Part I

Getting Started, Getting Secure

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Windows users range in experience from people who are just getting started with their first PC to folks with years of Windows experience under their belts. Part I attempts to address both audiences by tackling topics that everyone needs to know in order to get started.

Chapter 1 highlights the new features of Windows 7 and is geared toward people with some experience with a previous version of Windows. The idea there is to point out the main Windows 7 features that make it different from or better than earlier Windows versions.

Of course, if you have little or no Windows experience, you don't really care about what's new versus what's not. All you care about is learning how to work the computer. If you're in that category, you can skip Chapter 1 and go straight to Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 then covers user accounts and the User Account Control (UAC) features of Windows. Chapter 4 moves on to Parental Controls, something that many parents have wanted in their computers for a long time. Beginners and experienced users alike will find much that's useful in those chapters.

Chapter 5 helps you learn where to go in Windows to get help using Windows and your computer. Chapter 6 tackles some common problems you might encounter in getting things to work throughout the first five chapters.

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CHAPTER 1

What's New in Windows 7

Welcome to Windows 7! This chapter is for people who have experience with Windows Vista or other versions of Windows and just want to know what's new. If you're new to PCs, this chapter won't help much because *everything* will be new to you. So feel free to skip this chapter and head over to Chapter 2 if you're not a long-time Windows user.

Even though Windows 7 has new features and some new looks (particularly if you are a Windows XP user), that doesn't mean you have to throw away all your existing hard-earned knowledge. In fact, you don't have to throw away any of that, because the old familiar ways of doing things still apply.

If you invest a little time in learning what's new and different, you'll find that you really *can* get things done more quickly and easily in Windows 7. This chapter provides a quick overview of what's new, so you can decide for yourself which of the features are most relevant to how you use your computer.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- A new look and feel
- Quicker, easier navigation
- Built-in security and parental controls
- A better Internet experience
- And so much more

Taskbar and Full-Screen Improvements

The taskbar at the bottom of the Windows desktop provides, just as it does in previous versions of Windows, quick access to your running programs, the clock, and notification messages. But Windows 7 improves on the taskbar by streamlining it with smaller icons that group your programs together. For example, if you have three different Web pages open in three instances of Internet Explorer, you'll see a single, small Internet Explorer icon on the taskbar that you can use to quickly access one of those windows. The reduced icon size makes more room available on the taskbar for other program group icons, making it easier for you to work with your programs. Figure 1-1 shows an example of the new taskbar.

In addition, Windows 7 now provides preview features to help you move between programs. When you click the mouse on or hover it over a program group icon, Windows displays a preview of each of the program windows in that group, and as you hover the mouse over a preview window, Windows shows you a full-size preview on the desktop of that window's contents. You can then click the preview to open its associated program window (Figure 1-2).

FIGURE 1-1

The new taskbar.

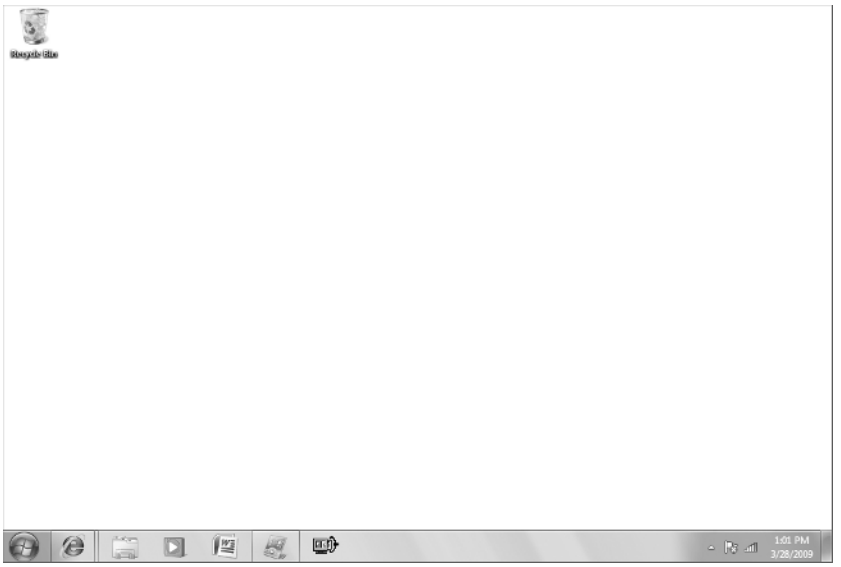


FIGURE 1-2

Window previews from the taskbar.

