

# TWEAK it AND FREAK it

A KILLER GUIDE TO MAKING WINDOWS RUN YOUR WAY



MAKE THE INTERNET  
RUN FASTER

LOCK THE BAD  
GUYS OUT

GIVE WINDOWS A  
NEEDED MAKEOVER

SPEED UP THAT  
SLOW COMPUTER

TWEAK YOUR  
WIRELESS CONNECTIONS

# **Tweak It and Freak It: A Killer Guide to Making Windows Run Your Way**

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# INTRODUCTION

**H**undreds of millions of people use Windows every day, and it's a safe bet that some of them would not describe themselves as happy Windows campers. Regardless of skill level, most people have something they dislike about Windows, and they often have a whole laundry list of gripes. "Why can't Windows do this rather than that?" "Why does Windows do X instead of Y?" "Wouldn't it be great if Windows could do Z?" Scratch the surface of most Windows users and you'll come upon a seething cauldron of unmet needs, unrequited desires, and unending frustration at being stuck with Windows the way it is.

However, a funny thing happens when you tell people that it doesn't have to be this way, that they don't have to put up with the out-of-the-box Windows experience: An initial skepticism soon gives way and their eyes light up with an almost forgotten feeling—hope. Specifically, the hope that they really can make Windows smarter, safer, faster, more flexible, and more aligned to their needs.

## IN THIS INTRODUCTION

- Who Should Read This Book?
- Conventions Used in This Book

The secret behind this hope? Tweaks, tweaks, and more tweaks! Most people think that Windows is set in stone, but that apparently solid surface is really just a thin veneer that Microsoft slaps onto Windows to ensure that new and fumble-fingered users don't get into trouble. Strip off that veneer and a whole world comes into view, one that's eminently tweakable, moddable, hackable, customizable, and personalizable. Within this world lie tools and technologies that anyone can use to tweak and tune almost every aspect of Windows, from startup to shutdown, from the interface to the Internet, from security to scripting.

## Tweak It and Freak It!

*Tweak It and Freak It: A Killer Guide to Making Windows Run Your Way* is your guide to this tweakable Windows landscape. With a lighthearted and lightly irreverent tone, and with a bare minimum of jargon and technical claptrap, this book takes you through hundreds of useful, unique, and easy tweaks designed to improve Windows Vista and Windows XP. The key words here are useful, unique, and easy:

- **Useful**—Any monkey can, say, reverse the interface shadows, but what's the point of doing that? In this book, if a hack doesn't help you get your work done, solve a problem, or make Windows more secure or reliable, it didn't make the cut.
- **Unique**—There are lots of Windows tweaks available on the Internet and in other books, so you certainly don't want another conglomeration of the same old Registry hacks. Instead, this book presents a fresh collection of tweaks that include many custom hacks that I've built over the years.
- **Easy**—A tweak that takes you an hour to implement and yet saves only a few seconds a day isn't much of a tweak. This book focuses on tweaks that you can implement with a few steps, or with easy-to-understand plug-and-play scripts.

My goal with this book is to empower you to take a hands-on, do-it-yourself approach to tweaking Windows. In the end, you'll no longer have a version of Windows that Microsoft thinks you should have, but rather a tweaked and tuned version that suits the way you work and play.

## Who Should Read This Book?

This book is aimed at Windows users who have a gripe, a beef, or an ax to grind and are looking for ways to overcome their Windows woes and shortcomings with targeted, easy-to-implement tweaks and tune-ups. This book will also appeal to curious users who want to travel down different Windows roads, rebellious users who want to thumb their noses at standard-issue Windows techniques, and power users who want to get the most of Windows.

To that end, this book includes the following features:

- A focus on practical, useful tweaks rather than mere tricks.
- Tweaks for both Windows Vista and Windows XP.
- Icons that show you which operating systems the tweak works with and the difficulty level of each tweak.
- Unique tweaks, many of which have never been seen before.
- Explanations of key concepts for novice users.
- In-depth coverage of the inner workings of each hack for more experienced users.
- A friendly and lightly humorous tone that I trust will make you feel at home with the subject and keep boredom at bay.

## Conventions Used in This Book

To make your life easier, this book includes various features and conventions that help you get the most out of this book:

Steps	Throughout the book, I've broken many building, upgrading, and repairing tasks into easy-to-follow step-by-step procedures.
Things you type	Whenever I suggest that you type something, what you type appears in a <b>bold monospace</b> font.
Filenames, folder names, and code	These things appear in a monospace font.
Commands	Commands and their syntax use the monospace font, too. Command placeholders (which stand for what you actually type) appear in an <i>italic monospace</i> font.

