
Office XP Tips

We present the first in a series of tips and tricks designed to help you understand and support Office XP.

By Dennis Jarrett

Office XP has been shipping for a few months now and, although the sales of upgrades were initially slow, copies bundled with new PCs mean that it is now in widespread use. This article presents some tips and tricks for support staff to ensure that users get the best from the latest version of this office suite.

Ease The Panes

All Office XP applications feature one or more nifty task pane sidebars for easy access to various types of editing tools. They can get in the way, though, for they do take up around a fifth of the screen. The good news is task panes are both resizable and detachable - click at the top edge, drag it away, and drop it somewhere else: click on any edge and drag to resize it. Next time you run the application the task pane will appear where you last left it. And each application now remembers the position of its own task pane, so you can customise that for different apps. To restore the task pane to its default position, docked on the right of the display, drag it as far to the right as you can. It should click back into place.

Privacy Perfect

In the XP versions of Word, PowerPoint and Excel you can save files with all personal information stripped out. In any of these you can go to Tools, Options, Security and click the Remove Personal Information From This File On Save box. The personal information that will henceforth be omitted when files are saved includes the source data that shows up when someone right-clicks on the file name and selects Properties then Summary - specifically your name as author, your company and your manager. Also hidden will be the names of authors associated with edits that are normally attributed when someone use Track Changes and the other review and mark-up tools.

Take Your Office With You

The new Save My Settings wizard (found under Start, Programs, Microsoft Office Tools) provides a way of saving an individual user's personal settings for Office XP applications. The settings include toolbar and menu customisations, templates and personal styles. The wizard saves your settings as a .OPS file on whatever local or network drive you specify. You can also save to a Web location, including Microsoft's own secure server designed for the purpose. To recreate your settings, or to apply them to a foreign PC, simply run the wizard again and choose the restore option rather than save.

Quick Access To The Smart Tag menu

When the Smart Tag indicator appears under text, press Alt-Shift-F10. Using the arrow keys, move the cursor to the tagged text and then press Alt-Shift-F10 to pop up the relevant Smart Tag menu. Well, it might just be easier than clicking the Smart Tag icon to get the same result - and the cursor doesn't need to be on top of the icon: the keyboard shortcut will work so long as the icon is currently being displayed, and the cursor can be located anywhere on the Smart Tagged text.

Fast Help

Office XP has famously disabled the irritating Office Assistant as the default Help mechanism (though for masochists it's still there, as an option on the Help menu). Instead there's a saner and less annoying quick-access Help tool replacement - the "Type a question for Help" box that appears in the upper right corner of the Office XP applications (everything except FrontPage 2002). Type a question or some keywords, press Enter, and you'll get a drop-down list of possible answers. Click on any of them to display the appropriate help text.

Make The Most Of The Clipboard

Office XP doubles the size of the neat Office Clipboard. You can now store and retrieve up to 24 items using cut or copy. (Any more than that and the Clipboard will start to overwrite the oldest items). The Clipboard task pane should pop up whenever you cut or copy two or more items. If it doesn't, and if you want it to do so, use Edit, Office Clipboard (or press Ctrl-C twice) to bring up the Clipboard and then click the Options buttons at the bottom of the task pane and select Show Office Clipboard Automatically. You can cut and copy information from just about any Windows application into the Office XP clipboard - including images - but you can paste from the Clipboard only into Office XP documents.

Kill Those Tags

If you decide that Smart Tags are more trouble than they're worth - and the appearance of those squiggly lines and pop-up icons can be extremely irritating when you're in full flow - it is possible to get rid of them. There isn't a single disable-all-Smart Tags command, and there isn't even any way of killing off all the Smart Tags inside a particular application. There's scope here for some clever macro-writing, but in the meantime here's how to do it.

In Word, to turn off the Paste Options Smart Tag, go to Tools, Options, Edit and clear the Show Paste Options button box. To turn off Smart Tags that recognize names, dates, times, addresses, places, telephone numbers, and recently used email addresses, go to Tools, AutoCorrect Options, Smart Tags and untick the Label text with Smart Tags and Show Smart Tag Action buttons boxes. (You can of course select individual Smart Tags by checking the boxes in the Recognizer list.) To turn off the AutoCorrect Smart Tag go to Tools, AutoCorrect Options, AutoCorrect and clear the Show AutoCorrect Options buttons box.

In Excel 2002, to turn off the Paste Options Smart Tag go to Tools, Options, Edit and clear the Show Paste Options buttons box. This also disables Excel's AutoFill Options Smart Tag. To turn off the AutoCorrect Smart Tag go to Tools, AutoCorrect Options, Smart Tags and clear the Label data with Smart Tags box. To turn off the formula-checking Smart Tag go to Tools, Options, Error Checking and clear the Enable background error checking box.

