By Greg Shultz

In the last week's edition of the Windows Vista Report, Stop unfairly comparing Vista to its predecessor and its successor, the resulting discussion thread quickly filled up with all sorts of chatter about the topic at hand. While respondents weighed in on both sides of the issue, along with the usual interpersonal sniping, an overall analysis of the discussions seems to indicate that there are a whole lot of disgruntled Vista users out there.

Those of you who are using Vista and are adapting to it, seem to be doing OK. However, those in the disgruntled camp, well, they appear to be absolutely miserable. While some have opted to abandon Vista and go back to XP, it would seem that many don't have that option and as such are being forced, against their will, to use Vista when all they want is XP.

Well, I gave it some thought and figured that I would throw those poor folks a bone. In this edition of the Windows Vista Report, I'm going to show those of you who hate Vista, but are stuck with it, how to convert Windows Vista into Windows XP by stripping out as many of Vista's components as possible thereby making the OS both look and operate more like XP.

We can even come up with a fancy name for the transformed OS. Let's call it Windows VXP! That way, you can have you cake and eat it too!

Disable UAC

Since User Access Control will get in our way when transforming Vista to VXP, let's begin by getting rid of UAC. It's a real pain anyway, right? Windows XP doesn't have anything to automatically protect you from inadvertent mistakes or tricky malware; you can do that yourself, so you don't really need UAC. Here's how to disable it:

1. Access the Control Panel and select Classic View. (That fancy Control Panel Home look is for pansies anyway, right?)
2. Locate and click User Accounts.
3. Select the Turn User Account Control on or off and respond appropriately to the UAC.
4. Clear the Use User Account Control (UAC) to help protect your computer.
5. Click OK.
6. Restart Windows

With UAC out of the way, we're free to disable all sorts of Vista features without any stupid warning messages. Yea!

Disable notification balloons

After you disable UAC, you'll be nagged to death by a notification balloon whose message will constantly remind you that you have disabled UAC. To get rid of that, and all notification balloons for that matter, you'll need to perform a little registry edit. Here's how:

1. Access the Run dialog box, type Regedit in the Open text box, and click OK.
2. Locate the following key:
   HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\Advanced
   Click on the right-hand pane.
3. Pull down the Edit menu and select the New | DWORD (32-bit) Value command
4. Name the new key EnableBalloonTips.
5. Make sure the value is set to 0.
6. Click OK.
7. Log off and then back on.

Disable Windows Defender

Because Windows Defender is built into the operating system, it more than likely should be considered part of the overall bloatware problem. Besides, Windows XP doesn't come with a built-in spyware tool, does it? No, so let's get rid of Windows Defender too. Here's how:

1. Access Windows Defender on the Start | All Programs menu.
2. Click the Tools button.
3. Click Options in the Settings section.
4. Clear the following check boxes:
   a. Automatically scan my computer.
   b. Use real-time protection.
   c. Scan the contents of archived files and folders for potential threats
   d. Use heuristics to detect potentially harmful or unwanted behavior by software that hasn't been analyzed for risks.
   e. Create a restore point before applying actions to detected items.
   f. Use Windows Defender.
5. Click Save.
6. Access the Run dialog box, type Services.msc in the Open text box, and click OK.
7. Locate and click the Windows Defender service.
8. Select Disabled in the Startup type drop down, click the Stop button, and then click OK.

You can install your favorite, third-party antispyware tool later.

Disable TCP/IPv6 & the Topology Discovery Mapper

By default Vista comes with TCP/IP v6 installed even though almost no one is using it yet. Windows XP doesn't have IP v6 installed, so you really don't need it in VXP. Vista also comes with a fancy network mapping and troubleshooting feature that we can remove. Since XP works fine without this stuff, then VXP won't need them either. Here's how:

1. Access the Control Panel.
2. Click Network and Sharing Center.
3. Select Manage network connections in the Tasks pane.
4. Right click on Local Area Connection/Wireless Network Connection and select Properties.
5. Clear the Internet Protocol Version 6 (TCP/IPv6) check box.
6. Clear the Link Layer Topology Discovery Mapper I/O Driver check box.
7. Clear the Link Layer Topology Discovery Mapper Responder check box.
8. Click OK.
9. Access the Run dialog box, type Services.msc in the Open text box, and click OK.
10. Locate and click the Link Layer Topology Discovery Mapper service.
11. Select Disabled in the Startup type drop down, and if it is started, click the Stop button.
12. Click OK

Turn off special Vista features

Vista comes with a bunch of special features and games that XP doesn't have. Having all this extra stuff in Vista is just bloatware anyway, right? Here's how to get rid of it:

