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Your monthly newsletter, written for humans not geeks

TECHNOLOGY INSIDER

Unlock these productivity gems in Windows 11

Since its launch in 2021, Windows 11 has been continuously updated, bringing new features and improvements to make your life easier. But while big announcements like the AI assistant Copilot and expanded hardware support grab headlines, there are some lesser-known features that deserve your attention too.

These hidden gems can make your Windows 11 experience quicker and easier, helping you stay productive and organized.

One of the most helpful features in Windows 11 is Focus mode. Picture this: You're deep into an important project, and suddenly, notifications start popping up - emails, instant messages, reminders. It's hard to maintain focus with all these interruptions. Focus mode comes to the rescue by silencing them.

To activate it, click the bell icon at the bottom right of your screen and select "Focus" from the menu. This will give you a 20-minute period with no interruptions, which you can pause anytime. It's your digital "Do Not Disturb" sign.

Another great feature is Live captions. Imagine you're in a noisy office or maybe you have some difficulty hearing. Understanding audio and video files can be challenging. Windows 11 has built-in live captioning that automatically generates captions for your content.

You can activate it from the Accessibility settings (go to Settings > Accessibility > Captions) or by pressing Windows Key + Ctrl + L. The first time you use it, you'll need to agree to Microsoft's voice processing terms and download a speech pack. After that, captions will appear at the top of your screen, making it easier to follow along with any audio or video.

If you find typing tedious, you'll love Voice typing. This lets you dictate text instead of typing it. To start, press Windows Key + H. Make sure you have a microphone connected (your webcam mic works fine). Click the mic button that appears, and you're ready to go. You can even set it up to automatically punctuate your sentences. Voice commands like "stop listening" or "ignore that" help you control the flow of dictation. It's a real time-saver for writing emails or documents.

And if you want a tidy and efficient desktop, Start menu folders are a game-changer. To create a folder, right-click an app and select "Pin to start." Then drag another app over it, and they'll combine into a folder. You can rename the folder and move it to the top of your Start menu for quick access to your most-used apps. It's a simple way to keep things organized and within reach.

Finally, there's the Snapping bar. If you're a multitasker, this feature is a lifesaver. It lets you snap windows into various layouts on your screen. Drag a window to the top of the screen, and a set of layout options will appear. You can place windows in different positions, making the most of your screen space. You can also use the Windows key + arrow keys to snap windows into place. If you don't see the snapping options, you can turn them on in Settings > System > Multi-tasking.

These features might not make headlines, but they can really enhance your Windows 11 experience. Try them out and see how much time you can save.

DID YOU KNOW...

zero-click exploits exist?

Zero-click exploits are a type of cyber attack that can hit your device without you even clicking on anything. Yep, that means anyone can fall victim. They usually target messaging or voice-calling apps, using hidden messages or files to slip malware onto your device.

Since these attacks don't leave much evidence, they're tough to spot. To stay safe, make sure your software is always updated and make sure your team doesn't open messages or take calls from unknown senders.

TechFacts

1 Certain fonts use less printer ink and cut costs over time. The classic Times New Roman is one of the best standard ink-saving fonts you can use.

2 The US Air Force used PlayStation 3s, but not for gaming. They used 1,760 consoles to create the world's 33rd-fastest computer inside their research laboratory.

3 Apple's iTunes has some interesting terms and conditions. By agreeing to them, you're agreeing not to build nuclear or biological weapons with iTunes.

INSPIRATIONAL QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"It doesn't make sense to hire smart people and then tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do."

Steve Jobs, co-founder, Apple

Technology update

Easier file sharing between your PC and Android phone

Windows 11 could be getting another new feature that'll make your life easier if you use an Android phone.

Microsoft's working on letting you access files on your phone through File Explorer. Which means no more emailing yourself or using third party apps to move photos or documents between your phone and computer.

This update aims to streamline your workflow and save you time, perfect for when you're busy – which is all the time, right?

