M. Salter
Palm Creek 2013

Some of the New Features in Windows 8

- Performance
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- Sync All Your Data to the Cloud
- Windows Explorer
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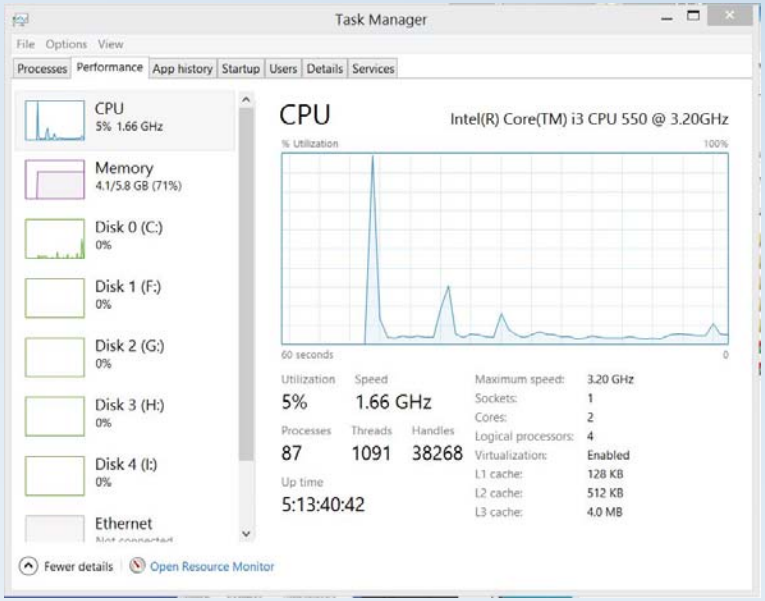
Windows 8 is complete with a new tiled, touch-friendly interface as well as some enhancements to the traditional mouse-and-keyboard desktop.

Microsoft's "re-imagining" of Windows is focused very heavily on a new, tiled, touch-centric interface for tablets. However, it's still somewhat usable with a mouse and keyboard-and no matter what device you're on, **you can switch between the simple Metro interface and the traditional Windows desktop** to fit whatever your needs are at that given moment.

Performance Increases



Windows 8 is slated to have better performance than Windows 7, even with this metro interface running on top of a desktop. Boot time is faster.

Tablet users and netbook users especially should notice a fairly significant performance increase with Windows 8. Especially considering that any of your tablet-based apps will suspend themselves when you jump into the traditional desktop, so all they take up is a little of that extra RAM.

Windows 7 – about 404 MB
– 32 processes

Windows 8 – about 281 MB
– 29 processes

The Lock Screen

Windows 8's lock screen is pretty much what you'd expect: it's got a beautiful picture along with a few little widgets full of information, like the time, how many emails you have, and so on.

You can swipe up to unlock, or press the spacebar if you're on a desktop keyboard.

You can then proceed to type your normal password, or use one of Windows 8's "picture passwords," which let you swipe or draw an invisible gesture that only you know, using your lock screen photo as reference, to let yourself in (though this is really better on tablets than it is on a PC).

For example, in Microsoft's original demo, they used a photo of a person, and the password was to tap on their nose and swipe left across their arm).

The Start Screen

Once you log in, you're taken to Windows 8's new Start screen, which replaces the old Start menu.

The screen should be familiar to Windows Phone users: You've got a set of tiles, each of which represents an application, and many of which show information and notifications that correspond to the app.

For example, your email tile will tell you how many unread emails you have (and who they're from), your calendar tile will show upcoming events, your music tile will show you what's playing, and so on. You can also create tiles for games, contacts, and even traditional Windows apps that will pull you into the Windows desktop.

The tablet-optimized apps are all full screen and "immersive", though, and you can rearrange their icons on the home screen easily (just as you would on any other tablet platform).

At any time, you can press Win+D or click on the Desktop tile to go to the familiar Windows desktop instead.

The Desktop

Once you get to the desktop, you'll be in much more familiar territory. You've got your taskbar, your desktop icons, and your normal windowed applications as you're used to (though they have a new, flatter, Aero-less theme).

