for flaws and fixing problems. Unfortunately, I rarely take the time to use the tools.



Fast Fix: Scheduling a task to handle this chore automatically at regular intervals takes only a few minutes. First, to check your disk manually, click *Start, Run* (or press **Windows-R**) to open the command line, type **cmd.exe /c echo y|chkdsk c: /f /x**, and press **Enter**.

'Cmd.exe' is the command processor, which opens a command-prompt window in Windows. The '/c' switch tells the command prompt to run the commands that follow, including the all-important chkdsk utility, which examines your drive for errors. (Change '/c' to **/k** if you want the command-prompt window to remain open so you can see any screen messages that might appear.) In this example we are checking the C: drive with the fix (/f) function and telling it to lock out the disk (/x) if necessary while the scan takes place. (Your drive letter and switches may differ; type **chkdsk /?** at a command prompt to see all your choices.) If

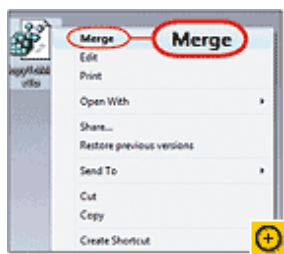
you're checking the Windows drive, the command won't work while Windows is running but will schedule a check for the next time you restart your system. That's where the 'echo y|' portion comes in: It sends a "yes" answer to approve this option.

To automate disk checking in XP, choose *Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Scheduled Tasks*. Double-click *Add Scheduled Task* to start the Scheduled Task Wizard, and click *Next*. In the Application list, select *Command Prompt* and click *Next*. If you don't see an entry for Command Prompt in the list, click *Browse*, find and select the file 'cmd.exe' in Windows' System32 folder, and click *Open*. Choose a time interval (*Monthly* is a good choice) and click *Next*. Specify the time, day, and months, and click *Next* again. Enter the account name and password that you use for logging in, and click *Next* once more. Check *Open advanced properties for this task when I click Finish*, and then click *Finish*. With the *Task* tab selected, edit the text in the Run box so that it reads **c:\windows\system32\cmd.exe /c echo y|chkdsk c: /f /x** (your path and options may differ). Click *OK*, and enter your account name and password again. Finally, click *OK* one more time (you may be asked to confirm your log-in ID and password once more).

To automate disk checking in Vista, choose *Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Task Scheduler*. Click *Continue* in the User Account Control prompt. In the Actions pane on the right, click *Create Task*. Use the appropriate boxes to type a name for the task and, if you want, a description. Check *Run with highest privileges* and any other settings you wish. Select the *Triggers* tab and click the *New* button. Set the interval for checking your drive: For example, choose *Monthly*, *Select all months* in the Months drop-down menu, click *On*, and select *First* in the first drop-down to the right of the button and *Monday* in the second drop-down. Specify the time and other settings if you wish, and click *OK*. Select the *Actions* tab and click the *New* button. For 'Program/script', type **cmd.exe**. For 'Add arguments (optional)', type **/c echo y|chkdsk c: /f /x** (your options may differ). Click *OK*. Finally, click the *Conditions* and *Settings* tabs to see if either of those dialog boxes has any other circumstances you want to specify. When you've completed these steps, click *OK*. If you need to edit the settings later, select *Task Scheduler Library* in the left pane of the Task Scheduler to see your tasks in the top center pane. Either edit the settings in the bottom center pane, or double-click the task name to reopen the dialog box.

Manage Files From Your Right-Click Menu

Problem: My right mouse button has delete, cut, and copy commands, but to copy or move a file, I then have to open a new Explorer window (or lose my place in the current Explorer window) to use the Paste command that completes the operation. (Naturally, I can also drag and drop from the right pane to the left folder-tree pane.)



Fast Fix: You can invoke a prompt that asks for the destination folder by adding 'Copy to Folder' and 'Move to Folder' commands to your right-click menu.

