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If you read any article that involves editing the registry, you will no doubt see ominous warnings telling you that you can destroy Windows and/or your applications if you edit the registry incorrectly, and that you should **always make a full system backup before performing a registry modification**. While these statements may be true, the fact remains that there are things that you can do by editing the registry that you simply cannot do with the GUI. In this article, I want to share with you 10 handy registry hacks for Windows XP and Vista.

## 1: Disable AutoPlay

I always find it a bit annoying to insert a TechNet CD and have Windows open Internet Explorer and display a bunch of information I don't care about. I would rather just be able to navigate through the disc's file system and go directly to what I need. Fortunately, it's easy to create a registry setting that disables AutoPlay:

1. Navigate through the Registry Editor to `HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Policies\Explorer`.
2. Create a DWORD named `NoDriveTypeAutoRun`.
3. Set the value to `000000FF`.

## 2: Increase the maximum number of simultaneous downloads

As a technical writer, I'm constantly downloading files. Sometimes I need to download a lot of files, and Windows' limit on the number of files that can be downloaded simultaneously gets in the way. If you're in the same boat, you can tweak the registry so that Windows will let you download 10 files at a time:

1. Navigate through the Registry Editor to `HKCU\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Internet Settings`.
2. Create a new DWORD named `MaxConnectionsPerServer` and assign it a value of `0000000a`.
3. Create a new DWORD named `MaxConnectionsPer1_0Server` and assign it a value of `0000000a`.

## 3: Change the name of the registered user

When you install Windows, you're prompted to enter a username and a company name. But since it's fairly common for companies to merge, you may want to change the name of the company Windows is registered to by using this hack:

1. Navigate through the Registry Editor to `HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Windows NT\CurrentVersion`.
2. Change the values that are assigned to the `RegisteredOwner` and `RegisteredOrganization` keys to reflect the new ownership information.

## 4: Prevent the Recycle Bin from being deleted

If you've ever right-clicked on the Windows Recycle Bin, you know there's a Delete option, which can be used to get rid of it. If you want to prevent the Recycle Bin from accidental deletion, follow these steps:

1. Navigate through the Registry Editor to `HKCR\CLSID\{645FF040-5081-101B-9F08-00AA002F954E}`.
2. Create a new registry key called `Shell`.
3. Create a new registry key named `Delete` and put it beneath the `Shell` key. The path should look like this: `HKCR\CLSID\{645FF040-5081-101B-9F08-00AA002F954E}\Shell\Delete`.
4. Modify the `Default` key and assign it a value of `Recycle Bin`.

## 5: Eliminate cached logons

Windows is designed to allow users to log on using cached logins if no domain controller is available to authenticate the request. If you want to make sure that a login request is always authenticated by a domain controller, you could change the number of cached logons that are allowed from 10 to 0 (or you could increase the number of cached logins allowed to 50). To do so, follow these steps:

1. Navigate through the Registry Editor to: HKEY\_LOCAL\_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows NT\CurrentVersion\winlogon.
2. Create a new REG\_SZ setting named CachedLogonsCount.
3. Assign this new setting a value that reflects how many concurrent cached logins you want to allow.

## 6: Encrypt and decrypt from a shortcut menu

Normally, when you want to encrypt or decrypt a file in XP Pro or Vista, you just right-click on the file or folder and choose the Properties command from the shortcut menu. When the properties sheet appears, click the Advanced button on the General tab and then use either the Encrypt or the Decrypt option.

If all that seems like a lot of work, you can add those options to the shortcut menu you see when you right-click on a file:

1. Navigate through the Registry Editor to HKCU\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\Advanced.
2. Create a new DWORD called EncryptionContextMenu and assign it a value of 1.

## 7: Delay Windows Activation

Typically, when an organization deploys Vista, it will create a master image, run SYSPREP, and deploy the image. But it might be a while between the time that SYSPREP is run and when Vista is actually deployed. Microsoft will allow you to extend the activation period by 30 days, but you can do that only three times. You can, however, use a registry hack to get around this limitation:

1. Navigate through the registry to HKLM\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows NT\CurrentVersion\SL.
2. Change the value associated with the SkipRearm key to 1.
3. Open a Command Prompt window and enter the following command: `slmgr -rearm`.

## 8: Relocate your offline files

When you use Vista's Offline Files feature, the offline file cache is automatically placed on your C: drive. But my laptop has two hard drives in it, and I wanted to configure Vista to place my offline files onto my secondary hard drive. I accomplished the task by following these steps:

1. Open the Control Panel and click on the Network And Internet link, followed by the Offline Files link. Windows will display the Offline Files properties sheet.
2. Disable offline files if they are currently enabled.
3. Click OK and reboot the machine.
4. When the computer reboots, open the Registry Editor and navigate to HKEY\_LOCAL\_MACHINE\System\CurrentControlSet\Services\CSC.
5. Create a new string value named Parameters.
6. Assign this value to the Parameters key:

```
\??\e:\csc
```

where e: is the drive letter you want to use.

7. Exit the Registry Editor and reboot the computer.
8. When the machine reboots, enable offline files.
9. Reboot the computer one last time. Now, you can start making folders available offline.

## 9: Disable User Account Control

One of the things about Vista that seems to irritate a lot of people is the User Account Control feature. In essence, an administrator is treated as a standard user. Administrators who attempt to perform an administrative action receive a prompt asking whether they initiated the action. I think that this prompt is a valuable safeguard against malware, but since a lot of people don't like it, here's how to use the registry editor to suppress the prompt:

1. Navigate through the registry editor to  
HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Policies\System.
2. Change the value of the ConsentPromptBehaviorAdmin key to 00000000.

## 10: Don't display the last user who logged in

Windows Vista is designed so that when you press Ctrl+Alt+Delete to log in, it will display the name of the user who logged in most recently. This can be a bit of a problem if multiple users share a common PC. They may forget to check to see who was logged in previously and key in their own password in association with another user's login name. If they try this enough times, they could lock the other user out. You can get around this problem by using a simple registry tweak to tell Windows not to display the name of the user who was logged in previously:

1. Navigate through the Registry Editor to  
HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Policies\System.
2. Set the DontDisplayLastName key to a value of 1.

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## Version history

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