

OS/2 Tricks

BY RICK BYRLEY

While there's something to be said about mastery, if you really want to impress your friends and have fun at the same time, it never hurts to learn a trick or two. OS/2, like most software, contains undocumented features. This occurs for a number of reasons: the code wasn't quite stable enough for General Availability, the person documenting the code missed something, or some manager decided that the feature was not worth supporting. These features can only be accessed by those "in the know," so to speak. Besides learning about undocumented features, you can add to your bag of tricks by learning novel uses of common features and commands, kind of like the household secret of using a potato to remove a broken light bulb. In either case, tips and tricks are fun, so this month I thought I'd throw out a few for you.

SETTING THE DEFAULT BEHAVIOR OF THE DIR COMMAND

One undocumented feature of OS/2 is the DIRCMD environmental variable, which sets the default behavior of the DIR command in command line sessions. In the DOS days one of the signs of a guru was a customized DIR display that used various parameters with the DIR command in batch files to sort files by date or size, or restrict the display to files with certain attributes. While you can't get rid of the batch files yet, you can at least set the default behavior (do you ever get tired of typing DIR /P?) by using the DIRCMD environmental variable. For example, to pause after each screen, set DIRCMD to equal the Pause parameter, e.g., SET DIRCMD=/P. You can use any valid DIR parameter. Separate multiple parameters with spaces; for example: SET

DIRCMD=/P /W /R to pause after each page. Use wide display format and show long filenames on a FAT system. The SET DIRCMD statement can be included in your CONFIG.SYS file to set the system default or it can be set for any individual command line session.

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USING THE WINDOW LIST TO MINIMIZE AND MAXIMIZE WINDOWS

I would swear I've seen this trick documented, but I couldn't find it in the user's guide or anywhere else while researching this month's column. If it is documented, it must be obscure because I've never seen any one of the countless OS/2 users in my office use this trick. This is rather surprising, since everyone seems to use the Window List constantly to switch between applications. In any case, if you hold down the shift key and

double-click on an object's name in the list you can minimize the window. To maximize the window, hold down the Ctrl key and double-click the object's name. Another nifty tidbit about the Window List is that you can quickly move to the object you want by typing the first letter of the object's name until the right object is highlighted.

ADDING ITEMS TO THE DESKTOP POP-UP MENU

Although this trick is documented, again, I've rarely seen it used, so I have to assume most people don't know what it can do. You can add items to your Desktop pop-up menu (the menu that appears when you click with the right mouse button on an open area of the Desktop):

- ◆ Open the properties notebook for the Desktop by clicking on the right mouse button on the Desktop and selecting the Properties option.
- ◆ Click on the Menu tab.
- ◆ Under the Available Menus section, select the Primary pop-up menu. Under the Actions menu section, click on Create another....
- ◆ Next, enter the name of the program as you want it to appear on the menu (e.g., "Editor") and the name of the program and its path (if it is not in the PATH statement) in the two entry fields on the dialog.
- ◆ Close the dialog and the properties notebook. Your new menu item will appear on your Desktop pop-up menu at the bottom. This procedure works with any folder.

SHUTTING DOWN WITHOUT A MOUSE

If you've ever lost your mouse cursor or video (and if you haven't, you will), then this one's for you:

- ◆ Press ALT+ SHIFT+ TAB to select the Desktop as the active object.
- ◆ Press CTRL+ \ to deselect all objects.
- ◆ Press SHIFT+ F10 to invoke the Desktop pop-up menu.
- ◆ Press 'D'. This will shut down your system just as if you'd had both mouse and video. Of course, you could always press CTRL+ALT+ DEL, which, contrary to popular opinion, does perform an orderly shut down of the file system.

CATASTROPHIC SHUT DOWN

Speaking of CTRL+ALT+DEL, I've been told that pressing CTRL+ALT+NUM-LOCK twice, then CTRL+ALT+DEL when the system prompts for a floppy for a

memory dump, produces the cleanest of all catastrophic shut downs. Although I haven't been able to verify this with anyone "in the know," I've used this technique several times, and in my opinion it does produce a little cleaner shut down.

GETTING YOUR NAME IN PRINT

Have a tip that you think others could use? I would love to hear it, and I'll bet others would as well. Each month I will include at least one tip or trick as an aside to the column. And, if you have a column idea to share, I'll give you a shot as a guest columnist. So drop me a line at rbyrley@softouch.com. 

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