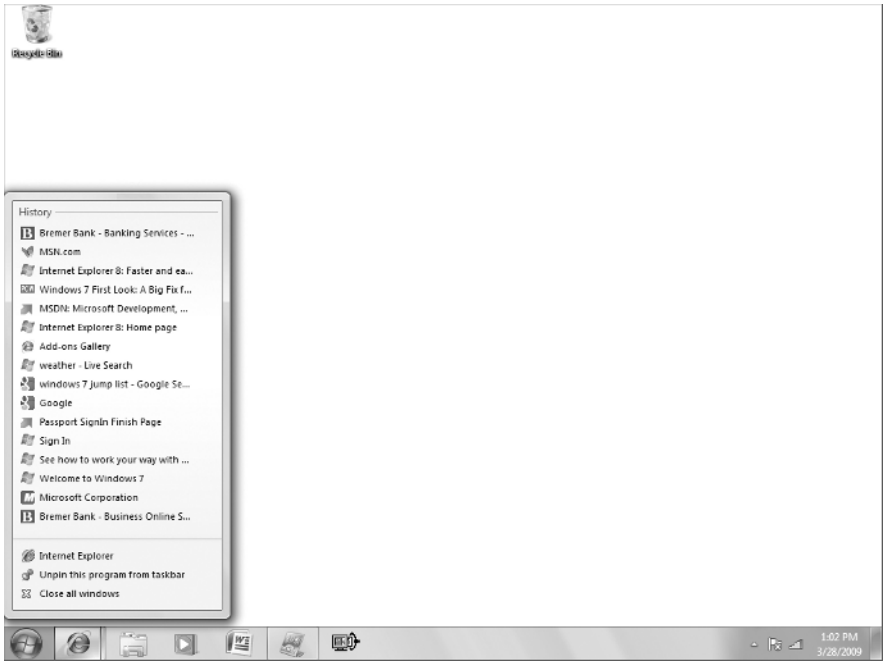
Windows lets you control the taskbar's new behavior. You can direct Windows to always combine like programs into a single group icon, combine them only when the taskbar gets full, or never combine them.

Jump Lists

Jump lists are another new feature in Windows 7. When you right-click a taskbar icon, Windows displays a jump list that contains menu items for commonly-used tasks for the program and quick access to recently-used documents (Figure 1-3).

FIGURE 1-3

A program's jump list.



Jump lists are a Windows feature, rather than an application feature, so you'll get a jump list for a program even if it wasn't written specifically to use the jump list. However, program developers can modify the jump list, so programs that are written specifically to do so will likely provide additional options in the jump list menu.

New Ways to Work in Windows

Windows 7 gives you more ways to work with program windows. For example, you have more ways to maximize and arrange windows on the desktop. In addition to the familiar ways of maximizing a window — double-clicking its taskbar or clicking the Maximize button — you can simply drag the

window's title bar to the top of the desktop. Windows will then maximize the window. To restore it to a window, just drag the title bar down from the top of the desktop. Is that any faster than using the buttons in the top-right corner of the window? Not really, but on a high-resolution display, those buttons can be kind of small, and dragging the title bar is an easier method.

You can also dock windows to the left or right side of the desktop. Docking the window attaches the edge of the window to the edge of the desktop and sizes the window to fill exactly half of the desktop. You dock the window by dragging the title bar to the left or right edge of the desktop. This is a great feature when you want to copy or move items between two windows.

Finally, remember the Show Desktop icon in previous versions of Windows, which when clicked minimized all running programs to the taskbar temporarily? That feature is now in the bottom-right corner of the taskbar. Just hover the mouse over the small, vertical button at the right edge of the taskbar, and Windows makes all open windows disappear so that you can see the desktop. This is really handy when you want to see your desktop gadgets for a second. To view your program windows again, just move the mouse away from the taskbar.

Tip

To minimize or restore all program windows, click the Show Desktop button at the right edge of the taskbar. ■

Internet Explorer 8

Windows 7 comes with Internet Explorer 8, and IE 8 sports lots of new features. The following sections explore a few of them.

Instant search

In IE 8, as you start typing in the Live Search box, IE offers instant results to match what you are typing. For example, it offers previously visited sites, just as in previous versions of IE. But it also starts searching for that word or phrase within Live Search and within your history. Figure 1-4 shows an example.

Web slices

Web slices in IE 8 let you keep track of content from sites through the IE 8 Favorites Bar. For example, Live Search offers Web slices for weather that you can add to your Favorites Bar, and you can get weather update notifications when they occur. eBay is another example, offering to track an auction and notify you when bid changes occur.

