

Teach end users to navigate Windows without a mouse

Jan 22, 2003

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The keyboard is not only quicker than the mouse, but if Dr. Engelbart's venerable rodent is ill or absent, it can be your only navigation choice. Sure, you can fetch a spare mouse from your IT department, but you really don't need to go to all that effort. And what about the end user whose mouse just died—leaving him or her unable to save that just-updated spreadsheet?

Whether you're an end user or support pro, knowing how to navigate Windows without a mouse can save you a lot of time and trouble—not to mention frustration. I'm now going to take you through a Windows session, from startup to shutdown, in which I will modify the registry without ever reaching for the mouse. Although the registry tips aren't something you should share with your users, the general navigation skills are something every Windows user should know. Think about including them in your next help desk newsletter or new user e-mail.

Signing on

I can't tell you how many times I see users enter their usernames at a login prompt, move to the password field using the mouse, and then clicking OK—what a waste of time. Before I show end users any other keyboard navigation techniques, I teach them to move between fields using the [Tab] key. Once they've learned this I show them how [Enter] activates the default button—in this case OK.

Movement basics

So far so good, but maneuvering Windows isn't just about [Tab] and [Enter]. There are loads of keyboard shortcuts, many of which are listed on the Web or in a particular application's manual. But those lists tend to be long and tedious, and users rarely bother reading them. Instead of overloading your users with too many keyboard navigation shortcuts, just cover the basics. The shortcuts shown in **Table A** are a good place to start.

Table A

Move between items in the active area	Arrow Keys
Move between different fields or controls	[Tab]
Move between different parts of the screen	[F6]
Move forward through tabs	[Ctrl][Tab]
Move between active applications	[Alt][Tab]

Note: Pressing [Shift] along with any of the combinations listed in this table reverses the direction of movement.

Using the [Windows] key

Once your users have the basics of Windows movement down, it's time to show them the [Windows] key. This

is one of the most useful keys for support pros and end users alike. The next time you're talking a user through opening the Run dialog box, instruct them to press [Windows]R instead of clicking start and then Run. **Table B** shows many of the most useful [Windows] key combinations.

Table B

Shows the Desktop	[Windows]D (Win 98/Me/2000/XP) [Windows]M (Win 95/NT)
Opens My Computer with Windows Explorer	[Windows]E
Opens the Search dialog box	[Windows]F
Opens the Run dialog box	[Windows]R
Opens the System Properties window	[Windows][Pause/Break]

Pressing the [Windows] key alone will invoke the Start menu—the same as clicking the Start button. Keyboards that do not have a [Windows] key can invoke the Start menu by using [Ctrl][Esc]. However, this alternate key combination cannot be used with other keys. For example, [Ctrl][Esc]R will not open the Run dialog box.

The [Alt][F4] pop-up killer

[Alt][F4] is another handy keyboard shortcut that I teach my end users. This key combination will close the current active application. Pressing [Alt][F4] with no applications running is the same as clicking Start | Shut Down. Exiting Windows was never so simple.

Not only is [Alt][F4] a quick way to close an application, it can be used as a manual pop-up killer. The next time one of your users faces a bad-mannered pop-up with no X to close it; they can send the offending window packing with [Alt][F4].

Editing the registry with just the keyboard

Now let's try something a little more complicated and not for the average computer user. Suppose you need to change a registry value using only the keyboard. Once Windows is running, press [Windows]R, type *Regedit* in the Open field, and press [Enter].

Once the Registry Editor is running, you can navigate the tree on the window's left side with the arrow keys. Move up or down the tree with the corresponding arrow keys; use the right arrow key to expand an item on the tree and the left arrow key to collapse an item. Once you've located the registry entry you want to edit, press [Tab] to move to the right side of the window where you can edit the entry. One item to remember: You'll need to select the item using the arrow keys or the spacebar.

Find list items quickly

The keystrokes listed so far are sufficient to get you anywhere you need within the Registry Editor, and in fact, almost anywhere in Windows. However, the keyboard has even more elegant shortcuts to offer when it comes to locating items within a list.

For example, I often find myself messing around with the key

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion. The annoying thing is that the set of subtrees listed under the Microsoft branch is usually very long. There's no way you'll catch me scrolling that mouse-wheel down the list to find the item I'm looking for. Instead, I start typing the first few letters of it. In this case, typing *win* will instantly move the focus to the required Windows hive. This method works for any given list and is particularly useful when navigating through your hard drive. You can access any icon, shortcut, file, or folder that appears on the screen simply by typing its first few letters. **Table C** shows other helpful file-tree-navigation shortcuts.

Table C

Jump to a particular item or entry	Type its first few letters
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Move one level up (or one screen back) [Backspace]

Scroll quickly [PageUp] and [PageDown]

Right clicking and accessing the menu bar with the keyboard

Once you've located and selected (highlighted) the registry entry you want to edit, it's time for action. If you want to edit the entry, simply press [Enter]; if you want to delete the key, press [Delete]. But what if you want to add a new key or value? Using the mouse, you would normally right click within the right side of the window to open a shortcut menu.

You can access this same shortcut menu by pressing [Shift][F10] or the Application key located on the right side of some keyboards between the [Windows] key and the [Ctrl] key. Once you've made the necessary changes, you'll want to exit the Registry Editor. There are several ways to exit the Registry Editor: You could use [Alt]F4, or you could press [F10] to access the Registry Editor menu bar, press the down arrow key to select Exit, and press [Enter] to exit the application. You could also press [Alt]R and then X to exit.

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