

# MBTS TekJournal

Volume 4, Issue 2

February 2005

Thank you everyone for your feedback on the last issue of the MBTS TekJournal. The main response was that the new format is preferred to other formats that have been used and the newsletter is easy to print and read.

The big news lately is there is now a viable alternative to Internet Explorer (IE), Firefox. It allegedly doesn't have the security problems of IE, and also has a brand new email client to do battle with Outlook Express. See our article on Microsoft Alternatives for more information and the latest bug.

One section which has been in almost every TekJournal has been Tips and Tweaks. However, in many cases to implement these modifications you will have to make changes to the System Registry. This issue deals with proper backup and restore techniques for helping to make sure you always have a good copy of the System Registry to fall back on.

I have received many ideas for future articles including a request to delve into Word and Excel and help users get more familiar with the features of these applications. You also want to know how to backup DVD's, the intricacies of home networking, wireless vs. traditional networks, making backups of Outlook and Outlook Express, just to name a few. Even though my

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## Backing up the System Registry

In many of our issues we have published enhancements to the Windows Operating System in what is called a Tweak. In order to implement many of these Tweaks, you are required to make a change to the System Registry. However, since making a wrong move in the System Registry can leave your system inoperable, you will always see the following disclaimer:

*NOTE – Modifying System Files is not recommended. These procedures may contain information regarding editing the System Registry. You should make sure you have a valid System Registry backup before attempting any of these modifications. Incorrect editing may severely and irreparable damage your operating system. MicroByte TekSolutions takes no responsibility for the health or stability of your system should you attempt to implement any modification found herein.*

Whenever changes are made to the System Registry in Windows, even those users with the best intentions can make a minor error and end up with a non-functioning or unstable system. The only way to gracefully back out of this situation is to be able to restore the System Registry with a known clean copy which was obtained prior to the change which crippled the system. This article will help you make sure you have a good backup copy of the System Registry to fall back on.

To access the System Registry you will click on start and then select Run. In the dialog box which appears you will type in regedit and press OK.

The System Registry is made of up five distinct regions called hives. Under the heading of My Computer the hives are called:

- HKEY\_CLASSES\_ROOT
- HKEY\_CURRENT\_USER
- HKEY\_LOCAL\_MACHINE
- HKEY\_USERS

idea bin is starting to fill, I still need you to send along more topics for discussion.

As for me, my knee surgery went very well and I am walking a lot better now than before. Thank you to everyone for their kind wishes during my recovery.☺

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- HKEY\_CURRENT\_CONFIG

When the System Registry is opened the first time all the hives should be collapsed and all you should see are the five labels above under the main heading of My Computer. If any of the hives have been expanded, you can safely collapse them by pressing on the minus sign beside keys which have been expanded.

To backup the complete System Registry highlight My Computer and click on the File Menu and select Export. The dialog box that pops up is called "Export Registry File" and defaults to saving the file in the users My Documents folder. If you are saving the complete System Registry we suggest a using a name like SysReg and the current date. Once you have selected a name, click Save to save the file. You may also choose to create a special folder for Saved Registry keys so you can identify them more readily.

To save a specific key, sub key, hive, or other object, navigate to that object and repeat the above process for saving the System Registry. In this instance use the name of the key you are saving as the name of the file to be created during the save. This way, if you change or delete a key you shouldn't have, it will be easy to find the right one to restore.

#### Restoring a Key or group

When you saved the key or sub key above and gave it a file name, the system automatically appended the file extension of ".reg" to indicate it as a Registry File. To restore the contents of the key that was changed in error, navigate to the location where you stored the file, the default folder is "My Documents", and double click on the file to wish to restore. Windows security will pop up a dialog box asking if you are sure you want to add the contents of this file to the Registry. Click Yes to proceed or No to cancel.

## Creating a Restore Point

Now that we know how to backup and restore all or part of the System Registry manually, we can show you an alternate method that you may find easier and less stressful. The alternate method can also be used, and in many cases may be automatic, when you are going to install new programs to your system. This method is found under Help and Support and is known as creating a Restore Point.

To see what Restore Points are currently available on your system, click start and select the Help and Support option. Select the option labeled "Undo changes on your computer with System Restore." The default option is "Restore my computer to an earlier time": Click Next. On this screen you will see a calendar where some of the dates are listed in **Bold**. These are the dates when a Restore Point was created for you. Clicking on these dates will show what changes were made after the Restore Point was created. Now that you have seen what Restore Points look like we can close this window with taking any action by clicking the X in the top right corner.