First, create a Registry backup by setting a new restore point in System Restore. With your Registry backup in place, launch Notepad, click the *Format* menu, and make sure 'Word Wrap' is unchecked. Type these three lines:

Windows Registry Editor Version 5.00
[HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT\AllFilesystemObjects\shell

ContextMenuHandlers\{C2FBB630-2971-11D1-A18C-00C04FD75D13}]

[HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT\AllFilesystemObjects\shell

ContextMenuHandlers\{C2FBB631-2971-11D1-A18C-00C04FD75D13}]

The file should have only *three* lines.

Save the file to a convenient location such as the Desktop, and give it a name like **CopyToMoveTo.reg** (be sure to include the .reg extension) and exit Notepad. Now right-click the file and choose *Merge* (see the screen shot). Confirm at any prompts you may receive.

The next time you right-click a file, you'll see two new commands: 'Copy to Folder' and 'Move to Folder'. Choose one of these commands to open a dialog box for selecting where your files should go.

Now you can delete the .reg file you created, or save it as a guide to which Registry keys to delete in case you decide later to remove these commands.

Analyze Your System Security

Problem: I'm not certain how secure my system is, but the last thing I want to do is pay some high-priced consultant to test it for me.



Fast Fix: Download the free Microsoft Baseline Security Analyzer (MBSA) and let the program perform a security check of your computer. The tool's reports include links to descriptions of the scan, details of the results, and ways to correct any problems it finds. MBSA works with any version of Windows from 2000 SP3 on, though Vista requires the 2.1 beta; MBSA also analyzes the security of Office, Exchange, and other Microsoft products.

[Download either the current version 2.0.1 or the beta 2.1 release.](#) After installing the program, launch it and follow the prompts to analyze your own system or multiple computers.

Stay Safe: Back Up by Bot

Problem: I know that backing up can save my hide--but I keep forgetting to do it.

Fast Fix: The backup tools built into many editions of Windows XP and Vista let you schedule and perform automatic backups. Unfortunately, only XP Pro and Vista Business, Enterprise, and Ultimate include these tools by default. XP Home users, however, will find a backup program on their Windows CD: Navigate in Explorer to the `valueadd\msft\ntbackup` folder, right-click the `Ntbackup` file, and choose *Install*. If you use Vista Home Premium, you'll have to find a backup program elsewhere; go to the "Make Image Backups" section of ["Give Home Premium Vista Ultimate Features"](#) for more on backing up Home Premium.

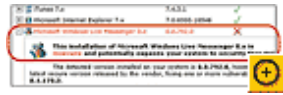
In XP, click *Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Backup*. If it's already set to start in Advanced mode, choose *Tools, Switch to Wizard Mode*. Step through the wizard, specifying what to back up and where. At the 'Completing the Backup or Restore Wizard' screen, click *Advanced*. Specify the type of backup (such as *Incremental*, which is good for regular, automated backups) and click *Next*. Set other options on the subsequent screens, and click *Next* for each. At 'When to Back up,' check *Later*, type a name for the backup, and then click *Set Schedule*. Use the settings listed under the Schedule and Settings tabs in the Schedule Job dialog box to customize when and how often to back up, and click *OK*. Enter your log-in name and password twice, and then click *OK* again. Click *Next*, enter your password two more times, and click *OK* and *Finish*. If you need to modify the backup schedule, reopen Scheduled Tasks and double-click the icon for the backup job.



In Vista, choose *Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Backup Status and Configuration*. Click *Set up automatic file backup* and confirm at the User Account Control prompt. Follow the prompts to set what, where, and when to back up (see the image here). To make changes later on, return to this utility and click *Change backup settings* or *Turn off* to modify or disable your backup bot.

Patch Your Apps and OS Together

Problem: I always grab the latest Windows security patches, but I sometimes neglect the other programs that pose a security risk when they're not kept up-to-date.



Fast Fix: To test the security of your applications, use the free online [Secunia Software Inspector](#). You don't need to install anything; simply click *Start* and follow the instructions. The scan requires the Sun Java JRE version 1.5.0_12 or later. It works

with Windows 2000 SP4 and later.

The analysis identifies applications that are outdated. Click the plus sign next to an entry for more details, and for links to the latest version.