The Start menu, however, is gone - instead, you can move your mouse to the bottom left hot corner and click to return to the Start screen, or press the Windows key as normal. Like the old Start menu, you can start typing any time you're on the Start screen to start searching for an app or setting, giving you quick access to everything on your computer.

Pressing the Windows button and typing in an app or setting is faster than browsing the Start menu anyway, so it's a good habit to get into.

You can always access a more traditional menu by pressing Win+X - this will bring up a small menu in the corner that has shortcuts to the Control Panel, Run, the Command Prompt, and other stuff advanced users may want to access.

Full Screen Apps

While you can pin your favorite apps to the taskbar, as usual, most of your apps will reside on the Start screen, just like they used to reside in the Start menu.

Just fire up the Start screen and tap or click on the tile for the app you want to launch (or, as we mentioned above, type it in the search box). Tablet-optimized apps will go full screen, while others will shoot you back to the desktop.

The full-screen apps that come with Windows 8 are really nice: most have touch-based controls, like pinch to zoom and copy and paste, but you can also use them with a mouse and keyboard if you so desire. Each has options like search, share, and settings through the Charms bar, which you can get by swiping from the right edge of the screen or pressing Win+C. Apps can share information one another easily, such as selected text or photos. After picking your media from one app, you'll then be able to choose which app you want to share with, and work with it from there. For example, you can share photos to Facebook, send text from a web page in an email, and so on.

None of this is brand new to touch-based platforms, but what *is* new is the ability to not only multitask, but run these apps side by side. Say you want to watch a video and keep an eye on your news feed at the same time. Just like in Windows 7 for the desktop, you can dock an app to one side of the screen while docking another app at the opposite side, which is a seriously cool feature.

The Windows Store

The Windows Store looks much like the home screen, with tiles that correspond to different categories and featured apps. From there, you can look at a more detailed list of the available apps in a given section.

And, the store contains not only touch-based apps for the tablet interface, but some of the more traditional desktop Windows apps you're used to, so you have one portal to discover all your Windows apps no matter what interface you're using.

The Store has free and paid apps, and you can try paid apps before you commit to buying, which is really, really nice.

Sync All Your Data to the Cloud

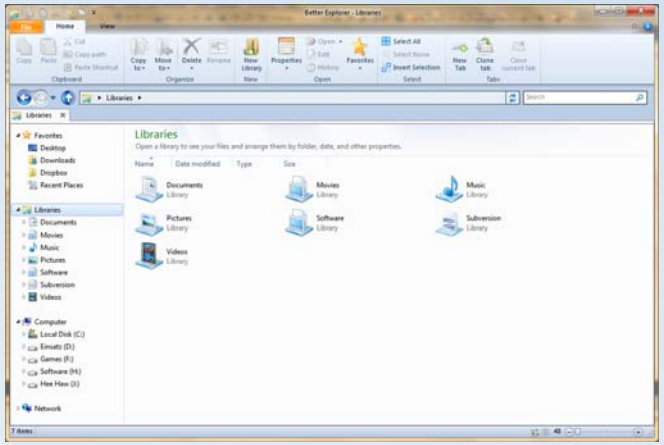
The cloud is taking center stage in Windows 8, with your Microsoft account driving all the syncing. Your address book, photos, SkyDrive data, and even data within third-party apps can sync up to the cloud, and you can access them on any Windows 8 device - even a brand new one.

Just sign in, and you'll have access to everything (not unlike Chrome OS, which immediately loaded your themes and extensions when you logged in). The address book also syncs with other services like Facebook and Twitter as well.

You can even sync all of your settings from one Windows 8 PC to another. Just sign onto your Windows 8 with a Microsoft account and you'll get all your themes, languages, app settings, taskbar, and other preferences will show right up.

It's a pretty neat feature if you have multiple Windows 8 PCs and don't want to set them all up separately - just a few taps and you've got all your preferences ready to go (you will have to re-download your apps, though).