1. Access the Control Panel.
2. Click Programs and Features.
3. Select Turn Windows Features on or off in the Tasks pane.
4. Clear the check boxes adjacent to any Vista options in your version that are turned on. For example:
    a. Expand the Games branch and clear the check boxes next to all of the Vista games such as Chess Titans, Ink Ball, Mahjong Titans, or Purble Place.
    b. Expand the Microsoft .NET Framework 3.0 branch and clear the check box next to XPS Viewer.
    c. Expand the Print Services branch and clear Internet Printing Client check box.
    d. Clear the Remote Differential Compression check box.
    e. Clear the Tablet PC Optional Components check box.
    f. Clear the Windows DFS Replication Service check box.
    g. Clear the Windows Meeting Space check box.
    h. Clear the Windows Ultimate Extras check box.
5. Click OK and wait for the features to be turned off.
6. Restart Windows

Disable Automatic Defragging

In Windows XP, you had control over how and when your hard disk needed to be defragged, so take back that control in VXP. Here's how:

1. Access Disk Defragmenter (Start|All Programs|Accessories|System Tools)
2. Clear the Run on a schedule check box.
3. Click OK.

Enable the Explorer menu bar

By default, Vista hides the standard menu bar (File, Edit, View, tools, and Help). However, it has always been a part of Windows Explorer, so you probably want to put it back in VXP. Here's how:

1. Access the Control Panel.
2. Click Folder Options.
3. Select the View tab.
4. Select the Always show menus check box.
5. Click OK.

Disable the new Start menu

As you know, the Start menu was completely revamped in Vista. However, in XP the start menu was basically the same as its predecessors and it has always worked just fine. Fortunately, you can turn back time and revert the new fangled Start menu back to the good old fashioned one. Here's how:

1. Right-click the Start button and choose Properties.
2. Select the Classic Start menu option
3. Click OK.

Disable the Taskbar thumbnails

Chances are that those pesky thumbnails that pop up whenever you hover over the taskbar really annoy you. Here's how to disable them:

1. Right click the Taskbar and choose Properties.
2. Clear the Show window previews check box.
3. Click OK.

Disable the Sidebar

Gadgets, who needs them. They just waste resources and screen real estate. Here's how you can disable the Sidebar and get rid of those inane gadgets:

1. Right-click in the Sidebar and choose Properties.
2. Clear the Start Sidebar when Windows starts check box.
3. Click OK.
4. Right-click in the Sidebar again and choose Close Sidebar.

Disable Visual Effects

Vista is really packed with useless eye candy. Here's how you can get rid of all of it:

1. Access the Control Panel.
2. Locate and click System.
3. Select Advanced System Settings in the Tasks pane.
4. Click the Settings button in the Performance panel.
5. On the Visual Effects tab, select the Custom option, and clear every check box in the list.
6. Click OK.

Disable Aero

Once you disable all the visual effects, the goofy transparent, smooth looking windows generated by the Aero user interface are gone and the good old solid boxy windows are back. Here's how to make sure Aero won't reappear:

1. Access the Run dialog box, type Services.msc in the Open text box, and click OK.
2. Locate and click the Desktop Window Manager Session Manager service.
3. Select Disabled in the Startup type drop down, click the Stop button, and then click OK.

Delete unnecessary shortcuts

While there doesn't appear to be a way to uninstall some of the other native Vista applications that aren't a part of XP, you can delete the shortcuts from the Start menu. That way you won't be tempted to run them. For example, you can delete the following shortcuts:

- Windows Calendar
- Windows Contacts
- Windows Defender
- Windows DVD Maker
- Windows Media Center
- Windows Photo Gallery

Voila! It's Windows VXP!

When you get done with this last step, you will be looking at and using Windows VXP. Sure there are probably other services and Vista features that you can strip from the operating system, but after performing the steps in this article, you are well on your way. If you know of any other things that can be removed from the operating system to make it more like XP, stop by the discussion area and let us hear from you.

Additional resources

- TechRepublic's [Downloads RSS Feed](#) XML
- Sign up for TechRepublic's [Downloads Weekly Update](#) newsletter
- Check out all of TechRepublic's [free newsletters](#)

Version history

Version: 1.0

Published: December 10, 2008

Tell us what you think

TechRepublic downloads are designed to help you get your job done as painlessly and effectively as possible. Because we're continually looking for ways to improve the usefulness of these tools, we need your feedback. Please take a minute to [drop us a line](#) and tell us how well this download worked for you and offer your suggestions for improvement.

Thanks!

—The TechRepublic Downloads Team