Pull-down menu commands I use the following style for all application menu commands: *Menu*, *Command*, where *Menu* is the name of the menu you pull down and *Command* is the name of the command you select. Here's an example: File, Open. This means that you pull down the File menu and select the Open command.

This book also uses the following boxes to draw your attention to important (or merely interesting) information:

**NOTE** The Note box presents asides that give you more information about the current topic. These tidbits provide extra insights that offer a better understanding of the task.

**TIP** The Tip box tells you about methods that are easier, faster, or more efficient than the standard methods.

**CAUTION** The all-important Caution box tells you about potential accidents waiting to happen. There are always ways to mess things up when you're working with computers. These boxes help you avoid those traps and pitfalls.

## Online Chapters

I had such a good time writing this book that I actually ended up writing too much! Way too much, in fact, but that's not a problem in this day and age because what wouldn't fit between the covers of the book can easily fit between the covers of my website. And that's just what I've done: Six of this book's chapters are available online at my site. Just point your favorite web browser to [www.mcfedries.com/TweakItFreakIt](http://www.mcfedries.com/TweakItFreakIt).

These files are also freely available from Que Publishing at [www.informit.com/title/0789738228](http://www.informit.com/title/0789738228). There, you'll also find information on Que's other products.

## Running Scripts

You've seen throughout this book that tweaking Windows involves making changes to object properties, program options, Registry settings, group policies, and other under-the-hood adjustments. It's surprising how often a simple change—such as checking or unchecking a check box or activating an option button—can make a major difference (hopefully for the better!) in how Windows works.

However, there are lots of Windows tweaks where these more straightforward adjustments aren't enough. Instead, you have to bring out the heavy-duty tools: scripts. Throughout this book, I've helped you unlock the potential of Windows by providing you with sample scripts that automate routine or cumbersome tasks and take advantage of the power that only scripting and programming can provide. This isn't a programming book, so I've tried not to overwhelm you with too many scripts. However, there are quite a few, and it's important that you know how to get those scripts onto your system and run them.

### IN THIS CHAPTER

- Understanding Windows Script Host
- Introducing Script Files
- Running Script Files Directly
- Using WScript for Windows-Based Scripts
- Using CScript for Command-Line Scripts
- Script Properties and .wsh Files

That's the goal of this chapter. You won't learn how to program scripts, but you will learn how to unlock their power by running them on your system.

## Understanding Windows Script Host

As you might know, Internet Explorer is really just an empty container application that's designed to host different data formats, including ActiveX controls, various file formats (such as Microsoft Word documents and Microsoft Excel worksheets), and several ActiveX scripting engines. A *scripting engine* is a dynamic link library (DLL) that provides programmatic support for a particular scripting language. Internet Explorer supports two such scripting engines: VBScript (`VBScript.dll`) and JavaScript (`JScript.dll`). This enables web programmers to write small programs—*scripts*—that interact with the user, control the browser, set cookies, open and close windows, and more. Although these scripting engines don't offer full-blown programmability (you can't compile scripts, for example), they do offer modern programming structures such as loops, conditionals, variables, and objects. In other words, they're a huge leap beyond what a mere batch file can do.

The Windows Script Host is also a container application, albeit a scaled-down application in that its only purpose in life is to host scripting engines. Right out of the box, the Windows Script Host supports both the VBScript and JavaScript engines. However, Microsoft designed the Windows Script Host to be a universal host that can support any ActiveX-based scripting engine. Therefore, third-party vendors also offer scripting engines for languages such as Perl, Tcl, and Rexx.

The key difference between Internet Explorer's script hosting and the Windows Script Host is the environment in which the scripts run. Internet Explorer scripts are web page-based, so they control and interact with either the web page or the web browser. The Windows Script Host runs scripts within the Windows shell or from the command prompt, so you use these scripts to control various aspects of Windows. Here's a sampling of the things you can do:

- Execute Windows programs.
- Create and modify shortcuts.
- Use Automation to connect and interact with Automation-enabled applications such as Microsoft Word, Outlook, and Internet Explorer.

**NOTE** This chapter does not teach you how to program in either VBScript or JavaScript. If you're looking for a programming tutorial, my *VBA for the Office 2007 System* (Que, 2007) is a good place to start. (VBScript is a subset of VBA—Visual Basic for Applications.) For JavaScript, try my *Special Edition Using JavaScript* (Que, 2001).



- Read, add, and delete Registry keys and items.
- Access the VBScript and JavaScript object models, which give access to the file system, runtime error messages, and more.
- Use pop-up dialog boxes to display information to the user and determine which button the user clicked to dismiss the dialog box.
- Read environment variables, which are system values that Windows Home Server keeps in memory, such as the folder into which Windows Home Server is installed—the %SystemRoot% environment variable—and the name of the computer—the %ComputerName% environment variable.
- Deal with network resources, including mapping and unmapping network drives, accessing user data (such as the username and user domain), and connecting and disconnecting network printers.
- Script the Windows Management Instrumentation (WMI) interface.