The reason for Restore Points is that if you make a change to your system by adding new drivers or applications that cause your system to respond unexpectedly, you can select a specific point in time when you know your system functioned properly and hopefully restore it to its' previous working state.

To create a Restore Point, open Help and Support and select "Restore my computer to an earlier time". This is another of those Microsoft wonders of click start to stop. Anyway, click the button marked "Create a Restore Point" and then click Next command button. Enter a description as to why the restore point is being created, and click Create. When it tells you the Restore point has been created click Finish.

To restore your system using an existing Restore Point, use the option "Restore my computer to an earlier time": Click Next. Select the Restore Point to use and click the Next command button. In this option always accept the defaults provided by the system and you shouldn't have any problems.☺

# Microsoft Alternative

## Browsers

Microsoft is certain it has a lock on the computer software market since the majority of personal computers are running one form or another of its' varied operating system base. Even though they have been discontinued for a long time, some users still have and rely on DOS (believe it or not), Windows 3.1, Windows 95. Quite a few users are hanging on to Windows 98 (SE), Millennium, and NT. The rest of us are using Windows 2000, XP, or XP Media Centre, and a few are even using a beta version of Windows 64. However, until recently better than 90 percent were probably using Internet Explorer and Outlook Express for browsing and email. But that may change quickly and only you can be the judge.

If you surf over to <http://www.mozilla.org> you will find a new robust offering to replace the inherently bug ridden Internet Explorer and Outlook Express. To be fair, these tools are only bug ridden because they have been around a long time and it seems everybody uses them. That makes them the most visible target. Given time, the offerings from Mozilla could take their place, but right now Firefox (browser) and Thunderbird (email) seem bulletproof.

Table 1 (page 4) shows a quick comparison between Firefox and Internet Explorer. Firefox seems to be the clear winner and has thrown down the gauntlet. Will Microsoft pick it up and issue a similar product. Only time will tell (and the number of defectors to this new offering).

Personally, I have quite enjoyed getting to know Firefox and have changed both Firefox and IE to stop asking if they can be the default browser. I would like to be able to choose which one I want by clicking an icon. After all, if I have Word and Word Perfect installed on the same system they don't ask if they can be the default word processor every time they start.

So far I have modified the Bookmark Toolbar to list my suppliers for really easy access and have extensively used the tabbed window interface to compare monitors and other components for a recent system. I feel I was able to comparison shop

between manufactures considerably faster than with IE and multiple windows open on the task bar.

I have also utilized themes to change the default visual appearance of the menu bars and quite like saferfox xpanded v2.3.1.

I definitely think this product is worthy of a month long test drive.

## Email

Most Windows operating systems have come with an email client called Outlook Express which quite simply is the minute subset of Microsoft Outlook that is used to get and send email and not much else. It is limited to one email account and depends on an Identity Manager to allow for multiple accounts which means to get all your email you must keep switching Identities. For that reason alone many people use the full feature version of Outlook, but have to buy Microsoft Office to get it.

There is a new email client available from Mozilla called Thunderbird which is more Outlook like, but is squaring off directly against Outlook Express. Features available in Thunderbird which surpass the features in Outlook Express include multiple email accounts in a common inbox, junk mail filtering, customizable views, and an RSS feed.

Regarding SPAM (or junk mail) Thunderbird will initially identify suspect email with a junk icon, but you can train the program to recognize and deal with SPAM effectively and quickly. Once you have trained Thunderbird to effectively identify junk mail, it will be processed into a special junk mail folder automatically. You also have the option of immediately deleting email identified as Junk, instead of simply moving it to a junk mail folder. If you move it to a folder, you can set a time limit that will automatically delete junk mail which is older than x number of days.

As with Firefox, there are many different themes available to customize and personalize your copy of Thunderbird, but installing them is a little trickier. Refer to the instructions on each web page as to the proper steps, but don't be surprised if they don't all work as expected. It took me about three tries but I finally installed Nautipolis which adds colour and eye catching