In PowerPoint 2002, to turn off the AutoCorrect Smart Tag go to Tools, AutoCorrect Options, AutoCorrect and clear the Show AutoCorrect options buttons box. To turn off the AutoFormat and AutoFit Smart Tags go to Tools, AutoCorrect Options, AutoFormat As You Type and clear the boxes labelled AutoFit title text to placeholder, AutoFit body text to placeholder, and Automatic layout for inserted objects. To turn off the Paste Options Smart Tag go to Tools, Options, Edit and clear the Show Paste Options buttons box.

Finally in Outlook 2002, to turn off the Paste Options Smart Tag go to Tools, Options, Advanced options and clear the Show Paste Options box.

Drawing Borders In Excel

Let's have a big hand for the new Borders toolbar. Display it using View, Toolbars, Borders and you'll be able to draw borders very easily around one or more cells. Select the border-drawing style you want (line style, colour, and whole-grid or outline) and simply click and drag from one corner of the group to the corner diagonally opposite. It also works from drawing horizontal or vertical lines alongside a group of cells.

Wrong Number Alignments

So it might not happen to you, but if you should find that applying right alignment to an Excel cell actually produces precisely the opposite effect (and ditto for left-alignment), don't worry too much: it's a bug. You'll have to live with it until Microsoft decides to patch it. The problem occurs if the cell contains a number, if it's formatted with Wrap Text (selected via Cells, Format, Alignment), and if you have the specified the View current sheet right-to-left (Options, Tools, International).

Fat Numbers In Thin Columns

Old hands know that Excel doesn't like displaying long numbers in narrow columns: you get a line of hash marks instead, and much time and effort has been spent in making the columns fit their contents when the sheet doesn't want to fit the page.

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At least Excel 2002 will show you the hidden number via a pop-up ToolTip that appears if you let the cursor hover over the cell.

Automated Web Publishing

Excel 2002 adds an extremely useful auto-update option when you save worksheets in HTML format and post them to the Web. When you save the workbook (using File, Save As Web Page) you'll see that the dialog includes a Publish button. Click this and you'll be taken to an option dialog where you can select all or part of the worksheet. Specify whether the resulting web page will use any kind of interactivity, and give a folder and a filename as a location for the Web page. There's also the option to select AutoRepublish every time this worksheet is saved, which is pretty explicit. It's worth ticking the box labelled Open Published Page In Web Browser to verify that everything will appear as you expect.

Colour-Coded Tabs

You can colour-code workbook tabs. Right-click any of the tabs along the bottom of the screen, choose Tab Color from the menu and select a colour from the chart.

See Selected Cells

The new Watch Window lets you key tabs on several cells at once. Right-click on a cell and select Add Watch. That puts the cell's details - including its contents - into a list in the Watch Window. So you can observe those cells even when you're working elsewhere in the spreadsheet or in another sheet of the workbook. Any changes that affect the watched cells will immediately be reflected in the Watch Window. Double-click on any line in the Watch Window list and you'll go straight to that cell in the worksheet. Moving a cell doesn't affect the Watch Window, except that you'll see the cell reference change. Deleting a cell will remove it from the Watch Window list. The Watch Window remains on top of your work, though you can of course move it around the screen. You can also drag it off the working area altogether, in which case the Watch Window will dock the other side of Excel's toolbars (you can even locate it above the menu command line).

Convert Text To Numbers

Sometimes you need to enter numbers into cells formatted for text. Ordinarily this means the number will be treated as text and you won't be able to perform calculations with them. Excel 2002 has a workaround for this: select the cell(s) in question and click on the options button that will pop up. Choose Convert To Number from the drop-down list. Numbers formatted as text will be indicated by a tiny green triangle in the upper-right corner of the cell. If it's not there, go to Tools, Options, Error Checking and the two boxes labelled Enable Background Error Checking and Number Stored As Text.

Add Animations

Microsoft came up with a classic use for Office XP's task panes with PowerPoint 2002's Animation Schemes view. With a task pane displayed (select View, Task Pane if necessary), click the small down-arrow at the head of the pane and go for Slide Design - Animation Schemes. This lists the 33 preset animation effects; click on any of them to apply and preview the effect.

You can also apply it to multiple slides. Select them by clicking the required items on the Slides tab at the far left of the PowerPoint window while holding down Ctrl key, then select your animation scheme from the task pane. You can also click the button labelled Apply To All Slides (found near the foot of the pane).