When you visit a page that offers a slice, you see a green icon, which in Figure 1-5 is under the mouse cursor. To subscribe to the slice, click the icon. Internet Explorer opens a dialog box asking whether you want to add the Web slice to your Favorites Bar. Click the Add to Favorites Bar button to add the slice. When the slice is updated, Internet Explorer highlights the item in the Favorites Bar.

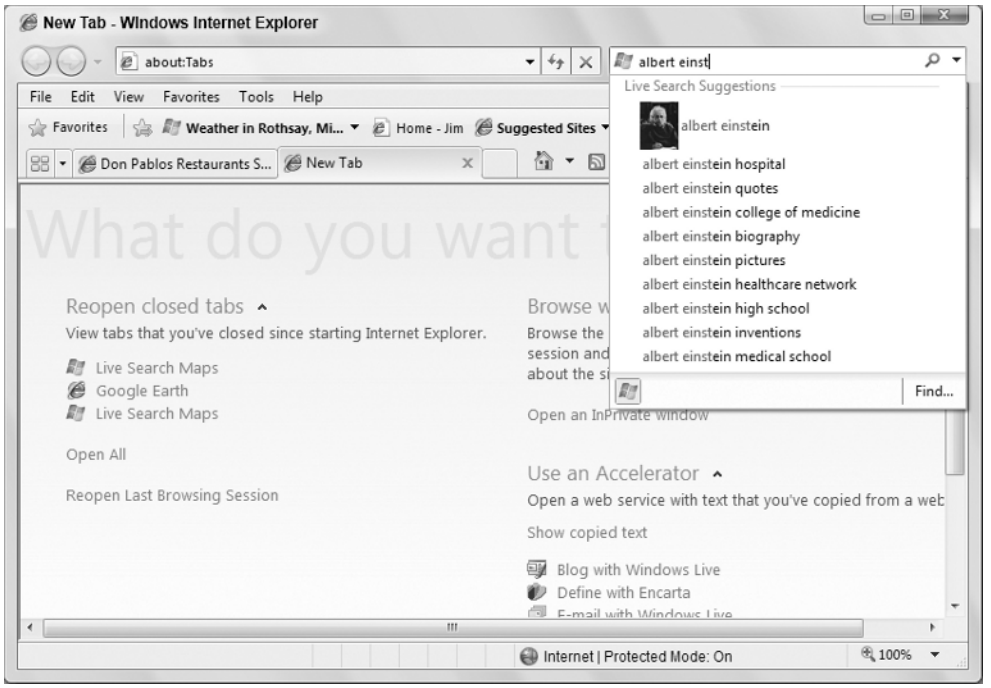
Accelerators

Accelerators are another new feature in Internet Explorer 8 that simplify and speed up browsing tasks. For example, if you were using an earlier version of IE and found an address on a Web page for a

restaurant you wanted to visit, you'd probably have to copy the address to the Clipboard and then navigate to another site to map that address. With the Map with Live Maps accelerator, all you need to do is highlight the restaurant's address and then click the blue accelerator icon that appears above the text. If you hover the mouse over the Map with Live Search option, IE displays a pop-up window showing the location on a map (Figure 1-6). You can click the menu option to open the map in a new IE tab.

FIGURE 1-4

Live Search at work.



There are lots of accelerators for IE 8 for blogging, research, mapping, music, social networking, and much more. To find more accelerators for your computer, visit `http://ieaddons.com`.

