

Windows NT Workstation User Profiles

BY JOHN E. JOHNSTON

Windows NT Workstation user profiles can be your best friend or your worst enemy. User profiles are comprised of a group of settings that control the user's customizations to his/her desktop. For example, the following settings are stored in the user profile: Start Menu entries, screen saver, shortcuts residing on the desktop, and color schemes. User profiles allow multiple users to use the same PC while retaining their individual settings. If you are planning to roll out Windows NT Workstations to your end users, you should become proficient in the use and manipulation of user profiles.

There are two main categories of Windows NT Workstation user profiles: local profiles and network-based profiles. Let's take a look at each of these categories and how they can be used to help manage your Windows NT desktops.

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LOCAL USER PROFILES

When a new user logs into a Windows NT Workstation, a new local profile is automatically created for that user. This profile is stored in the C:\WINNT\PROFILES\ username directory. You can view the profiles in use on a Windows NT Workstation by clicking on **Start > Settings > Control Panel > System > User Profiles**.

Anatomy of the Start Menu

Perhaps the most important folder in the user's profile directory is the "Start Menu" folder. This folder contains the shortcuts to the applications available to the end user. If you look in the "Programs" directory under the "Start Menu" folder, as shown in Figure 1, you will see the list that is displayed when the user clicks on **Start > Programs**. As illustrated in Figure 1, the following items should be displayed:

- ◆ Accessories
- ◆ Startup
- ◆ Command Prompt
- ◆ Windows NT Explorer

Yet, when the user actually clicks on **Start > Programs**, the items shown in Figure 2 are displayed. Where did all of the additional entries come from? The extra entries came from the "Profiles\All Users" folder. Figure 3 shows these additional entries that were added to the start menus. The end user's Start Menu is actually a combination of the entries contained in the user's individual profile and the entries

contained in the "All Users" profile. This fact should get you thinking about how you can simply place shortcuts in the "All User" profile and these shortcuts will be available to all users of that PC.

Tip: You will see a line in the start menus dividing the entries in the user's profile and the entries in the "All Users" profile.

Anatomy of the Desktop

Just as with the "Start Menu," both the "All Users" profile and the individual user's profiles contain a Desktop folder. The combined contents of these two folders make up the items that are placed on the end user's desktop. Items placed in the "All Users\Desktop" folder will appear on the desktops of all users of the PC. Items placed in the individual user's profile Desktop folder will only be placed on that user's desktop.

You can determine which Desktop folder a desktop item resides in by right clicking on the object, then clicking on **Properties**.

Network-Based User Profiles

Network-based user profiles, or "roaming profiles," are stored on a file server's disk drive rather than on the local PC's hard drive. By

Figure 1: The "Programs" Directory Under the Start Menu Folder

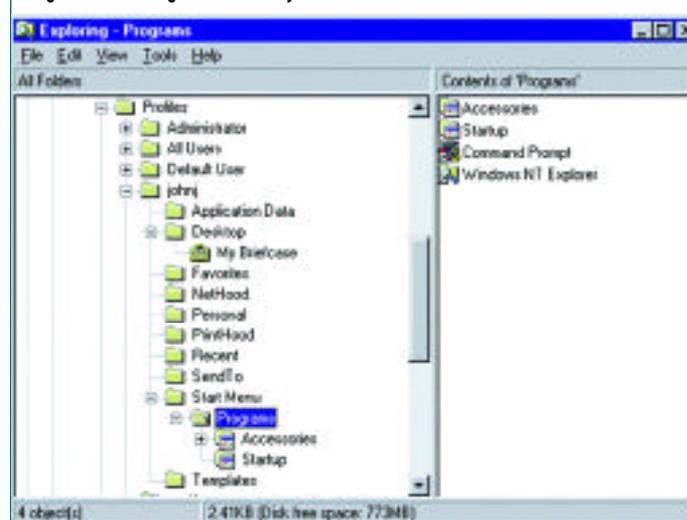
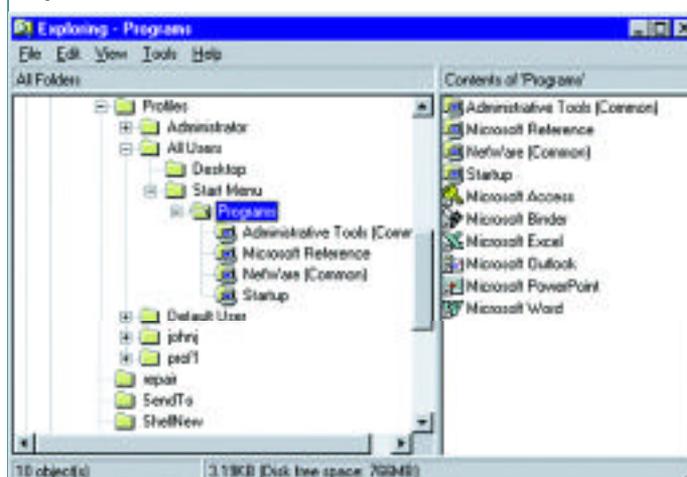


Figure 2: Actual Start Menu for the End User



Figure 3: User's Start Menus are a Combination of "All Users" and Individual Profiles



workstation's hard drive in the WINNT\PROFILES\ username directory. When the user logs out, the network-based profile will be created in the path specified in the previous step.

The user can customize his desktop and Start Menu, and these changes will be saved in both the network-based user profile and the local user profile. The system saves the profile in both places so that in the event of a network outage, the user can still login to the workstation using the local user profile.

Tip: If the user already has a local user profile, this local profile will be copied to the network when the user logs out.

If you have any questions or comments on this material, or have suggestions for future topics, please feel free to email me at johnj@fast.net. 

keeping the user profiles on the network, the user can roam from one PC to another while retaining individual desktop customizations. The following steps can be used to establish network-based user profiles:

1. Create a directory on a Windows NTServer named PROFILES.
2. Share the directory with a share name of PROFILES. To do this, perform the following steps from the NT server where the PROFILES directory was created:
 - ◆ From Windows Explorer, navigate to the PROFILES directory.
 - ◆ Right click on the PROFILES directory, then click on Sharing.
 - ◆ Click on "Share As:" then enter PROFILES as the share name.
 - ◆ Click on Apply, and then click on OK.
3. Start the User Manager for Domains and select a user for whom you wish to implement roaming profiles.
4. Click on the Profile button.
5. Enter the path to the Profiles directory, then click on OK.
6. Log in to a Windows NT Workstation as the user whose settings were just modified. If this is a new user (a user without a local user profile), a local user profile will be created on the



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