Look Before You Print

PowerPoint now includes a Print Preview option - and not before time. Find it under File, Print Preview. The pull-down menu alongside the Print What label on the toolbar lets you select which version of the presentation you need - slides, handouts in various styles, notes or an outline. Other useful settings at the top of the preview window toolbar include the ability to see how full-colour slides would appear on a black-and-white printer: go to Options, Color/Grayscale and choose Colour (On Black-and-White Printer) from the pop-up menu.

Trim File Sizes

Unexpectedly large presentations often owe their girth to obese bitmaps like photos and uncropped illustrations. One option would be to convert all images to a

Instant URLs Extended

You'll be used to Outlook recognising URLs in the body of messages and automatically presenting them as clickable hyperlinks. Outlook 2002 extends this to the Subject line as well, which might make life easier if you just want to send someone a Web page reference with no need for an actual message.

You can also include a clickable email address in the Subject line - just precede it with the HTML mailto: command. As you would expect, clicking on the link will pop up a new message window with that address as the recipient. This might be useful if you just want to send a terse notification of someone's address - the Subject line could for instance read "My new address is mailto:dj@fieldsplace.co.uk".

compressed format like JPG, but that could be a tedious process manually.

PowerPoint 2002 can automate the process. Pop up the Picture toolbar (View, Toolbars, Picture) and you'll see the Compress Pictures button fifth from the right. Click this and you'll get a useful collection of options in the dialog box. For instance, you can pick the resolution you require - 96 dpi for Web/Screen, 200 dpi for Print. Be aware that you won't then be able to return to the original resolution if you need to.

You also get the chance to delete cropped areas of pictures. That is often a source of file inflation. By default, PowerPoint doesn't actually erase parts of an image that you have cropped, merely hiding it. That's so you can return to the original later if you need to, but the data for the entire picture is stored with the slide. So selecting this option on the Compress Pictures dialog will discard the data (and remove the chance of editing the original image) to reduce the size of the PowerPoint file.

Add Diagrams

Another new and much-requested tool in PowerPoint 2002 is quick diagram drawing. Go to Insert, Diagram and you'll get a choice of six ready-to-use diagrams to drop on to the currently selected slide. They include a handy organisation chart, but all of the styles will be useful. No more fiddling about with the drawing toolbar or importing shapes that had to be created in other applications.

Unifying addressbooks

Outlook 2002 can use address information from many sources, each of them referred to in Outlook-speak as an address book, and the key point is that email address resolution or searches will be transparent in operation. So when you start typing a name in the To: field of a message form or the Find a contact box on the Standard toolbar, Outlook will look for that name in all the address books it knows about. The results will be reported in a list that makes no distinction between sources.

By default Outlook is configured to use its own Contacts folder. But you can also specify email addresses from an LDAP Internet directory service, the corporate Global Address List from Exchange Server, and/or a PAB Personal Address Book. New address books are added via Tools, Email accounts. Click one of the two options under the Directory label and follow the prompts.

The Personal Address Book was introduced some time ago as a basic contact management system, allowing Exchange users to maintain their own personal contact file away from corporate email addresses. When Outlook appeared, it came with a different (and more tightly integrated) contact management system called Contacts, richer and more flexible than the PAB - you can do much more in the way of sorting and filtering, for instance, and you can have many more fields for entries. The PAB continued however, providing the address book for Outlook Express and being bundled with Windows 9x while Outlook came with an Office installation.

It is possible to maintain a separate PAB and include it as an independent email address book in Outlook, as indicated above. But unless there are good reasons for doing this it makes more sense to convert the PAB into Outlook contents. Outlook provides extra customisation, more and better sorting and filtering, and considerably better printing controls.

If the import option was not selected during installation of Outlook 2002, you might find that the Contacts folder omits some of the addresses you had under Outlook 97 or 2000. That's probably because the PAB was set up as part of the original Outlook profile, and that part of the profile won't be brought over to Outlook 2002 automatically. But if the PAB content is indeed missing, you can still import it retrospectively. Go to File, Import and Export, Import From Another Program and select Personal Address Book as the import file type. The ensuing dialog will allow you to map PAB and Contacts fields to make sure that information is imported into the right fields, though the default mapping option is usually good enough.

Using Nicknames

Contacts now include a Display As field for email names. When you compose a message, the name you type in the Display As box appears in the To: field instead of the actual email address.

You can assign a nickname to an Outlook contact, but that field isn't used when you use Outlook 2002's Find a Contact search. The Display As name associated with a particular email address is however one of the fields searched, so it makes sense to use nicknames there. Open the contacts record, select one of the email addresses you have for them, and hand-edit the Display As: text to be the nickname you want to use.

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