Better navigation

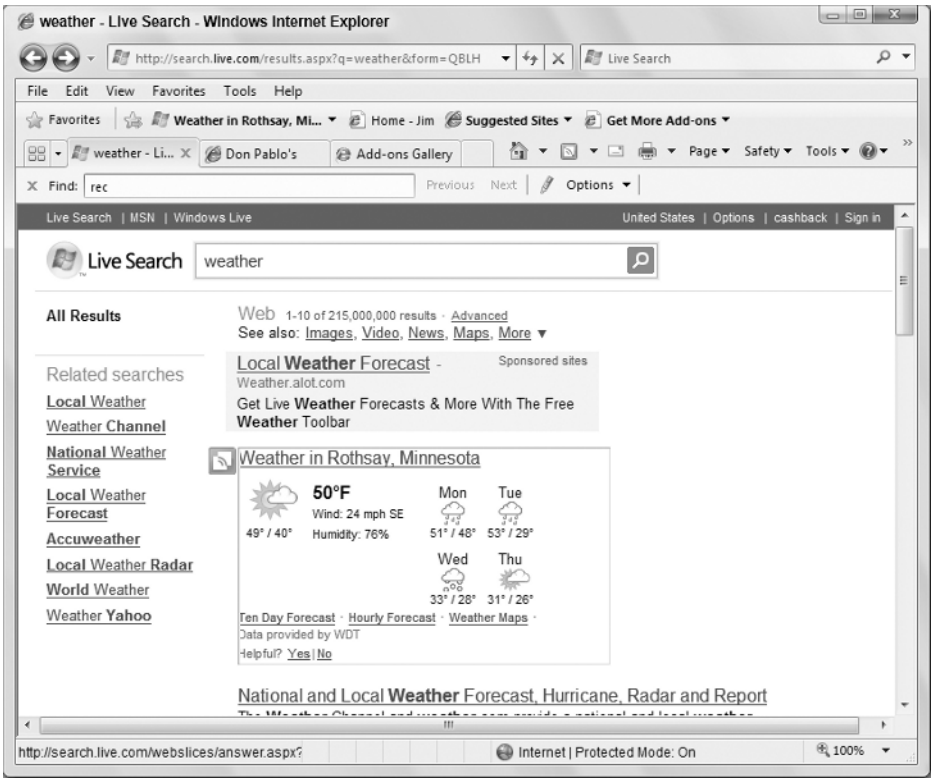
IE 8 adds several improvements to simplify navigation. For example, when you open a new tab from a page, IE 8 places the two tabs next to each other and color codes them so that you can see that they are related. You can right-click a tab and close that tab, close all other tabs and keep that one open, remove the tab from its group, and access a list of recently closed tabs so that you can easily reopen them.

Searching on a page is also improved. The Find on Page toolbar, which you can open by pressing Ctrl+F, performs an instant search as you type. It offers search results as you type each character. It

also highlights search results on the page rather than locates them one at a time, as in previous versions of IE (Figure 1-7).

FIGURE 1-5

An icon on a Web page indicates an available Web slice.



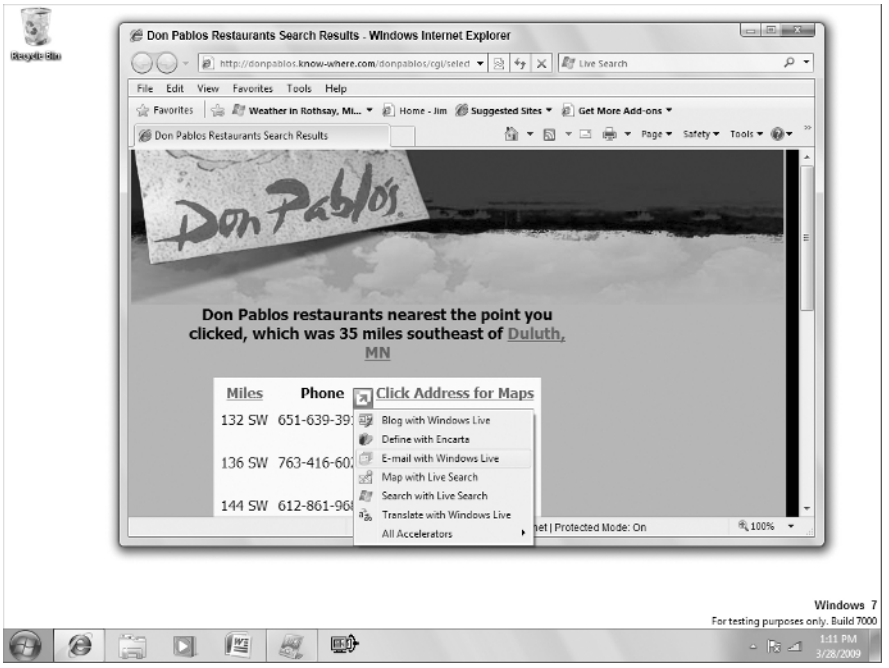
IE 8 offers several other navigation improvements, including a smarter address bar that provides an instant search of your History, Favorites, and RSS feeds; better page zoom; smarter back navigation; and a compatibility view for viewing Web pages that are not fully compatible with IE 8.

InPrivate browsing

InPrivate Browsing in IE 8 helps you minimize your exposure on the Internet. This new feature helps prevent your browser history, temporary Internet files, form data, cookies, and usernames and passwords from being saved by the browser, effectively leaving no evidence of your browsing or search history. InPrivate Browsing also can block content from external sites — sites that the page you are visiting is pulling data from. Blocking these third-party sites can help minimize how and whether your browsing habits are tracked.