Windows Explorer



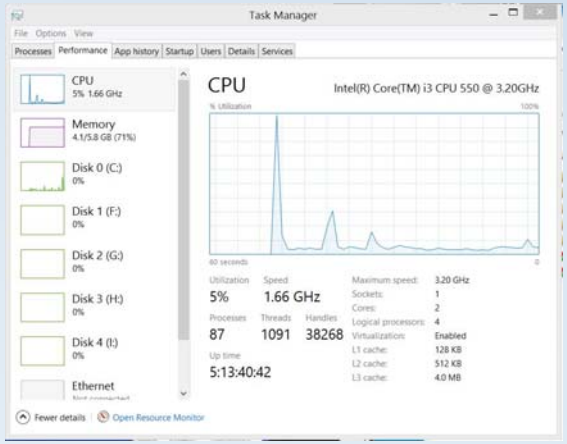
Windows Explorer has gone through a few changes this time around, most notably the "Ribbon" interface we've come to know from Microsoft Office.

Instead of traditional menus like View, you now have three Ribbon panes: Home, Share, and View, that give you access to the features that used to be in the menus. If you're in a folder designed for certain file types - like the "Pictures" library - you'll get a few extra Ribbon panes centered around photos, which is pretty cool.

Windows Explorer also has native mounting of ISO files, a one folder up button like the old days of XP (thank God), and a really cool "quick access" toolbar in the left-hand corner that lets you add your favorite shortcuts to the title bar.

It also has a new file copy dialog that makes it easier to manage move-and-replace actions with lots of files.

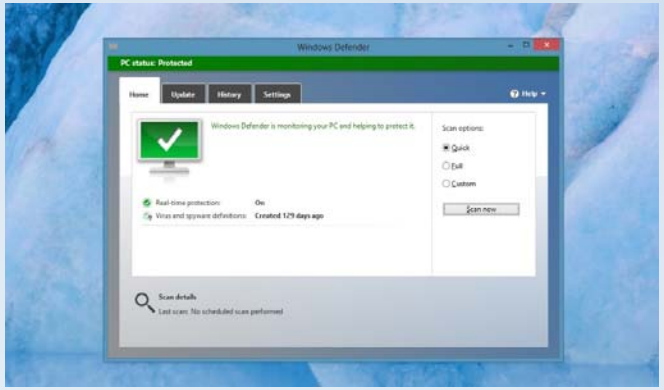
Task Manager



Microsoft has finally redesigned the task manager.

You have a very simple task manager for basic task killing, but if you're a more advanced user, you can bring up the detailed task manager filled with information on CPU and RAM usage, app history, and even startup tweaking - so you can get rid of apps that launch on startup without going all the way into msconfig.

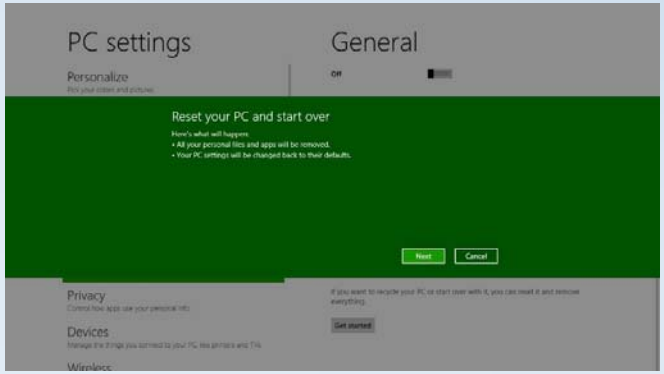
Built-In Anti Virus with Windows Defender



Remember Microsoft Security Essentials - Well, now it's built in to Windows 8 as Windows Defender.

It has nearly the exact same interface and feature set; the main difference is that you no longer have to install it.

Some Other Windows 8 Features



Along with these cool features, Windows 8 also comes with other features we've come to know and love to see in desktop and mobile OSes alike.

It's got system-wide spellchecking, so you don't have to rely on a specific app to keep your writing top-notch, as well as a system-wide search feature, that lets you search anything from your music library to your contacts to the web itself.

It also has a really cool feature for desktop users that lets your run the Metro UI on one monitor while running the traditional desktop on the other (not to mention better support for multiple monitors in general - like having the taskbar on both screens).

It also has a really cool feature called "refresh your PC", where you can do a clean install with the tap of a button. Whether you're selling your machine or just want a cleaner, faster installation of Windows, you can do it all in one click. You can even set refresh points, similar to restore points, so you can refresh your PC to the way it was at a certain point in time.