Here's August's fun tech quiz – put your tech knowledge to the test

1. What was the original name for Amazon.com?
2. What does the word "Android" mean?
3. Why was the QWERTY keyboard designed?
4. What was a computer mouse first called?
5. Nomophobia is a phobia of what?

The answers are below.

1. Cadabra Inc
2. Human with a male robot appearance (Gynoid is the female equivalent)
3. To slow down typing speeds (on typewriters)
4. X-Y position indicator for displays
5. Being without a working mobile phone

NEW TO

MICROSOFT

Better coordination, wherever you work from

If some of your team work from the office while others are remote, collaborating and coordinating for meetings can be a little more challenging.

Microsoft Places is a new AI-powered tool that can change all that. It helps employees coordinate in-office time, book rooms, and desks, and see coworkers' schedules. It integrates with Microsoft 365 apps like Outlook and Teams, to make planning easier and boost workplace connections.

The day the data disappeared

It's a bustling Monday morning, your business is humming with activity. Employees are logging in, meetings are being scheduled, and projects are in full swing.

Suddenly, chaos erupts.

The server has crashed, and with it, access to all your company's crucial data vanishes. No-one can get it started again. And then the harsh reality hits – there are no backups.

This is a real scenario many businesses have faced. The consequences are dire. Without access to client information, ongoing projects, and financial records, the company is paralyzed. Deadlines are missed, clients are furious, and the financial loss can be staggering. What's worse? All this could have been avoided with a solid data backup plan.

Data backup might sound like a dry topic, but it's the unsung hero of modern business operations. Data is the lifeblood of any organization. From customer information and financial records to proprietary business strategies, everything hinges on the availability and integrity of this data. Without it, businesses simply can't function effectively.

Think of data backup as an insurance policy for your business. Just like you wouldn't drive a car without insurance, you shouldn't operate a business without a data backup strategy. Backups provide a safety net, making sure that even if the worst happens – a cyber attack, hardware failure, or human error – your business can bounce back quickly.

In this scenario, if you had regular backups, the crisis could have been a minor inconvenience instead of a catastrophe. With a backup in place, you could have restored your data swiftly, minimizing downtime and avoiding the loss of trust and revenue.

Beyond crisis recovery, data backups are also crucial for compliance and legal reasons. Many industries have regulations requiring businesses to maintain data records for a certain period. Failing to comply can result in hefty fines and legal trouble.

Better still, the cost of data backup solutions has become increasingly affordable. Cloud-based backup services, for instance, offer scalable options that can grow with your business. They provide automated, regular backups, so you don't have to worry about forgetting to manually save your data.

And of course, investing in a robust backup strategy also contributes to peace of mind. Knowing that your data is safe and recoverable allows you to focus on growing your business without the constant fear of data loss. It's a small investment with potentially huge returns.

If we can help you implement data backup or check that your current backup still suits your business as it is today, get in touch.

Q: I'm overwhelmed by the number of websites asking for location, notifications, camera, and microphone access – can I switch it off?

A: In the latest Edge browser in Windows, you can manage your privacy by going to a site, clicking the lock icon next to the website link and selecting 'Site permissions'.

Q: Switching from window to window is a real pain when I'm busy. Is there an easier way?

A: Try split screen. Hover over the Maximize button of a window and choose Snap Layouts. This is only available in Windows 11 though. If you need help upgrading, get in touch.

Should I upgrade to Windows 11 or wait for Windows 12?

A: At time of writing there's no release date set for Windows 12. But we do know support for Windows 10 will end next year, so upgrading to Windows 11 is a good idea.

Business gadget of the month

NVX Office 200 Bluetooth speaker

If you rely on your mobile for work calls when at your desk, you might miss the convenience and sound quality of a "proper" phone.

With the NVX Office 200 Bluetooth speaker, you get the best of both worlds. Dock your phone onto it and you have a desk phone that lets you dial and answer calls, browse contacts, and speed dial – all with exceptional audio and conference calling abilities.

$234.27 from Amazon.

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