FIGURE 1-6

Accelerators speed up browsing tasks.



Other new IE features

The new features described in the preceding sections are just some of the new features in IE 8. You'll find better performance, better crash recovery, additional security features for phishing and malware attacks, better favorites management, and more.

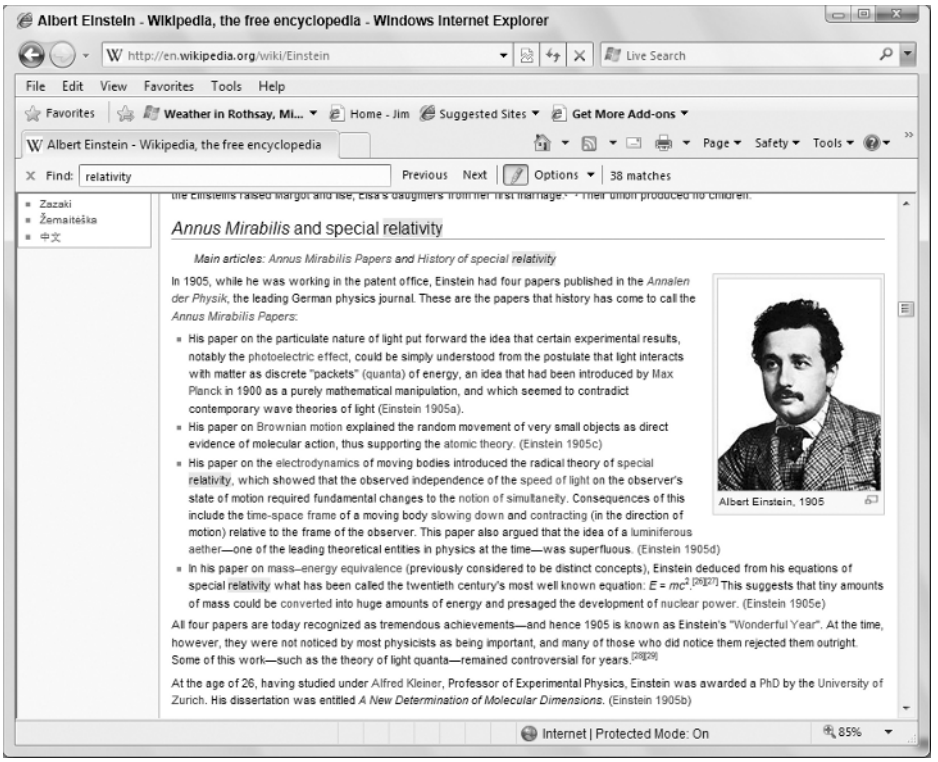
Windows Live

If you have been a Windows Vista user, you might be surprised to see that some of the programs you are accustomed to using are no longer included with Windows 7. For example, you won't find Windows Mail included in 7. Instead, these programs have been pulled from Windows and made part of Windows Live, a set of online services and programs from Microsoft. These programs include:

- **Messenger:** Use Messenger to text chat, video chat, or make phone calls to others.
- **Mail:** Formerly Outlook Express, then Windows Mail in Windows Vista, Windows Live Mail lets you send and receive e-mail and work with online newsgroups.
- **Writer:** Use this program to blog and share photos and videos on many blog services.
- **Photo Gallery:** Manage your digital photos, edit them, share them with friends and family, and even stitch together photos to make panoramic shots.

FIGURE 1-7

On-page search in IE 8.



- **Movie Maker:** Create movies and video clips, and add titles, subtitles, music, and special effects.
- **Family Safety:** Control what sites your children can see, view reports about their browsing history, limit searches, and decide with whom they can communicate when they are using Windows Live Messenger.
- **Toolbar:** The Windows Live Toolbar gives you quick access to Windows Live and Live Search in Internet Explorer.

You'll find most of these Windows add-ons covered throughout this book. Visit `http://home.live.com` to download these Windows Live add-ons.

