

Vista Tips and Techniques

by Greg Schwartz

The following are tips that I have either discovered myself or that I have found on the Internet. I hope that you will find most of them useful, but some may not apply to you.

Tip #1:

If you are a somewhat “savvy” computer user and have a decent anti-virus program, have Vista Firewall turned ON and Vista Windows Defender turned ON, you can turn OFF the very annoying UAC (User Account Control). This annoying security feature in Vista prevents you from doing most everything you might need to do including starting programs, modifying system settings in Control Panel, downloading and installing programs or updates, etc. without having to “confirm” that you “really” want to do this.

Turning UAC off does potentially expose you to spyware or malware if you don’t know what you are doing, but if you are careful about what you are doing, you really don’t need it.

To turn off:

Go to Control Panel, Security, and then Security Center. UAC is the last item and you can turn it off by clicking on “Turn off now”.

After turning off, you will still see an *occasional* pop-up warning if Vista thinks what you are doing is *really* dangerous, but the frequency of these pop-ups will be reduced significantly.

Tip #2:

If you get a pop-up box saying “LOCATE LINK BROWSER” when you click on a link in an email, you are probably using Firefox as your default browser and you have probably just had an update to Firefox. When the update is installed, it changes registry setting which you will need to manually change per the following. After making the following changes, you will no longer get the “Locate Link Browser” message until the next time that Firefox is updated. Then, you will have to repeat the following Registry Edit.

Caution: Editing the registry incorrectly can damage your system. Do not attempt these steps if you are inexperienced or uncomfortable using the Registry Editor. It is suggested that you make a backup of your Registry before making any changes.

Here’s the steps to take:

1. Go to “Start” then “Run” (or press the windows key + R) then type regedit and click OK.
2. Use the directory tree hierarchy to navigate to “HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT\HTTP\shell\open\ddeexec”.
3. Delete the “ddeexec” registry key in it’s entirety (NOT just the values within “ddeexec”.
4. Repeat for “HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT\HTTPS\shell\open\ddeexec”.
5. Repeat for “HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT\Firefox\URL\shell\open\ddeexec”.
6. Repeat for “HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT\FirefoxHTML\shell\open\ddeexec”.

Tip #3:

One of the first things I do when setting up a new Vista machine is to download Firefox, install it, and set it to be the default browser. Firefox is faster and more secure than IE7 (which in my opinion is over-bloated and not very good). The only thing I use IE7 for is to go to Microsoft’s website to get an update since Microsoft will not let you update using anything other than Internet Explorer.

Tip #4:

Tip #2 above reminds me that on a default installation of Vista, the old “Run” command that we had in XP is hidden by default. To make it visible all the time like in XP, right click on your taskbar, click on “Properties”, click on the “Start Menu” tab at the top, then on the “Customize” button on the right.

You will then see a list of features in Vista that are either turned on or off. Scroll down the list until you see “Run Command”. The box in front of it is NOT checked. To make the Run command visible, click on the check box and then on OK. The Run command will now be visible whenever you click on the Vista Start Globe in the lower left corner of your screen. In the same list of features, you can also choose other items that you want to see or not see as well as how things are displayed. Feel free to play around with these settings until you get your Start Menu set up the way you like it. Also, in the first “Start Menu” tab pane, you can also choose to have Vista display the old XP Classic start menu instead of the new Vista way by clicking on the item called “Classic Start menu”

Tip #4:

Even with UAC turned OFF, you may encounter some programs or updates that just won't work. One update that I have noticed that will not work is Firefox update. After you download the update and it tries to install, you get an error message that the update could not be completed. No matter how many times you try this, it won't work. The answer to this is that you MUST save the update to your computer (I suggest on your desktop temporarily), then right click on the icon, and then click on “Run as Administrator”. The update will then install properly. Don't ask me why, but even though you are in the Administrators group, you are not really an Administrator in Vista. There is a Super Administrator account that you cannot see or modify.

There are other programs other than Firefox that may exhibit this behavior also. What I do is that if something doesn't run, I then right click on the program and click on Run as Administrator. Most times, this will fix the problem.

Tip #5:

Along the same lines as Tip #4, if you have an older program that is not Vista certified, you may still be able to run it under Vista. I normally just try the older program and if it works, then it works. If however, the program won't run, the next thing I try is to right click on the program name, then click on Properties, then on Compatibility. You can then click on “Run this program in compatibility mode for” and then in the drop down box, you can choose one of the older Windows versions to run in. Then click OK. Many times this will let you run an older program that will not run under Vista.

