

Unnecessary Vista features to disable

Here are quite a few Vista features that you can turn off right now!

The latest Windows packs a lot of code - more than any version of Windows ever - and some of it is just plain unnecessary. All of that excess code has a way of slowing down an operating system. You can regain some PC performance by removing unneeded features.

There are at least a dozen Vista features that you can turn off right now. Some are shiny baubles that slow down graphics performance, while others are optional utilities that hog memory when they shouldn't. A few can actually be quite useful, though they play a major role in bogging down your PC.

Should you really turn off all of these things right this minute? That depends on your computer, your work habits, and your tastes.

Just to be on the safe side, make sure to create a restore point before you turn any of the items off. That way you can quickly return your machine to its present state should you decide that you don't like the change. To make a restore point, click Start, type `sysdm.cpl`, and press Enter. Choose System Protection, Create, and then follow the prompts. Here are the features in the order that would make them easiest to turn off. For instance, features that you can remove in the same dialog box next to each other.

Sidebar

You pay a heavy performance price for the analog clock, thumbnail slide-show viewer, and Microsoft-centric RSS news feed that dock in the Windows Sidebar. Turning the whole thing off gives you a big speed boost, especially at boot time.

To remove the Sidebar, right-click anywhere on the Sidebar and select Close Sidebar. Uncheck Start Sidebar when Windows starts, and then click OK.

Aero

Microsoft put a lot of Vista's visual enhancements under one technological and marketing umbrella: Aero. Among those features are the thumbnails of your windows that appear when you hover the mouse pointer over the taskbar,



as well as the Flip 3D view you get by pressing Windows-Tab. Aero adds a little practicality and a lot of panache to the Vista user interface, and personally, I like it.

If your PC is underpowered or overloaded, however, Aero may be more trouble than it's worth. To turn it off, right-click the Windows desktop and select Personalize, Window Color and Appearance. In the resulting "Window Color and Appearance" dialog box, click Open classic appearance properties for more color options (if you don't see the option, that means Aero is already turned off). Select Windows Vista Basic and click OK.

Assorted Interface Beautification Options

You can save some additional clock cycles by turning off all or some of Vista's pretty interface options, not all of which are directly connected to Aero.

To see the options, click Start, right-click Computer, and select Properties. Click the Advanced System Properties link, the Advanced tab, and then the Settings button inside the Performance box.

You can uncheck all of the listed options by selecting Adjust for best performance, or you can simply uncheck the ones you don't care for. I unchecked Fade or slide menus into view, Fade or slide ToolTips into view, Show shadows under menus, and Slide open combo boxes. The rest I left on.

Remote Assistance

Don't worry about turning this item off if you run Vista Home (Basic or Premium). You don't have it. If you run Vista Business or Ultimate, though, you can use Remote Assistance to control one PC from another—a useful tool if you regularly provide tech support for a relative living far away.

On the other hand, if you're not providing long-distance support, or if you prefer a third-party remote-control program, Remote Assistance is just a waste of resources. To get rid of it, click Start, right-click Computer, and select Properties. Click Remote Settings. Uncheck Allow Remote Assistance connections to this computer.

Internet Printing Client

More on back-side >>

Do you ever print documents over the Internet? Neither do I. Chances are, you won't miss out on anything by disabling Vista's Internet Printing Client.

Open the "Programs and Features" control panel and click the Turn Windows features on or off link on the left; you'll get the Windows Features dialog box. Expand the Print Services section and uncheck Internet Printing Client. Click OK at this point, and then wait several more minutes for the system to ask to reboot.

Windows Meeting Space

I like Windows' built-in peer-to-peer collaboration program, Meeting Space, which lets you share files across a network while editing them with a remote colleague. But I don't have any use for it in my daily life, and neither do most of the people I know.

So you can shut Windows Meeting Space off. Simply uncheck Windows Meeting Space while you're in the Windows Features dialog box. If you're not in the Windows Features dialog box, see the tip on the previous page for instructions on getting to it.

ReadyBoost

If you're not using this much-hyped Vista feature—which supposedly speeds up Vista by caching memory to a flash drive — it's actually slowing your system down a tiny bit. (And if you are using ReadyBoost, it's probably still a drag on your PC.

You turn off ReadyBoost in Services. If you aren't already there, click Start, type services, and press Enter. Find and double-click ReadyBoost. In the "Startup type" drop-down menu, select Disabled, and then click OK.

Search Indexing

This one is a real trade-off. Turning off Vista's indexing will slow searches to a crawl — I'm talking minutes, not seconds. But ditching this convenient feature could very likely speed up your general PC use significantly.

In other words, turning off indexing will help your PC's performance only if you seldom search by file content, or if you use a third-party search tool such as Copernic Desktop or Google Desktop (in which case you probably have two indexing routines running at the same time, which is an even bigger waste).

If you match either of those descriptions, turn off indexing by clicking Start, typing services, and pressing Enter. Find and double-click Windows Search. In the "Startup type"

drop-down menu, select Disabled, and then click OK.

Offline Files

If you work on files stored on a server somewhere, and you can't depend on that server always being available, Vista Business and Ultimate's Offline Files feature makes your life easier by copying the files to your hard drive and keeping them synced.

Of course, that sort of thing isn't for everybody, which is probably why Microsoft didn't include Offline Files in the Home editions of Vista. But if you have Business or Ultimate and still don't need Offline Files, turn it off by clicking Start, typing services, and pressing Enter. Find and double-click Offline Files. In the "Startup type" drop-down menu, select Disabled, and then click OK.

Windows Error Reporting Service

Every time Windows experiences an error — either with its own processes or with a third-party program — it offers to report the problem to Microsoft. In theory, doing so can help the company locate problems with its OS (and heaven knows that would be a good thing). But more than likely, your report will either go unresolved or just end up in a big ol' pile of other people's reports on the same problem. Either way, you're wasting your system's precious resources on a feature that isn't doing you any good.

To disable this unhelpful service, open the Services window: Click Start, type services, and press Enter. Find and double-click Windows Error Reporting Service. In the "Startup type" drop-down menu, select Disabled, and then click OK.

UAC: Boon or Bloat?

One of Windows Vista's most controversial new features is User Account Control (UAC), which attempts to protect your system from malware by forcing you to authorize certain system-altering actions by clicking through a dialog box from time to time. To some people, this feature is an unwanted annoyance that must be eliminated. Other users appreciate the added security. While I wouldn't go so far as to lump UAC in with the other wasteful features in this article, I can certainly understand why some folks would like to turn it off — or at least minimize its intrusive behavior.

