

Utilizing the Windows 95 Active Desktop

BY JOHN E. JOHNSTON

The Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.0 update contains a very interesting addition function called Active Desktop. Active Desktop web-enables several areas of the Windows 95 desktop, including the background wallpaper. The Active Desktop is an integral part of Windows 98 that promises to change the way we present information to corporate users.

When I first explored Active Desktop, I thought it was a nice addition to Windows 95, but I could not think of any corporate uses for this new technology. After a bit of tinkering, the power of Active Desktop became apparent, and the ideas for corporate uses began to flow. Let me show you an example that illustrates the flexibility and ease of use that Active Desktop provides.

When you first enable Active Desktop, you will notice that your background is changed as shown in Figure 1. The background shown in Figure 1 is not an image file (BMP, PCX, etc.), rather it is a Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) file. This file can be found at C:\Windows\web\Wallpaper\wallpr.htm.

To help illustrate the power of Active Desktop, let's modify the wallpr.htm file to customize it for The Widget Corporation. The three lines that are underlined in Figure 2 were modified for this example. The first and last underlined lines simply change the text that appears on the end-user's desktop. The middle underlined line points to another HTML file that resides on a NetWare file server.

When we bring up our Windows 95 system using this modified file as our background, we are presented with the image shown in Figure 3.

When the user clicks on the "News from the Widget Company" line, the index.htm

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will be launched. The index.htm file is a simple HTML file that contains the latest news about The Widget Company. This file can be dynamically updated since it resides on a file server. Figure 4 shows the screen that the end user will see when he clicks on the "News from the Widget Company" line.

The index.htm file can contain links to other HTML files residing on the local file server and can also link to sites and web pages residing on the Internet.

ACTIVE DESKTOP GALLERY

You can also place web objects created for Active Desktop directly on your

file residing on the SYS volume of a NetWare server named nw410 in the web1 directory

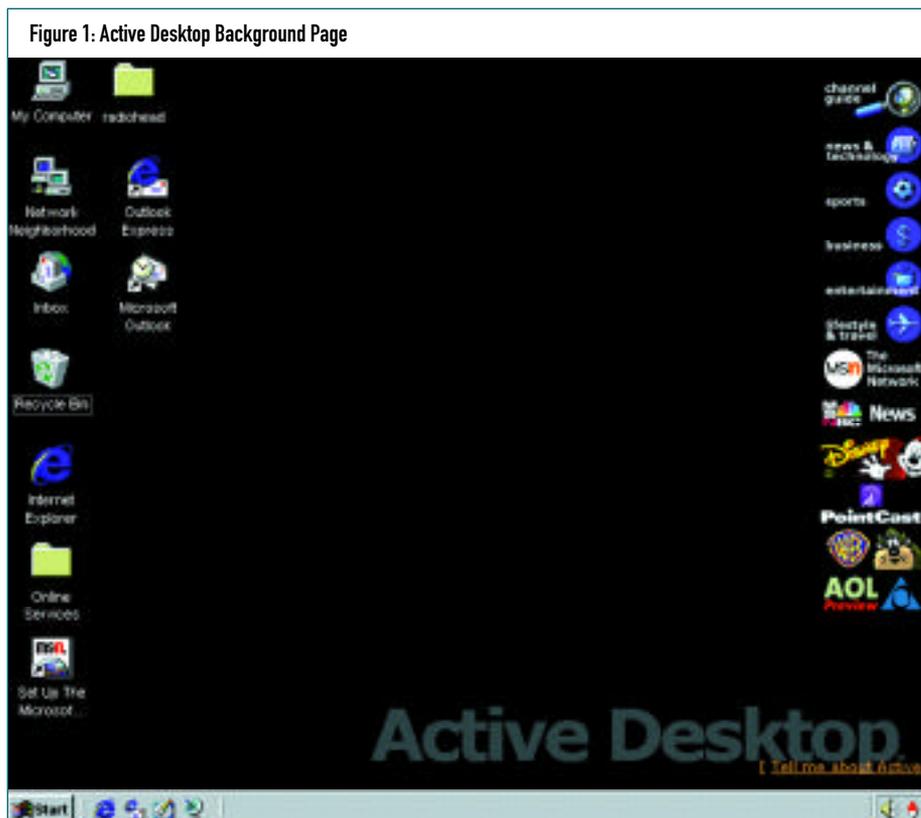


Figure 2: Modifications to the wallpapr.htm File

```

</head>
<body scroll="no" style="background: black; margin: 0; font: 8pt Verdana">
<table border="0" height="100" width="100" cellpadding="0" cellspacing="0" style="font: 8pt Verdana">
<tr valign="bottom">
<td align="right">
<span style="
position: relative;
left: -75px;
letter-spacing: -4px;
font: 4pt verdana;
font-weight: bold;
color: #444444">
>The Widget Company</span style="
font: 4pt Verdana;
letter-spacing: 0;
color: #444444">
</span>
</td>
<td align="right" style="
position: relative;
top: -10px;
left: -10px;
font: 8pt verdana;
color: #FF9933">
>[<ahref="http://www.widget.com/index.htm">
style="
color: #FF9933;
text-decoration: none;">
Home From The Widget Company] </ahref>
</td>
</tr>
</table>
</body>

```

Figure 3: The Modified Background Image



desktop. To view some samples, visit www.microsoft.com/ie/ie40/gallery. This site includes several interesting objects including:

- ◆ Microsoft Investor Ticker
- ◆ Satellite Tracker
- ◆ 3D Java Clock
- ◆ Dynamic Weather Display

Although many of these objects are not designed for the corporate desktop, they do illustrate the power of tightly integrating the Windows 95 and 98 desktops with the Internet.

Figure 4: Simple News HTML File



OBTAINING THE INTERNET EXPLORER 4.0 UPDATE

If you wish to try out Active Desktop, you must first download and install the Microsoft Internet Explorer Version 4.0. To obtain this update, browse to www.microsoft.com/ie/ie40. **Note:** *The Microsoft web site changes daily, so this link may not be valid at the time this column is published.*

CONCLUSION

I haven't covered all of the features of Active Desktop, however, most of them are cosmetic in nature. For example, you can add background pictures to folders. The display of a folders contents is controlled by an HTML document that can be modified by the user.

Hopefully, this introduction to Active Desktop has helped to spark your imagination. The Active Desktop can be a very effective communications tool for today's corporations. Text, graphics, sound, and video messages can be easily disseminated to all of your users using this new tool.

If you have any questions, comments or ideas for future topics for this column, feel free to contact me at johnj@fast.net. 



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