Tip #6:

If you are on a network (most likely at work) and you click on a file somewhere on the network, perhaps a file server, and you get a popup box that says: “**Open File – Security Warning**” and the file won't open, you need to follow this procedure:

1. Click “Start”, then in the “Run” box, type: inetctl.cpl
2. Click the “Security” tab at the top
3. Click “Trusted Sites”, then click “Sites”
4. In the top box, type: https://xxx.xxx.xxx.xxx (enter the IP address of your server or other computer where the file is located) NOTE the “s” at the end of “https:”
5. Click “Add”
6. UNCHECK “Require server verification (https:) for all sites in this zone”
7. Click “Close”
8. Click on “Local Intranet”
9. Click “Sites”
10. UNCHECK “Automatically detect intranet network”
11. Make sure all 3 items below are now CHECKED.
12. Click OK and then click OK again.

This should fix the problem. This works for both WinXP and for Vista.

HERE'S A BIGGIE:

Tip #7:

One of the MOST ANNOYING aspects about Vista is its very slow file copying from one computer to another. This issue has been hashed over and re-hashed many many times on the Internet and it was hoped that SP1 for Vista would finally solve this problem. Unfortunately, people who have already updated to SP1 have found that there is only a small incremental improvement in SP1 over pre-SP1 machines. I found what appears to be the solution on the Internet written in a blog by Mark Minassi. According to Mark, the problem seems to be with the autotuning feature of the new TCP stack and that even relatively new switches and routers may not like the autotuning feature. Try the following to see if transfer times improve: (reboot after resetting before trying out)

In an "elevated" command window (must start "As Administrator") type the following:

C:\> netsh interface tcp set global autotuninglevel=disabled

Prior to performing the above command, I tried a transfer of a 250 MB file from my computer to our server. The time to do the transfer was 2 min 39 seconds. After applying the above command, the transfer time dropped to 0 min 35 sec. Quite an improvement. Just to prove the point, I reentered the above command with "*autotuninglevel=normal*" and tried it again. My transfer time went back up to the 2 min 39 second time. So, it appears as if the above fix will work, at least for me.

Try it and see if it works for you also.

Tip #8:

This tip applies specifically to McAfee but may also come up with other programs.

When you initiate a download and run Download Manager using IE7, the following error is displayed before Download Manager scans for installed applications:

An error (0X800c0019) occurred when the download manager tried to access the MC website.

This may indicate a problem with the Certification Revocation List (CRL) related to the certificate. This information is used to validate the Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) certificate needed to create the SSL connection used by Download Manager.

Issues with the CRL may occur if replication of CRL updates to the hosting servers is disrupted. When IE checks the SSL certificate against a CRL host server that is not up to date, the validation may fail. If the validation fails, IE7 will prevent the SSL connection from being created. This failure is part of the intended functionality of SSL certificates used in conjunction with a CRL. The error occurs when the local IE7 CRL is out of date and McAfee is not listed in the CRL on the Certificate Authority server contacted.

You can fix this issue by disabling the option for IE to check for server Certificate revocation.

Follow these directions to do this:

1. Click on Start, All Programs, and then Internet Explorer
2. Click Tools, Internet Options.
3. Select the Advanced tab.
4. Navigate to the security section and DESELECT the "Check for Server Certification Revocation"
5. Click Apply to save the changes.

You should now be able to download your update or program. Remember, to be on the safe side, after downloading successfully, you should reverse the above by ENABLING the "Check for Server Certification Revocation".

Tip #9:

Here's another bug that really annoyed me. When starting any office program such as Word or Excel, EVERY time you start the program you get the "End User License Agreement" box. If you click on "I accept", the EULA box disappears and then reappears. If you once again click on "I accept", the box disappears and the program starts as expected. This behavior occurs if your user account does not have permissions to modify the Microsoft Windows Registry.

There is a method of fixing this issue involving the Registry, but a faster way that I have found which is much safer is the following:

1. Go to Control Panel, Security, and turn OFF UAC.
2. Start Word or Excel, accept the EULA and then exit the program.
3. Go back into Control Panel, Security and turn UAC back ON.
4. The office program should now start without the annoying EULA popup box.

Tip #10:**To make the Vista default Administrator logon appear:**

If you accidentally delete all users from being in the Administrator's account, you cannot ENABLE the administrator account because you are not an administrator. You also cannot assign a user to be in the administrator group because you are not an administrator.

To Fix This:

If there are NO users who are members of an administrators group, you can make the "Administrator" logon appear by rebooting the computer into SAFE mode. (press F8 at boot time) In SAFE mode, the administrator account logon will appear. (but ONLY if there are no users assigned to the administrator's group). The default password for the administrator account is blank (nothing) unless someone else previously assigned a password to the administrator account.