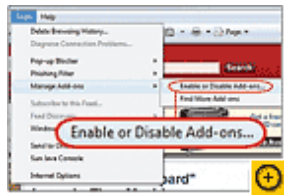
To ensure backward-compatibility, many applications leave old versions on your disk when installing updates, so back up your PC before you begin deleting or uninstalling older versions of any applications.

Solve Sluggish Surfing

Problem: My Web browsing is slow and sometimes stops altogether.

Fast Fix 1: If surfing is less responsive or impossible, your PC may have caught an infection. Use an antivirus utility or a repair tool to check for problems. Or try [Microsoft's free Malicious Software Removal Tool](#); just download the applet and follow the instructions.

Fast Fix 2: Install a new version of your browser, or patch your current one. To obtain the latest version of IE 7, choose *Tools, Windows Update*. In Mozilla Firefox, click *Help, Check for Updates*.



Fast Fix 3: You may have an issue with browser plug-ins or add-ons. To test this, disable all add-ons. If the problem goes away, enable one add-on and test again. Repeat until you find the culprit.

To disable add-ons in Firefox, choose *Tools, Add-ons*, and click *Disable* by each item until all are off. Close the window and restart Firefox. If the problem is solved, reopen the Add-ons window, click *Enable* for one entry, close, and restart. Rinse and repeat as needed.

In IE 7, choose *Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Internet Explorer (No Add-ons)*. If that solves the problem, restart IE normally and choose *Tools, Manage Add-ons, Enable or Disable Add-ons*. Pick an add-on and click *Disable*. Repeat this for all but one, and click *OK* twice. Restart IE. If everything is still fine, return to this dialog box, select another disabled add-on, and click *Enable*. Click *OK* twice and restart IE. Repeat until you find the misbehaving add-on.

Make Windows Defrag for You

Problem: While there's some debate on the matter, expert consensus says that defragmenting a hard drive improves its performance and reduces the likelihood of problems. But as with any PC housekeeping chore, finding the time to defrag my disks is getting tougher and tougher.

Fast Fix: Make Windows do the disk-defragmenting. In XP, follow the same steps as in "[Automate Your Disk Checking](#)" to create a Scheduled Task, but when editing the command line in Advanced Properties, change it to **cmd.exe /c defrag c: -f -v > "c:\ldocreport.txt"** (your switches and the path to your report file may be different).

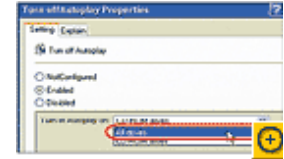
In Vista, follow the same steps as in "Automate Your Disk Checking," but change the text in the 'Add arguments (optional)' box to **/c defrag -c -f -v -w > "c:\ldocreport.txt"** (your switches and report path may differ).

Turn Off Autoplay

Problem: Autoplay works not only on CD-ROMs, but also on the flash drives and external hard drives that I connect to my PC. I'm worried that if some piece of malware gets on one of those devices, Autoplay will give it a clear path onto my system.

Fast Fix: Set your version of Windows to disable the Autoplay feature for all of your system's drives. The quickest way I know of to accomplish this result is to establish a group policy for your computer.

In XP, press **Windows-R**, type **gpedit.msc**, and press **Enter**. In the tree pane on the left, navigate to and select *Local Computer Policy\Computer Configuration\Administrative Templates\System*. Scroll in the right pane and double-click *Turn off Autoplay*. In the 'Turn off Autoplay Properties' dialog box, click *Enabled* and choose *All drives* from the drop-down list underneath. Click *OK*.



In Vista, press **Windows-R**, type **gpedit.msc**, and press **Enter**. Click *Continue* when prompted by User Account Control. In the tree pane on the left, navigate to and select *Local Computer Policy\Computer Configuration\Administrative Templates\Windows Components\AutoPlay Policies*. Double-click *Turn off Autoplay*. Click *Enabled* and *OK*. Next, double-click *Default behavior for AutoRun*. Click *Enabled*, and choose *Do not execute any autorun commands* in the resulting drop-down list. Finish by clicking *OK*. Unfortunately, this approach can cause problems on some systems, such as making it impossible to access photos on a camera plugged into your PC. If that happens, return to the above settings, choose the *Disabled* option, and then use Microsoft's free [Tweak UI](#) (scroll down to Step 6).

