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PC Tips

Don't Change That Extension!

Windows® 95 and Windows® 3.x use the file name extension to determine which application is associated with the file. If you change the extension, you'll lose that association and Windows won't know what program to run when you double-click on the file.

How It All Began

The use of the file name extension dates back to the good (bad?) ol' days of DOS (Disk Operating System) on the earliest PCs (early 1980's). The file naming convention used under DOS was sometimes called "Eight dot Three" because the form was eight characters for the name, a period ("."), and three characters for the file name extension. Example: COMMAND.COM where COMMAND is the name and the COM extension indicates that this is a special type of program file that must be run by the system in a way different from how it would run a file with the ".EXE" extension.

What It's Used For

The purpose of the extension was to indicate what *kind* of file it was. Software could then be designed to anticipate a certain structure and layout to the data in the file based on the extension. When Windows came along, this practice became widespread and file extensions became associated with files created by specific software applications. For example, ".doc" indicates the file is a Microsoft Word® file, ".xls" indicates a Microsoft Excel® file, ".txt" indicates a plain (no formatting) ASCII text file.

Keeping Track of It All

All versions of Windows keep a list of these extensions with the application that is associated with each. When you double-click on a file, Windows checks its list to see what program to run and gives the file name to the program to open when it starts. When you install an application, it adds its extensions to the list. [The Macintosh® operating system creates a separate, hidden, file called a "resource fork" for every file on the system in order to keep track of the application associated with each file.]

Creating a Bigger Problem

Some users (you know who you are!) have used the extension portion of the file name because the 8-character limitation was too restrictive on DOS and Windows® 3.x systems. Unfortunately, this only partially solved one problem and created a much worse one. With the loss of the true file extension, Windows could no longer tell which application had created the file. This became an even larger problem if someone "inherited" a diskette of these mis-named files without accompanying information to indicate which application(s) created them. If they are lucky, the extension won't match any application at all. If they are unlucky, it will direct Windows to run the *wrong* application!

A Solution Exists

What do you do if you have some of these files? Rename each one so that it has the proper extension. On Windows® 95, file names can be longer than eight characters, so you can make the names descriptive *and* use the proper extension.

How To Show File Extensions in Windows® 95

When you first get your Windows® 95 system, you may not see any file name extensions at all. This can be a problem if you have files on diskettes that you've "inherited" which have non-standard extensions (see previous story).

If you would like to see the file name and extension, do the following:

1. Double-click on the "My Computer" icon or run Windows Explorer.
2. From the menu, select View > Options.
3. Click on the View tab in the Options window.
4. Make sure that there is no check mark by "Hide the MS-DOS file extensions for the file types that are registered". If there is a check mark, click the check mark box to de-select it.



I also recommend that you select "Show all files" and "Display the full MS-DOS path in the title bar" so that you will see everything and know where things are located.

5. Click Apply, then Click OK.

Mailing List "Netiquette"

Electronic mail makes it easy to send a single message to many people at one time. There are different ways to list the recipients: they can all be in the TO: field, some can be in the TO: field, some in the CC: ("carbon copy" or "courtesy copy") field, and still others can be in the BCC: ("blind carbon copy") field. The choice depends on who is on the list.

TO:, CC:, and BCC:

The TO: field is used to identify the people that either need to take some action based on the email message contents or are affected by the message directly or indirectly. The CC: field is used mainly for keeping people informed, "in the loop" so to speak. These people are usually not expected to take any action regarding the message. The recipient list in either of these two fields is visible to everyone who receives the

message. The BCC: field is used when you want to hide one or more recipients from all the others. Anyone's address listed here will not be shown to the TO: or CC: or other BCC: recipients.

Be Discreet

It is considered good Internet etiquette ("Netiquette") to put all the recipients in the BCC: when they don't know one another. It protects their privacy by not revealing their email address to strangers. As an example, let's suppose you want to send out an electronic newsletter to citizens of a local community. You have asked people to send you their email address if they are interested in receiving the newsletter. More than 100 people have sent you their name and email address, requesting that they be included in your mailing list. When you send the newsletter by email, put yourself in the TO: field and all the recipients in the BCC: field. They'll appreciate your courtesy and you'll keep the message header small, too!

This Issue's URLs*

Newsgroup Search

Find discussions about topics based on keyword search. Great for looking up information on cars, software, brand-names.

<http://www.dejanews.com/>

Carlmont High School

Part of the Sequoia Union High School District web site.

<http://www.carlmont.seq.org/>

Sequoia Union High School District

<http://www.seq.org/>

Sequoia Union High School District Schools

<http://www.seq.org/schools.html>

Madeline's Goodies Page

On this page you'll find electronic copies of *PC Tips* as well as other PC and Internet resources.

<http://www.dnai.com/~mal/goodies/>

*URL: uniform resource locator.
WWW jargon for the address of a Web page.