Once you logon to the administrator account, you can then go into the Control Panel, Administration, and Users and Groups and change the individual users account to be a member of the administrator group. You can also make the Administrator logon appear by going to properties of the Administrator and unchecking the box that disables the account. Once you do this, the Administrator logon will always appear even on normal startups. This has the potential to be dangerous because if a user logs on as an administrator all of the new Vista security features are bypassed and the computer is now vulnerable to viruses, Trojans, etc. Also, if you do this, you should enter an Administrator password to prevent someone from really messing up your computer.

Once you make at least one user a member of the Administrators group, you should probably disable the built-in default Administrator account once again.

Tip #11:

Download and install the latest version of TweakVI. It allows you to make many changes to your system and provides much useful information. The basic package is free but does not allow you to perform some of the more advanced features and tweaks. But the basic package still is very useful.

Tip #12:

Most people who are using Vista have a few Gadgets installed on their Sidebar. One of the problems though is that you can only install a few of these in the normal Sidebar which cannot be resized bigger. Also, some people do not like to take up space on their monitor for these Gadgets, especially if they have a smaller monitor, but they really want to use some of them. There's a workaround for this though. Did you know that you can "un-dock" the Gadgets from the Sidebar

and drag them anywhere on your monitor? Just left-click on the Gadget and while holding down the left mouse button, drag them off the sidebar anywhere else on your monitor. You can do this with all of your Gadgets and this lets you open up as many Gadgets as you want. (or at least as many as will fit on your monitor). Once you drag the Gadgets off of the Sidebar, you can then close the sidebar and recover the space it normally takes up on your monitor. To close the sidebar but leave your Gadgets visible and active, just right-click anywhere on your Sidebar where there are no Gadgets and click on “Close Sidebar”. To open up your Sidebar once again, just right-click on the sidebar icon in your system tray and click on “Open”. Also, if you want to put the Gadgets back onto the Sidebar, just drag them from your desktop back onto the Sidebar. Another “trick” to using the Sidebar is that if you don’t want the Gadgets to be bright and glaring in your face all of the time, you can right click on the Gadget, choose Opacity and set the Transparency to 40% which will dim the Gadget down. You can still bring it up to full brightness by simply moving your mouse over the Gadget.

Tip #13:

While on the subject of desktops, did you know that there’s an easy way to resize you desktop icons to almost any size? Simply hold down the “CTRL” key and roll you mouse’s wheel. Rolling the wheel one way will make your desktop icons smaller and the other way will make them bigger.

Tip #14:

Windows Vista hates it when you don’t use an antivirus program, or a firewall, or some other security feature. But, if you don’t, you will constantly be reminded of this by the Security Center shield icon in your system tray popping up and telling you that you are at risk and should fix it. If you really don’t need one of the security features Vista thinks you need, you can turn off this annoying popup. Right-click the Shield icon and click on “Open Security Center”. Then, in Security Center, click “Change the Way Security Center Alerts Me”. You will want to select “Don’t Notify Me and Don’t Display the Icon” (even though Vista tells you it’s “Not Recommended”)

Tip #15:

Everyone knows about the Windows Experience score, but a power user won’t find the information there as comprehensive or useful as one could wish. Skip it in favor of Microsoft’s Management Console. Right-click on Computer and then select Manage. Then select “Reliability and Performance”, then “Monitoring Tools” and finally “Reliability Monitor”. You will see a graph at the top for a specific date (usually yesterday) which shows 5 categories of things that are being monitored. These are: Software (un)Installs, Application Failures, Hardware Failures, Windows Failures, and Miscellaneous Failures. To see more than yesterday’s results, at the top right of the graph, you can pull down the drop-down and choose to “Select All” or “Select a Date”. Under the graph you will see the same 5 categories that you can expand to see the results that are depicted in the graph. If you choose “Select All”, you will see every install or uninstall of software that has been made on your computer since it was new. In the lower 4 sections, you can see any failures that have occurred also. This is very useful especially if you have been having problems with your computer but do not know why. In the graph, if you see a yellow exclamation point or a red X you can click on them and the explanation of what happened at that time will appear below in the lower sections.

Take the time to look around in the Management Console. It can provide you with a wealth of information all in one place.

Tip #16:

Another thing I always do when I am setting up a new Vista computer is turn OFF the automatic indexing service. If you have a relatively up-to-date computer that is reasonably fast, you probably

don't need it. The main reason I turn it off is that in Vista, it is constantly running in the background consuming valuable horsepower. The Indexing service's main job is to constantly maintain a master index of all of the files on your computer so that if you start to type the name of a program or a file into the search box, Vista knows where it is immediately and can provide a link to it almost instantly. This is good in theory, but as I said, this service constantly is thrashing your hard drive and sucking up some CPU cycles that could be used for better purposes.

I have done some testing both with Indexing turned ON and with it turned OFF and I never noticed a major difference in how long it took to find something. This is something you can try for yourself and see if it makes a difference to you.