Use Keys to Start Quick Launch Items

Problem: I find that doing things from my keyboard is faster. But I want to be able to launch items in my taskbar's Quick Launch toolbar without reaching for my mouse.



Fast Fix: In XP, you can assign keyboard shortcuts either to items on your Desktop or to entries on your Start menu. The latter is a cleaner solution, so right-click the *Start* button and choose either *Open* or *Explore*. Double-click the *Programs* folder. To keep things organized, right-click in that window and choose *New, Folder*. Name the folder something like **Keyboard shortcuts**, and press **Enter**. Now double-click that folder, right-click and drag items from the Quick Launch bar into this folder one at a time, and choose *Copy Here*. Right-click each newly copied shortcut and select *Properties*. With the *Shortcut* tab highlighted, click in the 'Shortcut key' box and press the keys that you'll use to launch the program; they must begin with **Ctrl-Alt**, **Ctrl-Shift**, **Shift-Alt**, **Ctrl-Shift-Alt**, or a function key (**F1** through **F12** on most keyboards). Click *OK*. If you change your mind later and delete the shortcut, you'll have to log off and log back on again to remove the key assignment.

In Vista, the system automatically assigns Windows-key shortcuts to Quick Launch items based on their order in the toolbar. Launch the first item by pressing **Windows-1**, the second by pressing **Windows-2**, and so on. To change the keyboard shortcut for an item, drag it within the toolbar to change the order in which it appears.

Shut Down Instantly

Problem: When I want to shut off my computer, I want to do it *now*, without my having to point and click interminably.

Fast Fix 1: With a few quick keystrokes, you can close shop much faster. Here are the fastest ways to exit, restart, and log off from Windows.

In XP, press **Windows, U, U** to shut down; **Windows, U, R** to restart; and **Windows, L, L** to log off.

In Vista, press **Windows, Right Arrow** three times, and finally the letter for the command you want: **U** to shut down, **R** to restart, or **L** to log off.

Fast Fix 2: An even speedier way to shut down your computer is simply to press its power button (hey, it works on your TV, right?). Of course, yanking the power away from Windows all of a sudden could cause you to lose data. The solution is to reprogram your system's power button to exit Windows, without any prompts (except to save unsaved work, as needed). In XP, open Control Panel. In the 'Performance and Maintenance' category, launch *Power Options*. Click the *Advanced* tab. Under 'When I press the power button on my computer', select *Shut down*. Then click *OK*.



In Vista, click the *Start* button, type **power options**, and press **Enter**. In the upper left, click *Choose what the power button does*. Next to 'When I press the power button', select *Shut down*. You could also leave the setting at the default *Sleep* option, which can save you time when you power the PC on; see "[Reduce Your PC's Power and Operating Costs](#)" for more on Windows' power options. Finally, click *Save Changes*.

Living in a Dual OS World

Not everyone uses just XP or just Vista. Between work and home, lots of people must use both operating systems, experiencing no end of confusion as they cope with the two OSs' differences. These tips will help you switch from one to the other with ease.

Enhance Find: Perhaps the most obvious difference between XP and Vista is the Find box that appears on the Start menu. If you like the new Vista feature that lets you launch programs as well as search for files on your PC or the Web, you can add this to XP by downloading and installing [Microsoft's Windows Desktop Search for XP](#). The tool puts a search box in the taskbar, or you can open the program's main window by pressing **Windows-F**.

Make matching Start menus: If using two different Start-menu flavors is driving you bonkers, you can revert to the Windows 9x-style Start menu in both XP and Vista: In each OS, right-click the *Start* button and choose *Properties*. Select *Classic Start menu* and click *OK*. Organize icons and submenus in both systems to match so you don't waste time looking for what you need. For keyboard access, check out "[Add Custom Accelerator Keys to Your Start Menu](#)."

