



TROUBLESHOOTING Windows Vista™ ANNOYANCES

When initially released in January 2007, Vista was plagued with a myriad of issues such as slow and unresponsive OS, bloated and un-required features, annoying security concerns, non-compatibility of hardware and software, inadequate driver support and several others. Microsoft has since released a number of patches and updates to reduce or eliminate some of the common problems, yet majority of the annoyances still haunt the average user.

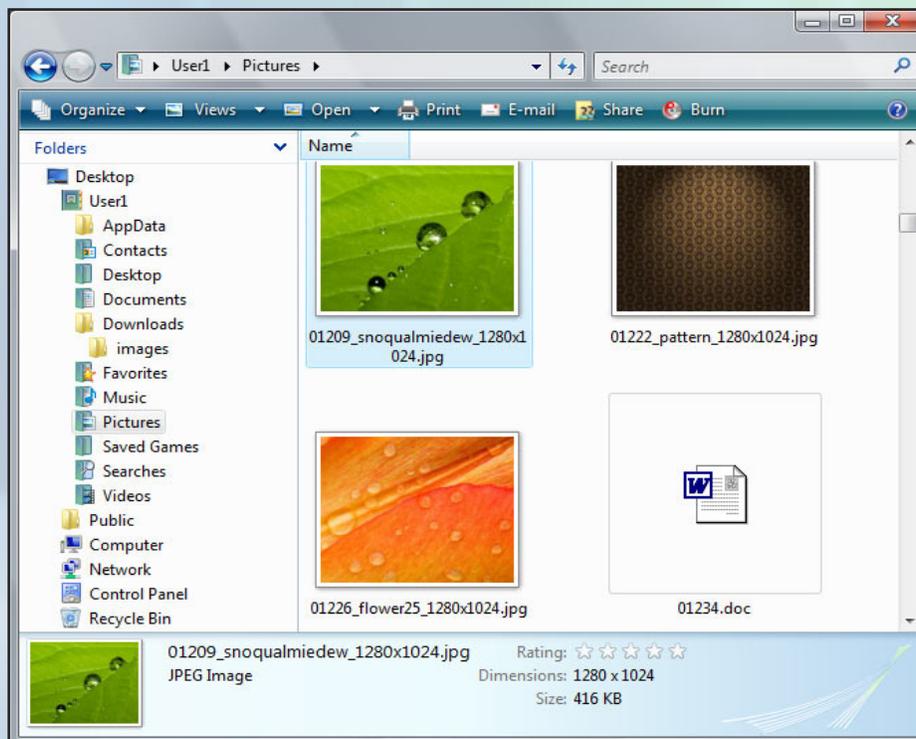
Vista received Service Pack 1 (SP1) on March 2008 and the OS finally seem to have matured and ready to be used for prime time. SP1 has undoubtedly improved the performance and made the OS much faster and smoother to work with. Still, some minor issues remain which continue to bug the user. In this article, we will discuss some of these problems and provide a practically workable solution for them. This should encourage you to shed the remaining inhibitions and try Vista right away!

(Note that the article presently deals with only the Ultimate version of Vista, though some changes are equally valid for Vista Home Premium and Business versions.)

Common Annoyances and their solutions

1. Ever-changing Folder Views

Even when you set the look of folders in a particular way, when you move another file (a word document, for example) to this group folders, the view still changes. This makes it visually bothersome and annoying.



Here's how you can permanently solve the problem by editing some entries in the registry.

1. Open the Registry Editor - Go to Start > Run and type "regedit" (without quotes). Press Enter. Registry Editor appears on screen.
2. Make a backup of the registry before you make any changes. Click on File > Export. Type a suitable name for making the backup of the registry and then save it.
3. Now from the left pane of Registry Editor, navigate to the following keys:

[HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Classes\LocalSettings\Software\Microsoft\Windows\Shell\Bags]

[HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Classes\LocalSettings\Software\Microsoft\Windows\Shell\BagMRU]

In the first case, right-click on the Bags key in the left pane and select Delete, then do the same thing for BagMRU for the second key. This will remove most existing customizations for things like window sizes, positions and views. While still at the same place, you will need to manually re-create one of these keys with a new settings. Right-click on the following key in the left pane:

[HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Classes\LocalSettings\Software\Microsoft\Windows\Shell]

Create a new key called Bags to replace the one you just deleted. Right-click on Bags, select New > Key and name this new key AllFolders. Right-click on AllFolders, select New > Key and name this new key Shell. The end result should look like this:

[HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Classes\Local Settings\Software\Microsoft\ Windows\Shell\Bags\
AllFolders\Shell]