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Mozilla Firefox	Microsoft Internet Explorer
No security problems YET!	Security problems which are regularly plugged by Microsoft Update yet never seem to go away
Tabbed windows for easier surfing	Open windows appear on the Windows Task bar
Seems to load pages faster than other browsers	Quick response, possibly due to cached pages
Cleanup available via Clean MOCache @ <a href="http://www.buttuglysoftware.com">www.buttuglysoftware.com</a>	Cleanup available via Clean Cache @ <a href="http://www.buttuglysoftware.com">www.buttuglysoftware.com</a>
Fully customizable toolbars	Fully customizable existing toolbars
Bookmark Toolbar is standard, customizable, used for most often visited sites, can stay visible at all times	No option available in IE
Google, Yahoo, Amazon, eBay, Dictionary.com are standard search engines	Default search engine is MSN
Additional search engines can be added	No additional search engines unless primary is replaced by a third party product like Copernic ( <a href="http://www.copernic.com">www.copernic.com</a> )
Primary Menu bar adds Go option to Go directly to recently visited sites	Firefox Go Option sort of available from drop down address bar history
Links from third party programs not yet implemented – hopefully soon	Links from third party programs like Norton and Epson available now
Visual presentation is changeable downloadable themes (Tools Menu)	Doesn't appear to be available in the online Help
Extensions (Tools menu) expand current capabilities	Doesn't appear to be available in the online Help
Online help – quite extensive	Online Help – quite extensive. Includes Tip of the Day

Table 1

Microsoft continued from page 3

icons to the menu bars.

The two main features that separate Thunderbird from Outlook Express is Junk Mail Filtering and Spell checking. These two alone make the choice of with email client to use quite easy. But if you have Outlook 2003, you already have the best available.

**Special Note:**

As of this writing the first magazine published “bug” has been reported for Firefox. The reported vulnerability “may let hackers misrepresent the source URL of a download.” While this risk is classed as a low level security risk, it can help scam artists trick users into downloading malicious software.

The launch of Firefox 1.0 was November 2004, and while originally heralded as the “bug free” Internet browser, it seems that no software can be labeled “bug free”.

There is a bug reporting site available from Firefox to let users identify the weaknesses of the product. You can find the complete list of user reported bugs:

<http://www.mozilla.org/support/firefox/bugs#duplicate>

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## MBTS TekSpecial

MicroByte TekSolutions generally does not offer used equipment for sale. Periodically however, we will refurbish a system with new components and resell it with an end user warranty. The following is such a system.

- Raidmax Mid Tower case with 420watt power supply and thermal controlled fans
- ASRock K7S41GX Motherboard with integrated 5.1 Channel Audio, Video, & LAN
- AMD Athlon XP 2100+ (1.73 GHz) processor, with 256MB DDR RAM
- 1.44 MB Floppy drive, 52x24x52x CD RW Optical Drive, 80GB 7200rpm IDE Hard Drive
- Microsoft Wireless Desktop Multimedia Keyboard and Optical Mouse
- Windows XP Professional, Norton Anti Virus 2005, Desktop Speakers
- Delivery, Installation & 6 month on site warranty

**\$ 699.00**

(PST & GST extra)

## F1 – HELP

While future issues will deal specifically with Word and Excel applications and how to use features within each, I thought it would be a good idea to get everyone up to speed with online Help as it is available in Windows Applications.

It used to be, and in a few cases is still true, that application software came with a user manual. It was usually used to prop up the bad leg of the derelict table in the corner of your office, or could be found in the bottom drawer of the filing cabinet under the lunch bag you thought was lost forever. In short, it was the one book that was generally never read, even though the author spent a great deal of time writing it.

I know from experience, since I once wrote application software and user manuals for a living. In one very memorable manual I put a prize on one of the pages offering the first reader to report it the full value of the software back. It took over two years from the release of the application before I actually had to pay out. But at least I knew that one user out of one hundred or so actually read the book. Today is no different, but Help is much closer than the book under your desk.

Every PC spawned in the IBM led revolution for personal computers has a row of programmable keys across the top labeled F1 through F10 or F12. While the use of many of these keys has changed over the last 25 years, the F1 key has always been reserved for HELP. Hence, the future name of this column will be called F1.

No matter what application you are in, press the F1 key and a window will pop up that really is there to help you. The Windows operating system is really just an application too. While the desktop is displayed, press F1 – up pops the home page for Help & Support. Here you can ask anything of Windows and probably get an answer which will help you. Bear in mind the questions you ask must be pertinent to the application you are using. Having said that, I just asked Word, “What is a ham sandwich?” and it attempted to answer by providing a very long list of possible responses. Unfortunately, none of these seem to relate to a ham sandwich but

at least the Help system tried to point me in the right direction. It may not always understand what you want, but it will always try to respond.

Years ago, help systems were not intuitive. You had to know what you needed help with in order to get it. Mail Merge would more likely return a definition than real help, but today it returns pointers to dozens of articles on How to send letters with ease, resume a mail merger, how to use data sources, troubleshooting, use it to print letters or do mass e-mailings, etc.

