

Windows 7 Utilities: Power Alternatives

“Alternative utilities for the old Windows standbys.”

by Pete Choppin

Believe it or not, Windows 7 has been officially on the market for seven months, and it has generally had very positive reception. Microsoft has packed this OS with tons of great features. But even with all the built-in utilities, there are still many tools and tweaks that can enhance this already outstanding version of the Windows operating system.

If you are looking for alternative utilities for some of the old Windows standbys, here are some to consider.

Notepad++

Windows 7 Built-in: Notepad

Alternative: Notepad++

Imagine Notepad with tabs, HTML and other programming languages, with code and markup collapsibility and plug-ins. [Notepad++](#), built on the C++ programming language, is a super-enhanced version of the old text editor.

Want to take Notepad++ to other computers? Try [Notepad++ Portable](#). It doesn't actually install anything or write to the Registry, so it will work the same everywhere you go (Windows only).

Xplorer2

Windows 7 Built in: Windows Explorer

Alternative: Xplorer2

What do you get with [Xplorer2](#)? What *don't* you get? Three-panel tabbed interface, the folder set bookmarking and full FTP support to name a few features. This is a very powerful alternative to the standard Windows Explorer. Xplorer2 blows Windows Explorer out of the water for anyone who browses multiple folders, copies, pastes, moves and searches the PC file system frequently. Using Xplorer2's tabbed, dual-pane interface, keyboard shortcuts and killer advanced features, you're in total control of your PC's files.

Paint.NET

Windows 7 Built in: Paint

Alternative: Paint.NET

[Paint.NET](#) is a powerful, lightweight image-editing alternative to Photoshop and GIMP. If you need to do basic/intermediate image editing from time to time, but you don't need the horsepower of Photoshop or GIMP, Paint.NET is a wonderful alternative.

MyUninstaller

Windows 7 Built-in: Add/Remove Programs (in Control Panel)
Alternative: MyUninstaller

Windows only: Freeware application [MyUninstaller](#) is a lightweight replacement to the Windows Add/Remove Programs dialog, similar to [Revo Uninstaller](#) (which is not free). The main difference, other than cost, is rather than going for an impressive feature set of uninstall capabilities, MyUninstaller is a very simple, barebones uninstaller. It runs from a stand-alone executable and is therefore very lightweight and non-intrusive.

Launchy

Windows 7 Built in: Start menu
Alternative: Launchy

The start menu for Windows 7 is definitely an improvement over Windows XP, but [Launchy](#) is still worth mentioning. This little utility allows you to perform a multitude of tasks like open Web site URLs, run commands or open documents from the "Launcher."

NetStumbler

Windows 7 Built-in: Wi-Fi network detector
Alternative: NetStumbler

A nice alternative to the built-in network detector in Windows is [NetStumbler](#), which can even detect networks that don't broadcast their SSID, with signal strength and encryption status.

Cygwin

Windows 7 Built in: Command Prompt
Alternative: Cygwin or PowerShell

[Cygwin](#) is a powerful command-line interface built to run in the Windows environment but with more commands, and more familiar commands, for those of us who work on *nix platforms when we're not on Windows, are available in the Cygwin Unix emulator and Microsoft's own new PowerShell command prompt apps. However, this is not to say that PowerShell is in any way a replacement or satisfactory alternative to the Unix command-line environment. The Unix command shell typically relies on a combination of newer tools and classic Unix utilities; the PowerShell has its own set of command-line programs. Neither the twain shall meet.

TeraCopy

Windows 7 Built in: Windows Explorer file copy operation
Alternative: TeraCopy

A free file-copying utility, [TeraCopy](#) speeds up file transfers and can pause, resume and test file copy operations. With TeraCopy you can:

1. Copy files faster. TeraCopy uses dynamically adjusted buffers to reduce seek times. Asynchronous copy speeds up file transfer between two physical hard drives.
2. Pause and resume file transfers. Pause copy process at any time to free up system resources and continue with a single click.
3. Error recovery. In case of copy error, TeraCopy will try several times and in the worse case just skips the file, not terminating the entire transfer.

You can also use TeraCopy to diff the contents of two directories by running a "Test" copy, which shows you which files exist in the destination directory as compared to the source. If you've ever had Windows fail at the very last minute of a multi-gigabyte file copy, TeraCopy's for you. TeraCopy is a free download for home use for Windows.

Windows 7 is taking the computer and software industry by storm. Microsoft has put a great deal of thought and improvements (after the Vista blunder) into this OS. However, for those of us who love our power with the computer, there are many really nice alternatives as well.

Feel free to submit your own recommendations for great alternatives to Windows utilities. I'd love to hear from you.