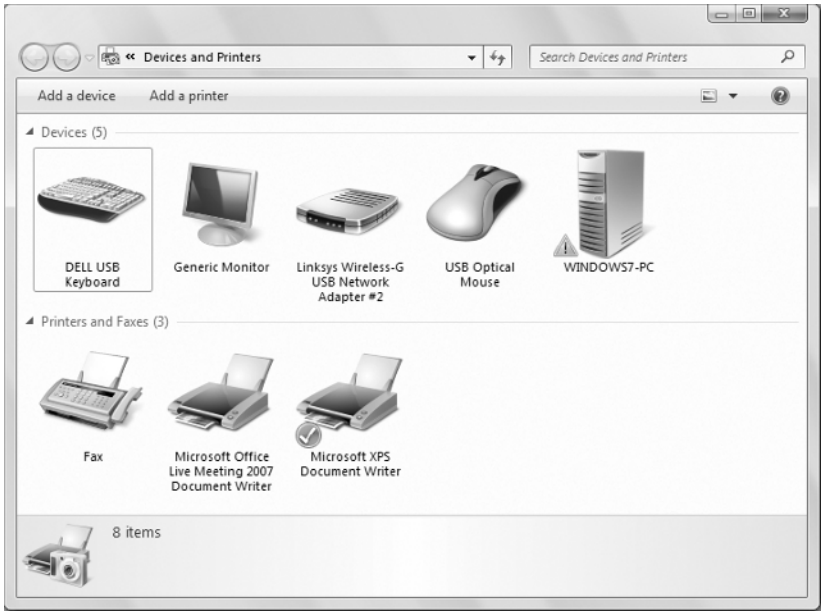
Better Device Management

Previous versions of Windows provided several different ways to manage hardware such as printers, mice, cameras, scanners, and so on. For example, you managed printers from the Printers object in Control Panel, mice from the Mouse object, keyboard from the Keyboard object, and so on. Windows

7 brings devices together in a new Devices and Printers object that enables you to view and manage devices in one location (Figure 1-8).

FIGURE 1-8

Manage devices in one location.



In Devices and Printers, you can manage cell phones, MP3 players, cameras, mice, displays, printers, faxes, keyboards, and other compatible devices. Bringing all these devices under a common management tool simplifies device configuration and troubleshooting.

Homegroup

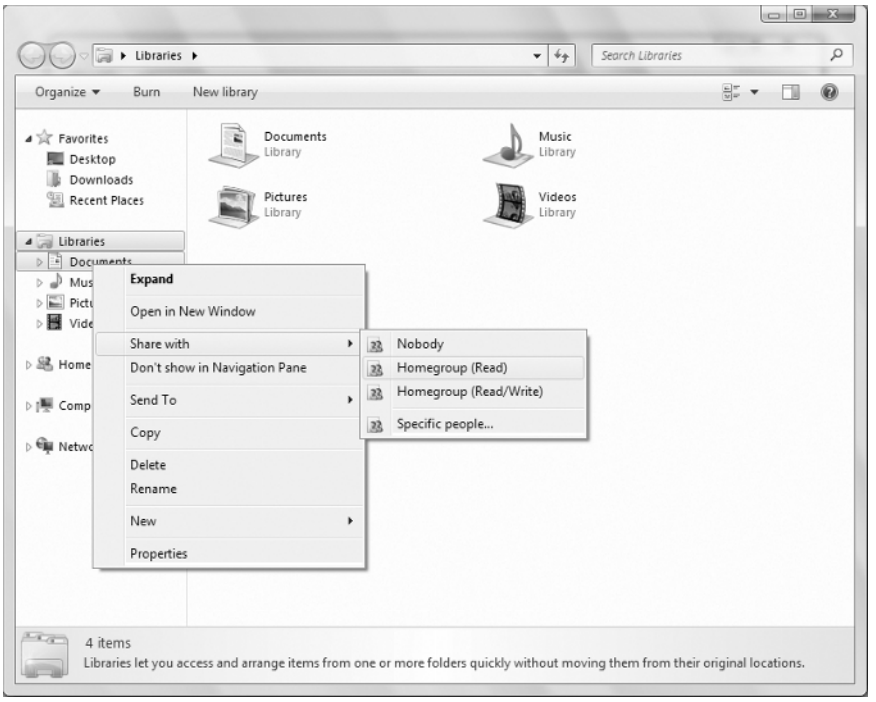
Windows 7 introduces a new feature called Homegroup to help simplify sharing files and printers in a home network. A homegroup is a collection of computers that are set up to automatically share pictures, music, videos, documents, and printers (or any combination thereof).

In effect, a homegroup lets you share resources on the network using a single password. By default, when you create a homegroup, Windows 7 shares your Pictures, Music, and Videos libraries, along with your printers. You can also share other folders simply by right-clicking the folder, choosing Share With, and then choosing one of the Homegroup options from the menu (Figure 1-9).

Windows 7 includes a Homegroup object to help you access resources that are shared in your homegroup. Click the Windows Explorer icon in the taskbar to open the Libraries window; then click Homegroup in the left pane to open your homegroup. You see the resources there that are shared by others in your homegroup.