If you want to turn off Indexing, go to Control Panel, System and Maintenance, and click on Indexing Options. You will then see a list of "Included Locations" which will identify exactly what folders are being indexed on your computer. If you see that the "Local Disk C" is listed there, then your entire hard disk is being indexed. If you see this, click on "Modify" and in the next window, deselect the Local Disk C and then click the little arrow to the right and drill down to just those folders that you *really* want to index. The only folder I normally include is the "Users" folder since this is where most of your personal stuff will be saved.

Tip #17:

One thing you need to check is your power settings. A new Vista install many times will set the default power setting to "Power Saver" which throttles down your CPU to only 50%. This is a real waste of CPU horsepower. To change, click on Control Panel, System and Maintenance, and then Power Options. Make sure to choose "High Performance" which will give your CPU 100% of its ability. You can change the settings yourself if you want something else by clicking on "Change Plan Settings" and then clicking on "Change Advanced Power Settings" and going thru all of the various options you see there. Pay particular attention to "Processor Power Management" where you can set the Minimum Processor State and the Maximum Processor State. For High Performance, these settings should BOTH be set to 100%.

Tip #18:

Did you know that Vista comes with a virtual keyboard? This is handy if all of a sudden, your real keyboard decides to quit right in the middle of doing something important. To open up the virtual keyboard, just click on the Start orb, type OSK into the search box and then hit Enter. You can then use your mouse to enter any keys you may need by clicking on the virtual keyboard.

Tip #19:

Here's one thing that had me baffled for a while when I first started using Vista. In Windows Explorer, if you have enabled Show Hidden Files, you will see icons for folders that look like shortcut icons with an arrow in them. These are for folders that you are already familiar with from Windows XP like "My Documents", "Application Data", "Cookies", etc. A user would naturally assume that you could click on these folder icons to see the files within the folders. NOT !!! Clicking on any of these icons pops up an error message that says "Access Denied". What? I can't even get into my own folders? In reality, in Vista, these are called "Junctions" and are there for the sole purpose of re-directing any files from older pre-Vista programs into the new Vista file folder locations. Some pre-Vista programs are hard-coded to look for and save files to specific folders like "My Documents" and if the "Junctions" were not there, these programs would fail. So, if you see a folder that looks like a shortcut with a blue arrow in it, don't try to open it since you will fail if you do. It is important to learn where Vista has decided to put all of your files. Below, I have included a list of where the old XP folder locations were and what the new Vista locations are. In the list below, everywhere you see \$USER\$, this would be your own username.

Windows XP Location

New Vista Location

\Docs and Settings	\Users
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\My Docs	\Users\%USER%\Documents
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\My Docs\My Music	\Users\%USER%\Music
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\My Docs\My Pictures	\Users\%USER%\Pictures
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\My Docs\My Videos	\Users\%USER%\Videos
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\Application Data	\Users\%USER%\AppData\Roaming
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\Cookies	\Users\%USER%\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows\Cookies
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\Local Settings	\Users\%USER%\AppData\Local
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\NetHood	\Users\%USER%\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows\Network Shortcuts
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\PrintHood	\Users\%USER%\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows\Printer Shortcuts
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\Recent	\Users\%USER%\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows\Recent
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\SendTo	\Users\%USER%\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows\SendTo
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\Start Menu	\Users\%USER%\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\Templates	\Users\%USER%\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows\Templates
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\Local Settings\ \Application Data	\Users\%USER%\AppData\Local
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\Local Settings\ \History	\Users\%USER%\AppData\Local\Microsoft\History
\Docs and Settings\%USER%\Local Settings\ \Temporary Internet Files	\Users\%USER%\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files
\Docs and Settings\All Users	\ProgramData
\Docs and Settings\All Users\Application Data	\ProgramData
\Docs and Settings\All Users\Desktop	\Users\Public\Desktop
\Docs and Settings\All Users\Documents	\Users\Public\Documents
\Docs and Settings\All Users\Favorites	\Users\Public\Favorites
\Docs and Settings\All Users\Start Menu	\ProgramData\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu
\Docs and Settings\All Users\Templates	\ProgramData\Microsoft\Windows\Templates
\Docs and Settings\Default User	\Users\Default

Final Tip:

We can all open up PDF files as long as we have Adobe Reader. But, most people cannot CREATE PDF files unless they have a high-end program like Adobe Professional. I looked for a long while until I found a free program that was Vista compatible that would allow me to create PDF files. The one I found and have been using for quite a while now is CutePDF Writer. This is a great program and installs as a printer which means it is usable in any Windows program. Instead of choosing a printer to print to, just choose CutePDF and a PDF file is created automatically. You can get a free copy of CutePDF at www.cutepdf.com.