After this, left click on the Shell key from the right pane to select it. Then, right click in anywhere in the empty area and select New > String Value. You can name this new string FolderType. Once this is done, double click on it and in the Value data box, set the default view that all the folders should be set to, (unless explicitly changed later). You can choose any one of the following values:

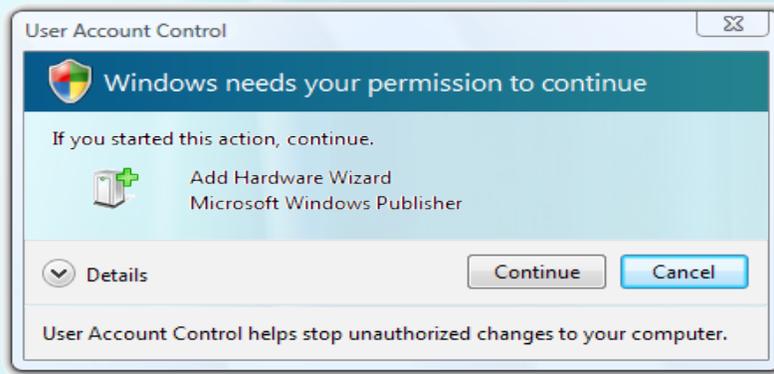
- NotSpecified
- Contact
- Documents
- Music
- Pictures

For example, if you choose Documents in the FolderType Value Data box (recommended), then all the folders for which you don't specify a particular view will default to a standard Document folder view as you set it.

4. Navigate to \Users\[username]\ directory from Windows Explorer and set the view of your choice for each of the main folders. This includes Pictures, Documents, Videos and Music. Make sure you do all the fine tuning of the views such as which columns should be visible, size of thumbnails and icons and their default way of sorting.

After you make the changes for each main folder, click on Organize button from the top of explorer window and select 'Folder and Search Options'. Select View tab and click on 'Apply to Folders' button. This automatically sets the view of folders of the same types. This view remains unaltered even if you copy any files of other types into a folder.

2. The UAC Prompt



The User Account Control (UAC) mechanism was incorporated in Vista so as to give the user the ultimate control over the OS. Whenever any changes to the system files were being made, the UAC used to flash an alert prompt asking conformation from the user, whether to proceed or not. While it was implemented with good intension, the too-frequent appearance of the prompt was quite annoying and intrusive to a common user. Confirmation was required to perform simple actions like installations of programs, even when the user had administrative rights. This quickly led to outright disabling of the UAC prompt from many users, and thereby also making the OS more vulnerable to trojans and worms which act silently in the background and infect the crucial files of OS without the user ever knowing it. Essentially, due to constant nagging from UAC prompts, most users disabled it and traded-off the security with convenience.

The UAC, without any doubt, is a neat security feature, albeit with somewhat flawed execution. It provides an additional layer of protection, which is not possible in XP. Instead of disabling it, you can very well reduce the frequency with which it appears. SP1 has already reduced the number of redundant UAC prompts and there are a number of ways UAC can be dealt with, as outlined below:

I. Turn off UAC prompts (without disabling the UAC): This will keep the protection of UAC but will severely reduce the number of prompts for the same. Follow this procedure:

1. Go to Control Panel > Administrative Tools > Local Security Policy (OR go to Start > Search and type "secpol.msc" without the quotes. Then press Enter)
2. Go to Policies > Security Options
3. From the right hand side pane, scroll down to find the settings for 'User Account Control'.
4. Double click on the item which reads 'User Account Control: Behavior of the elevation prompt for administrators in Admin Approval Mode'. Select the 'Elevate without Prompting' option from the drop-down menu and then click on OK.

These steps will automatically give the elevated privilege to most of the programs, without asking the user, provided he is operating the OS with Administrative rights. In turn, this will further reduce the number of UAC prompts without compromising the security benefits.

II. Turn off UAC completely: You can disable the UAC protection, its user prompts and the Secure Desktop Mode, should you choose to do so. For that, go to Control Panel > User Accounts and click on 'Turn User Account on or off' selection. On the next screen, uncheck the box "Use User Account Control (UAC) to help protect your computer" and click on OK. The OS will ask you to reboot. Choose Yes and UAC will no longer be active.

Disabling UAC completely in this way is not recommended though, as doing this essentially brings the Vista security on similar level of XP. Some users think it is better to run malware scanners in the background instead of letting UAC give continuous prompts. However, the advantage of UAC is that it does not degrade performance at all as it does not consume CPU and RAM resources. It also does not conflict with other softwares running on OS such, as games. The only 'cost' a user has to bear is some seconds for clicking on the prompt in each session, which should be totally acceptable for the great security layer UAC provides. The best solution, of course, is to just disable the frequency of the UAC prompts, as described in point I above.