FIGURE 1-9

Easily share folders in a homegroup.



A homegroup is a simplified sharing mechanism, so you have somewhat limited sharing options. For example, you can give those in your homegroup the ability to read or modify files as a group. If you need to enable some people only to view files but others to edit them, a homegroup isn't the right solution for you. Instead, you need to use one of Windows 7 other sharing options to share those files.

Performance and Battery Life

Performance is another area of improvement in Windows 7. If you have worked with previous versions of Windows, you'll find that Windows 7 starts, resumes, and shuts down faster, giving you a snappier experience with your computer. Thanks to some additional power-saving features, Windows 7 should also give you better battery life for your notebook computer.

Look and Feel

Because Windows 7 has its origins in Windows Vista, the look and feel is much the same between the two versions of Windows. As you might expect, however, Windows 7 adds its own features that give this new version its own look and feel.

For example, you find new backgrounds, color schemes, and screensavers bundled with Windows 7. You can also download new themes as they become available. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, changes to the desktop, taskbar, and window preview also give Windows 7 a new look and make it easier to use.

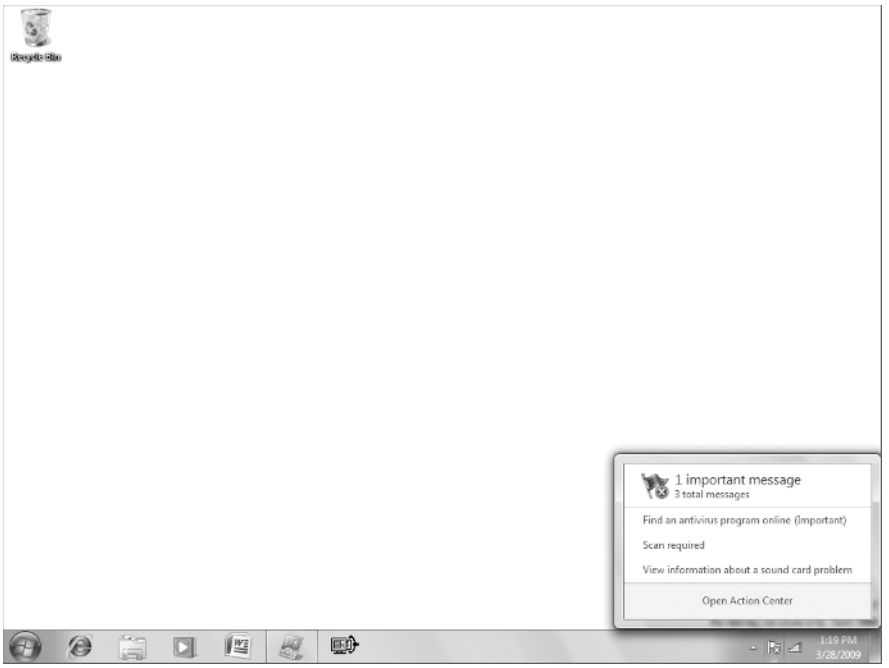
Troubleshooting and Alerts

One of the annoyances in Windows Vista is the frequency of the alerts and pop-up messages that it displays. Windows 7 changes the way it displays alerts; it also gives you more control over those alerts and messages, letting you choose the messages you want to see.

The Action Center consolidates alerts from several Windows features, including the Security Center and Windows Defender. In Windows 7, the Action Center icon appears in the taskbar. Clicking the icon displays messages related to the items that you might need to address, such as the lack of an antivirus program, a problem with a device in the computer, or the need to scan the computer for threats (Figure 1-10).

FIGURE 1-10

Action Center consolidates notifications.



