

CLEAN UP YOUR ROOM/DESKTOP - (PART I)

by Ron Hirsch - Boca Raton Computer Society

So, does that line ring any bells? If you're a youngster, you've heard your elders tell you to clean up your room very often. And if you're not a youngster, then you use the line yourself on your kids or grandchildren. Well, I have no young kids around anymore, but I often use that line (with a slight change.) I'm constantly telling people to "Clean up your desktop", with "desktop" being their computer screen after the machine has booted up, and before any programs are run.

There are some desktop differences between the different Windows versions. And, some companies such as Dell and Compaq very often install a "special" arrangement on the desktop, mostly to keep their name in front of you. Also, there are programs which generate their own desktop arrangement. But, they all generally respond to the procedures presented below. Once you become an expert in this area, you'll have no problems with the finer points and variations.

Since most of you are using Windows XP, and since I use XP on all my machines, all the activities discussed are based on XP. I have not used Vista, but I would assume it's the same there. One thing I do remember however, is that in Windows 95, desktop icons did not automatically line up in rows and columns. In XP, when you move an icon, it automatically snaps to the nearest position which keeps the rows and columns aligned.

The average computer user, even those who should know better, generally have disaster zones for the desktops. There are icons all over the place, not in any order and not lined up. And, there are many, that when I ask what they are, I'm told "I don't know." And, when I ask to have Windows Explorer or Notepad opened, there's usually a lot of scrambling, to find out where the icon is located.

Many programs, when installed, will place an icon on your desktop. Sometimes they ask you during the install if you want this - and sometimes they don't ask. There is always a tendency for software companies to grab real estate so that they can prominently keep themselves in front of you. Some newer computers running Windows XP/VISTA may even start off with almost nothing on the desktop. If you want to go back to a more conventional appearing desktop, right click on the desktop, and view the various options you have. There is probably a choice to revert to an "old-fashioned desktop, which I personally prefer

Most people keep their medications in a medicine cabinet, canned goods in the pantry, garden tools in the garage, etc.. But when it comes to their computer, they are as disorganized as is humanly possible. They feel intimidated by their computers, and don't wish to antagonize it. So, the thrust of this article is to go back to real basics again, and give you some information on organizing and cleaning up your desktop. If you're already super organized, you can skip this article, accept my apologies, and move on. But 99 out of 100 of you probably don't qualify to get the gold star for desktop organization. Once you do the tasks presented, you'll probably wonder why you didn't do it sooner. It not only is much easier to work with a good functional desktop, it looks prettier also, and will impress those who see it.

WHY HAVE ICONS ON THE DESKTOP?

Most users are familiar with the primary way to run a program. Click on START>PROGRAMS, and one can navigate to all the programs that are installed on the machine. But, most users generally have several programs that they use often. Having an icon for these programs on the desktop makes it easier to access that program. Just double click on that icon, and the program opens.

WHY SHOULD I BOTHER?

Let's take an extreme analogy. How would you like to have a dictionary where the words were randomly listed, not in any order? It would take lots of time to look up a word. By organizing things, and getting important icons

at your fingertips, you can make your life much easier. And, your friends will be asking you to help them, when they see your desktop.

Consider the desktop as a presentation area for icons that you often use. Count the icons on your desktop that you that you really use, and those you don't use. Then list the icons that you use which are not readily available on the desktop and you have to do lots of clicking to reach. You will see why it's a good idea to improve things. Now let's get down to business and fix things up.

OPERATING ON ICONS

The following activities are easy to perform on icons, wherever they may be. There are a few icons that Microsoft does put in places where they take control away from you - you can't readily rename them, or move them off the desktop, although you can always reposition them on the desktop. You may discover some of these in your travels. When you do, you'll just have to skip those icons. While they can be operated on using special protocols, that's outside of the scope of activities for these lessons.

WHAT IS AN ICON

An icon is a representation of a program, or file, or just about anything you want. The icons on your desktop are usually shortcuts to running a program, be it a word processor, spreadsheet, Internet connection, etc.. All icons have properties, which define the nature of the icon, and details of what it does when used. Right clicking on an icon will bring up a window with the bottom item in the list being "properties". Left click on "properties", and you'll get a window with lots of information about the icon. Try it, and browse around to get a feel for things. The more familiar you become with things on your computer, the more comfortable you'll feel using them.

MOVE AN ICON

Left click on and drag an icon, and you can move it manually anywhere you want on your desktop, or into another open folder. The ability to drag an icon around is tied into the choice that was made on how icons are positioned. Before you can engage in changing locations et al on your desktop, you must first check to see how things are set. Right click on the desktop, and in XP, you will bring up a small box with a list of items in it. The contents of this box will vary, depending upon which version of Windows you are using. The top item is "arrange icons by", and it has a little arrowhead to the left. Click on that arrowhead, and you'll see a variety of items related to arranging icons. Some of these may be checked. The best way to learn what does what is to play around with the checking and unchecking. After a few trials, you will get a good feel for what they all do.

COPY AN ICON

Copying an icon is similar to moving an icon. As with the standard Windows protocol, do exactly as you would to move, but hold down the CTRL key while you are doing the click and drag operation. If you copy it into the same area, you'll probably see a (2) following the text in the copy. You can't have two icons in the same place, with the same name. So, Windows adds the "(2)" for you. If you move it to another folder, the "(2)" will stay, but you can edit the text as you'd like. See "Rename an Icon" below. Dragging an icon to any folder on your desktop will move the icon into that folder

DELETE AN ICON

Click once on an icon to highlight it, and then hit the Delete key. Remember, the icons here are generally shortcut icons with the little curly arrow on the lower left corner. Deleting these does not delete anything from your system except the shortcut icon. *No programs or data will be deleted, just the icon.*

RENAME AN ICON

Click once an icon and then hit the F2 key. This puts you in "edit" mode, and you can type a new name by using the keyboard. If you type in a very long name, all the text you entered may not display when the icon is not selected. But, when you click once on the icon, the extra lines of text should be visible. In general, try to keep

the text to a maximum of 2 lines under the icon. Remember the F2 key. It is the “edit” key, for folder names, filenames, icons, and other elements in Windows .

Next month, we'll continue from this point to get a more streamlined desktop for you to work with. But, you must know the various icon manipulation procedures presented above. I won't be repeating the explanation for each step. I'll just say delete, copy, move, (etc.) the icon. So if you've forgotten how to do it, you'll need a copy of this article handy to remind you.

Remember, you will learn by experimenting and exploring - so don't be afraid to do so.

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