

Compressed Folders Versus Zip

In classic Microsoft fashion, a third-party feature—file compression in this case—has become so useful and widely utilized that Microsoft has decided to include it in the operating system.

Note | A couple of previous examples of this are the inclusion of disk defragmentation software, disk quota support, and improved backup software in Windows 2000, all licensed from their respective companies

Also in classic fashion, Microsoft implements this new feature with limited functionality—just enough to tantalize you, but if you want full functionality, you still need to get the third-party product. The new compressed folders feature in Windows Server 2003 provides similar capabilities as third-party add-ons such as PKZip and WinZip. But can it be used as a replacement? If you just want to be able to compress files, yes. However, the Zip programs (particularly WinZip) provide additional features that might make it worth the cost. Let's take a look at some of the features offered by WinZip and how they compare to the built-in compressed folders feature:

- **Compression ratio**—This is probably the most important feature for a file compression program. It determines how small the file(s) can be compressed and thus how much disk space you reclaim by compressing. Surprisingly, the compression ratios for the built-in compressed folder feature and the default compression type for WinZip are relatively close, if not identical. It makes you wonder whether Microsoft licensed the compression technology from WinZip. However, you can specify that WinZip use maximum compression.
- **Compression speed**—With WinZip, you can specify how to compress based on what is more important: speed or size. You can perform a minimal compression, which is faster than performing the normal compression. Zipping for maximum compression is slower.
- **Ability to open files from the Zip archive without having to extract them**—Both compressed folders and WinZip will do this. In some cases, you might be able to run programs from compressed archives without extracting them depending on whether the program has any dependencies, such as files that might need to be extracted. One benefit is that the compressed folder's feature displays the files in the original hierarchy of folders and subfolders. WinZip displays as a single file list and lists the folder or subfolder in which the file exists.
- **Ability to protect the Zipped file with a password**—Both programs allow this, although it's not immediately apparent using the compressed folders feature. With compressed folders, you have to create the Zipped archive, open it, and then select Add a Password from the File menu. With WinZip, in addition to being able to create a password after the Zip is created, you have the option to create a password while zipping the file.

- **Pop-up menu extensions**—These options enable you to select files and folders, right-click, and get options for zipping or unzipping. WinZip offers a few additional menu options:

Add to Zip File	Extract to Here
Add to xxx.zip	Extract to Folder C:\xxx
Add to Recently Used Zip File	Extract to Folder
Zip and EMail xxx.zip	Email xxx.zip
Zip and EMail Plus	Create Self-Extractor (.Exe)
Configure	Configure
Extract to	

The compressed folders pop-up menu offers only a Sent to Compressed (Zipped) Folders option (which is the same as Add to xxx.zip) and an Extract All option.

- **Self-extracting executables**—WinZip has the capability to create self-extracting executables to make your ZIP file easier to distribute. Self-extracting executables are helpful because they don't require an unzipping application. They are particularly useful for distributing files, especially to people who don't have an unzipping application. The built-in compressed folders feature does not make self-extracting executables.

The following options are offered by WinZip but not by the compressed folders feature:

- **Virus Scanning**—You have the option to use your virus scanning software to scan your zipped files for viruses.
- **Print Archive Listing**—Provides the capability to print a complete list of all the files included in the archive, whereas Compressed Folders does not.
- **Splitting Zip Files**—Provides the capability to break a single Zip file into multiple smaller Zip files. This is particularly useful.
- **E-Mail**—Provides the capability to launch your email application to send your Zip archives via email.
- **Comments**—You can put comments in your Zip archives, which essentially provides a little note to whoever opens the Zip file.
- **Test**—You can test your Zip archives to verify their integrity.

As you can see, WinZip offers several additional features over and above basic file compression. However, you can get by with the minimal functionality of Windows Server 2003's Compressed Folders. For basic functionality, it's virtually identical. Depending on how you use zipped archives, you might not need the extra functionality provided by WinZip. Personally, I like the extra features WinZip offers.