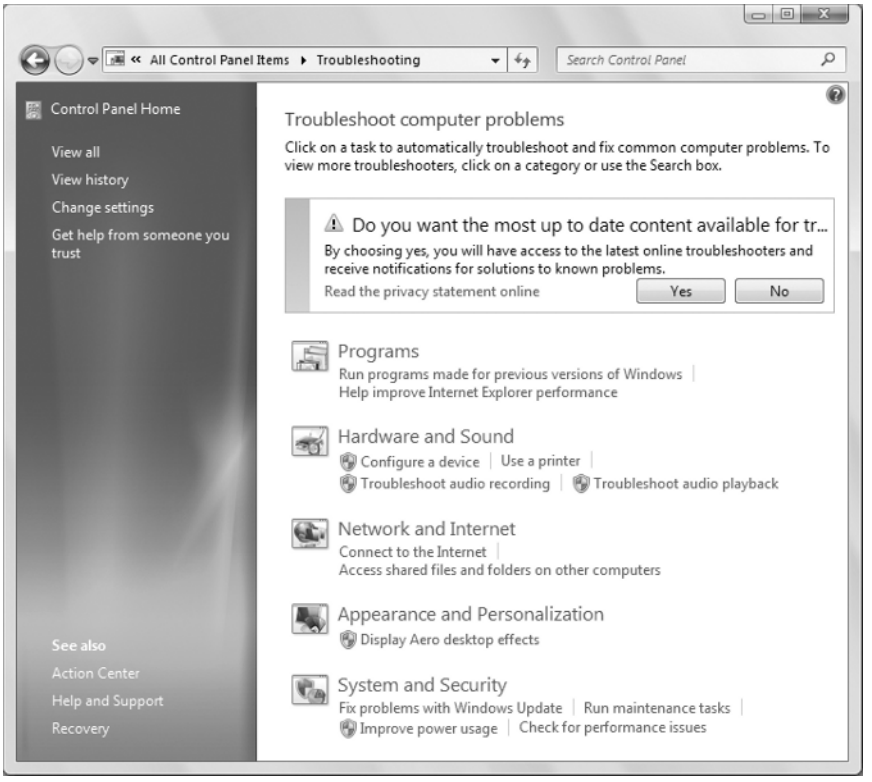
Windows 7 also gives you control over the types of messages you see. For example, if you don't want to see messages about Windows Update, you can turn off those messages by deselecting a check box

in the Action Center settings. In addition, you can control how Windows 7 notifies you when changes are being made to your computer. Instead of Windows notifying you and asking you to allow a change that you initiate in Windows, for example, you can have Windows notify you only when programs try to make changes.

Other changes are geared toward troubleshooting. The Devices and Printers folder, for example, gives you a single place to manage and troubleshoot a wide variety of devices connected to your computer. In addition, the Troubleshooting item in the Control Panel consolidates troubleshooting tools in one place (Figure 1-11).

FIGURE 1-11

The Troubleshooting item in Control Panel.



Music and Video Sharing

Windows 7 gives you new ways to enjoy and share your music and videos. With the new homegroup networking feature, you can easily share your music, pictures, and videos with others on your home network. For example, you might consolidate all your photos into one location, where you can easily back them up and share them across the network.

Even more significant is the capability in Windows Media Player 12, which is included with Windows 7 to stream media to other computers, even across the Internet. This means that others on your homegroup can access a central media library — for example streaming music from a home server tucked in your basement that streams to a media center in your living room. Even cooler than that, you can stream music from your home computer to your computer at work — and potentially stream music to mobile devices such as a Windows Mobile smartphone or media player.

To further extend sharing capabilities, Windows Media Player 12 can browse media libraries on other computers, enabling you to browse to and play music stored on other computers on your network. This capability isn't limited to Windows Media Player libraries, either. Media Player 12 can also browse and play from iTunes libraries.

. . . and More

The new Windows 7 features I describe in this chapter are just some of the major new features and capabilities offered by this latest version of Windows. You also find expanded hardware support and other usability features. For example, Windows 7 improves on its touch-screen features to make navigating on touch-screen devices easier. Windows 7 also improves on handwriting-recognition features to improve your experience with tablet PCs and similar devices.

So, don't think of Windows 7 as Windows with just a new look and feel. As you get more familiar with it, you realize that it offers a wealth of new features and capabilities that will make your computer experience more enjoyable and useful.

Wrap-Up

Long gone are the days when people managed a few files and folders on external disks without an Internet connection. In today's connected world, we deal with massive amounts of digital information in many forms, and from many sources. Windows 7 gives you new ways to interact with that information.

This chapter has been a sort of view from 30,000 feet of what's new in Windows 7. Here I've focused on the main things that most users will want to explore. But there's much more than I cover in a single chapter. Here's a quick recap of what's hot:

- The new taskbar makes it easier to work with multiple programs simultaneously.
- Jump lists give you quick access to documents and program functions right from the taskbar.
- New desktop features let you navigate the desktop more easily, quickly move and view program windows, and control the desktop much better than in past versions.
- Internet Explorer brings a big toolbox of new features that make Internet browsing easier and more useful.
- Windows Live makes several Windows features available as optional downloads to streamline Windows, but also makes more features available when you need or want them.
- Consolidated device management makes managing the devices connected to your PC easier.
- Homegroup networking simplifies sharing documents and media across your home network.
- Windows Media Player 12 extends media sharing across the Internet.