"Da Doo Run Run Run, Da Doo Run Run": Many Vista users soon come to miss the Run box on XP's Start menu, which provides a history of recently used commands. The Run command is still in Vista, but you have to get into the habit of pressing **Windows-R** to open it in either OS. Another option is to restore the Run box in Vista: Right-click the *Start* button, choose *Properties*, click *Customize*, check either *Run command* or *Display Run*, and click *OK* twice.

Hire a Defender: Vista comes with its own antispyware tool, Windows Defender. If you want to add the same tool to XP, you can grab the free [Windows Defender for XP](#). Note that to install the program, you must run Microsoft's own Windows Genuine Advantage spyware (ironic, isn't it?).

Equalize account control: Vista's User Account Control may generate a lot of annoying pop-ups as you work, but it does keep your system more secure. To get comparable protection in XP, log in as a standard user or as a power user rather than as an administrator; for details, see tips 19 and 20 in "[76 Ways to Get More Out of Windows](#)."

Bring back menu bars: If you find yourself stumbling over the missing menu bars in Vista's version of Explorer and Internet Explorer, one solution is to get in the habit of pressing the **Alt** key to reveal the menu bar and then using hot-keys to choose the command you need. Or bring the menus back for good by opening Explorer and choosing *Organize, Layout, Menu Bar*, or *Tools, Menu Bar* in Internet Explorer.

Our Favorite Fix-It Freebies

Sometimes, to get the job done, you need specialized tools. Whether their purpose is to filter spam, to recover lost data, or to perform other housekeeping tasks, these utilities make Windows a better OS, and they won't cost you a dime.

Keep spam at bay: As PC problems go, few are more annoying or more widespread than spam. And as free fixes go, few are as handy and helpful as [SpamBayes](#), a program that comes with plug-ins for Outlook, Outlook Express, and other POP3 e-mail clients. It uses a statistical algorithm that helps it learn what you consider spam, improving its filtering the more you use it. You can train it by sorting mail into 'spam' and 'not spam' folders, or just let it watch as you correct or confirm its guesses.

Start stuff on shutdown: Windows conveniently provides a Startup group so that you can run applications automatically each time you log in. But why not add something that runs programs whenever you log out? For example, you could set it to make backups of the day's work files, or to scan for viruses. [LastChance](#) lets you do just that. The program intercepts shutdown commands and runs your chosen apps before your computer calls it quits. You can also set the utility to run programs when a resource (such as a network drive) becomes available, and to schedule shutdowns to occur automatically.

Recover deleted files: If you tend to empty your Recycle Bin or to permanently delete files using Shift-Delete a little too quickly, [Restoration](#) (with a bit of luck) can save your bacon--or at least your deletions. Specify a folder location, or instruct the program to search the whole drive, and Restoration will do its best to recover the lost data. The program needs no installer, and it's so small that you can run it from a floppy disk, flash drive, or other portable medium.

Rename files in a flash: Nearly everyone has a massive collection of digital photos and music files on their hard drive. Renaming all those files for sensible organization and quick recognition can be onerous. But [Lupas Rename 2000](#) handles the chore with ease and sophistication. It can replace text; crop at the beginning, end, or any other position; and auto-number files, with a host of options. The program's preview pane lets you confirm that you have the settings you want before committing to the changes.

Manage proliferating passwords: Tracking the passwords to the Web sites you visit doesn't get any easier as their number increases and you get older. The open-source database [KeePass Password Safe](#) stores your passwords in an encrypted database. All you have to do is remember the master password that unlocks them all. It's not as convenient as using your dog's name for every password, but it's a lot more secure. The Auto-Type command helps you enter your account names and passwords.

Keep an eye on system changes: *PC World* editors have repeatedly cited [WinPatrol 2007](#) for its ability to protect your system from unauthorized changes, including new startup programs, altered browser home pages, changes to file-type associations, new hidden files, and much more.