**CAUTION** Scripts are obviously very powerful and can access and modify the sensitive innards of your system. Therefore, take extra care if you decide to download scripts from the Internet. In fact, I highly recommend that you only grab scripts from sources that you trust completely.

What about speed? After all, you wouldn't want to load something that's the size of Internet Explorer each time you need to run a simple script. That's not a problem because, as I've said, the Windows Script Host does nothing but host scripting engines, so it has much less memory overhead than Internet Explorer. That means that your scripts run quickly. For power users looking for a Windows-based batch language, the Windows Script Host is a welcome tool.

## Introducing Script Files

Scripts look complex, but they're actually nothing but simple text files. This means that you can create and edit script files using Notepad or some other text editor. You can use a word processor such as WordPad to create and edit scripts, but you must make sure that you save these files using the program's Text Only document type. For VBScript, a good alternative to Notepad is the editor that comes with either Visual Basic or any program that supports VBA (such as the Office suite). Just remember that VBScript is a subset of VBA (which is, in turn, a subset of Visual Basic), so it does not support all objects and features.

In a web page, you use the `<script>` tag to specify the scripting language you're using, as in this example:

```
<SCRIPT LANGUAGE="VBScript">
```

With the Windows Script Host, the script file's extension specifies the scripting language:

- For VBScript, save your text files using the `.vbs` extension (which is registered as the following file type: VBScript Script File).
- For JavaScript, use the `.js` extension (which is registered as the following file type: JScript Script File).

As described in the next three sections, you have three ways to run your scripts: by launching the script files directly, by using `WScript.exe`, or by using `CScript.exe`.

## Running Script Files Directly

The easiest way to run a script from within Windows is to launch the `.vbs` or `.js` file directly:

- Locate the script file in Windows Explorer and then double-click the file.
- Open the Run dialog box, type the file's path and name, and then click OK.
- In Vista, if you stored the script file within your user profile folders, open the Start menu, type the name of the script file into the Search box, and then click the script file in the results.

Note, however, that these techniques don't work at the command prompt. For that, you need to use the `CScript` program described a bit later.

## Using WScript for Windows-Based Scripts

The `.vbs` and `.js` file types have an `open` method that's associated with `WScript` (`WScript.exe`), which is the Windows-based front-end for the Windows Script Host. In other words, launching a script file named, for example, `MyScript.vbs` is equivalent to entering the following command in the Run dialog box:

```
wscript myscript.vbs
```

The WScript host also defines several parameters that you can use to control the way the script executes. Here's the full syntax:

```
WSCRIPT [filename] [arguments] [//B] [//D] [//E:engine] [//H:host] [//I]
➤ [//Job:xxxx] [//S] [//T:ss] [//X]
```

- filename* Specifies the filename, including the path of the script file, if necessary.
- arguments* Specifies optional arguments required by the script. An *argument* is a data value that the script uses as part of its procedures or calculations.
- //B Runs the script in batch mode, which means script errors and Echo method output lines are suppressed.
- //D Enables Active Debugging. If an error occurs, the script is loaded into the Microsoft Script Debugger (if it's installed), and the offending statement is highlighted.
- //E:*engine* Executes the script using the specified scripting *engine*, which is the scripting language to use when running the script.
- //H:*host* Specifies the default scripting host. For *host*, use either CScript or WScript.
- //I Runs the script in interactive mode, which displays script errors and Echo method output lines.
- //Job:*id* In a script file that contains multiple jobs, executes only the job with *id* attribute equal to *id*.
- //S Saves the specified WScript arguments as the default for the current user; uses the following Registry key to save the settings:  
  
HKCU\Software\Microsoft\Windows Script Host\Settings
- //T:*ss* Specifies the maximum time in seconds (*ss*) that the script can run before it shuts down automatically.
- //X Executes the entire script in the Microsoft Script Debugger (if it's installed).

For example, the following command runs `MyScript.vbs` in batch mode with a 60-second maximum execution time:

```
wscript myscript.vbs //B //TT:60
```

## CREATING SCRIPT JOBS

A script *job* is a section of code that performs a specific task or set of tasks. Most script files contain a single job. However, it's possible to create a script file with multiple jobs. To do this, first surround the code for each job with the `<script>` and `</script>` tags, and then surround those with the `<job>` and `</job>` tags. In the `<job>` tag, include the `id` attribute and set it to a unique value that identifies the job. Finally, surround all the jobs with the `<package>` and `</package>` tags. Here's an example:

```
<package>
<job id="A">
<script language="VBScript">
    WScript.Echo "This is Job A."
</script>
</job>

<job id="B">
<script language="VBScript">
    WScript.Echo "This is Job B."
</script>
</job>
</package>
```

Save the file using the Windows Script File (`.wsf`) extension.