Even though Help has dramatically evolved through the last 25 years into a very intuitive on line encyclopedia, users are still afraid they will ask the wrong question.

**RULE NUMBER ONE:** There is no bad question! If you have a question, and you don't have an answer, you have a very good starting point.

**RULE NUMBER TWO:** There is no such thing as a dumb question. A computer cannot humiliate you, or laugh at you, or snicker at your question.

Phrasing the question you want an answer to may take a little time, but don't give up hope. Help systems are written by people just like you and me, and they really are there to help you. For example, you may want help in Word with lists of things that have those little balls or stars beside them, but at first don't seem to be able to think of them as bullets. I tried “information lists” and got a lot of hits but not what I wanted, so I tried again and asked for “format lists”. The second response offered “Restore a customized list format to its original setting” from the Help > Bulleted and Numbered Lists section. Many more of the responses were for Bullets and numbering so then I asked for help on Bullets, and I had more help than I knew what to do with.

You may not be successful on your first attempt, but here perseverance always pays off big time. It doesn't matter which application you use, the Help system will work virtually, if not identically, in every application. That is the beauty of the Windows environment.

Next issue we will begin work with an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of mileage for income tax purposes. ▢

# Tips & Tweaks

## Backing up Outlook Express

Probably the most widely used programs for email are Microsoft Outlook and Microsoft Outlook Express. In each of these applications, we get and send our electronic mail, and some of us even use them as a giant filing cabinet to save the email we receive. We create additional folders to categorize our stuff and we would be lost if we ever lost these precious emails. But I would estimate that less than 5 percent of all users actually backup their email folders on a regular basis. Some don't even have a clue as to where these files are stored. In this issue we will show you where they are stored and provide you with a simple method of backing them up.

## Outlook Express

Windows XP has made it easier to find the Outlook Express files, but they still reside in a hidden folder, so a small change must be made to Windows Explorer in order to "see" where they are. Open Windows Explorer, click on the Tools menu at the top of the page and select Folder Options. Next click on the View tab and under the Files and Folders section you will see a file folder labeled Hidden Files and Folders. The default option in Windows is to "Hide" this information. But we want to see it, so use your mouse to point to the Radio Button beside "Show hidden files and folders" and click once to move the dot into that circle. Another step you may want to take is to remove the check mark in the box that says "Hide extensions for known file types" so that you can see what the file extensions of the various files are. Once you have made these changes, click Apply and then OK to apply the changes and close the dialog box.

## Locating the Outlook Express Files

To begin the search for your Outlook Express files, expand (click the plus sign beside) My Computer, then the C: drive, and finally Documents and Settings. Next locate your user profile and expand that folder as well.

The Outlook Express files can be found within the Local Settings folder by following the path through Microsoft and Identities. Each Identity used for Outlook Express is labeled with a specific key similar to the following identifier. {775FA827-5EEF-4B27-

8B59-D08FC3F98582}. Expanding each of these folders will take you to the list of files that make up your folders within Outlook Express that hold your saved emails.

## Backing it up

The easiest way to back up your email is to right click on the "Identities" folder and drag it to your "My Documents" folder. When you let go of the mouse you will be prompted with a context menu offering Move here, Copy here, or Create a shortcut here. You want to choose the option to Copy Here. Every time you want to make another backup of what is in your Outlook Express, follow these instructions, but when you tell the system to Copy the files you will receive a warning that the folder already exists. Then you will tell the system to copy over the existing folder and replace the contents with the new information.

Now when you use a recordable device to backup the My Documents folder, all your email (as of the last backup) will be backed up as well.

## The Windows Address Book

The Windows Address Book is identified with a file that has a ".wab" file extension, and it is not stored in the same location as the Outlook Express email files.

Once again you will have to open Windows Explorer and search for this file. If you have removed the check mark to "Hide extensions for known file types" you will be able to do a search on the Documents and Settings folder for all files which have a wab extension. Since you may not know what the file is actually called, you can do a search for a file called \*.wab which tells the system to report on any file which has an extension of wab.

Once you have found the file with the search you can copy it to your My Documents folder using the same method as used in copying the Identities folder above.

Generally the Windows Address Book file can be found under each user name in Documents and Settings, Application Data, Microsoft, Address Book.

Once you have copied the address book file to My Documents, your optical backup will contain your address book as well. Now all you have to do is remember to back backups using your RW drive.▯