## Using CScript for Command-Line Scripts

The Windows Script Host has a second host front-end application called CScript (`CScript.exe`), which enables you to run scripts from the command line. In its simplest form, you launch CScript and use the name of the script file (and its path, if required) as a parameter, as in this example:

```
cscript myscript.vbs
```

**NOTE** If you write a lot of scripts, the Microsoft Script Debugger is an excellent programming tool. If there's a problem with a script, the debugger can help you pinpoint its location. For example, the debugger enables you to step through the script's execution one statement at a time. If you don't have the Microsoft Script Debugger, you can download a copy from [msdn2.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ms950396.aspx](http://msdn2.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ms950396.aspx).

The Windows Script Host displays the following banner and then executes the script:

```
Microsoft (R) Windows Script Host Version 5.6 for Windows
Copyright (C) Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
```

As with WScript, the CScript host has an extensive set of parameters you can specify:

```
CSCRIPT [filename] [arguments] [//B] [//D] [//E:engine] [//H:host] [//I]
▶[//Job:xxxx] [//S] [//T:ss] [//X] [//LOGO | //NOLOGO] [//U]
```

This syntax is almost identical to that of WScript, but it adds the following three parameters:

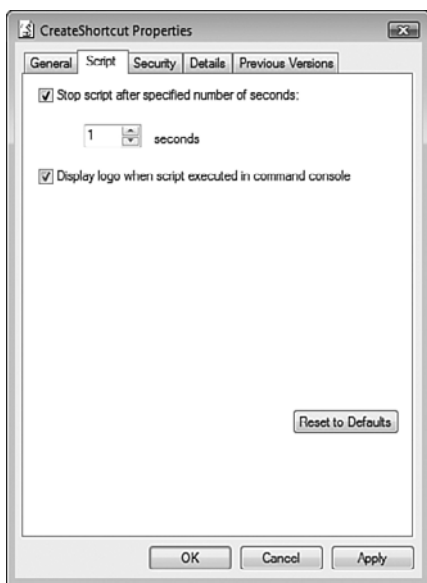
//LOGO	Displays the Windows Script Host banner at startup
//NOLOGO	Hides the Windows Script Host banner at startup
//U	Uses Unicode for redirected input/output from the console

## Script Properties and .wsh Files

In the previous two sections, you saw that the WScript and CScript hosts have a number of parameters you can specify when you execute a script. It's also possible to set some of these options by using the properties associated with each script file. To see these properties, right-click a script file and then click Properties. In the properties sheet that appears, display the Script tab, shown in Figure 37.1. You have two options:

**Stop Script After Specified Number of Seconds**—If you activate this check box, Windows shuts down the script after it has run for the number of seconds specified in the associated spin box. This is useful for scripts that might hang during execution. For example, a script that attempts to enumerate all the mapped network drives at startup might hang if the network is unavailable.

**Display Logo When Script Executed in Command Console**—As you saw in the previous section, the CScript host displays some banner text when you run a script at the command prompt. If you deactivate this check box, the Windows Script Host suppresses this banner (unless you use the //LOGO parameter).

**FIGURE 37.1**

*In a script file's properties sheet, use the Script tab to set some default options for the script.*

When you make changes to these properties, the Windows Script Host saves your settings in a new file that has the same name as the script file, except with the `.wsh` (Windows Script Host Settings) extension. For example, if the script file is `MyScript.vbs`, the settings are stored in `MyScript.wsh`. These `.wsh` files are text files organized into sections, much like `.ini` files. Here's an example:

```
[ScriptFile]
Path=C:\Users\Paul\Documents\Scripts\
CreateShortcut.vbs
[Options]
Timeout=10
DisplayLogo=0
```

To use these settings when running the script, use either `WScript` or `CScript` and specify the name of the `.wsh` file:

```
wscript myscript.wsh
```

**NOTE** Rather than setting properties for individual scripts, you might prefer to set global properties that apply to the `WScript` host itself. Those global settings then apply to every script that runs using the `WScript` host. To do this, run `WScript.exe` without parameters. This displays the properties sheet for `WScript`, which contains only the `Script` tab shown in Figure 37.1. The settings you choose in the properties sheet are stored in the following Registry key:

```
HKLM\Software\Microsoft\
Windows Script Host\Settings
```

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