

# STAR Watch

Statewide Technology Assistance Resources Project

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## It's Missing! (Or is it?)

Recently, someone checked the amount of available RAM on his computer and (gasp) some of it was missing!

The computer was supposed to have 4 Gigabytes of RAM, but when the user checked (Start > Settings > Control Panel > System), the operating system reported a significantly smaller amount. Being very quick at subtraction, the user concluded that 642 Megabytes of RAM was gone and posted this earth-shattering news on his favorite blog.

This unleashed a torrent of commentary from other bloggers, some who stayed on topic and a few who actually knew what they were talking about.

The postings can be summarized into a few categories:

- I know a computer buzzword. I want to use it incorrectly in a sentence.
- I don't have anything of substance to contribute, so I will brag about my computer.
- It's another Microsoft conspiracy.
- It's a hardware issue.

- It's a software issue.
- It's not a problem.

In truth, it's a combination of hardware and software issues, and except for computer workstations with 4 GB of RAM installed, it's not a problem.

None of the memory is truly "missing". But depending on the frame of reference used, the stated amount of RAM will be different.

When a computer is powered up, it sees all of the RAM that is physically present. Then, depending on the hardware devices present, some of the RAM is handed over for exclusive use by specific hardware devices (disk drives, video



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cards, CD-ROM drives, etc.). As long as the computer continues to run, the hardware devices never give any of that RAM back. That RAM is never available for use by the operating system or application programs.

The operating system boots up on the computer. As this happens, it gets the remaining RAM for its use. When the operating system reports on the amount of RAM in the computer, it is only referring to the amount of RAM that it has under its direct control. It does not report the amount of RAM that is physically present.

#### The Microsoft Connection...

Since the release of Windows XP Service Pack 2 (SP2) and Vista, Microsoft has given the conspiracy theorists more information to fuel the fires of paranoia. In an effort to improve device driver stability on workstations with 4 GB of RAM, Vista and XP (SP2) do not allow the operating system to use more than 3.12 GB of RAM. While most XP users saw available memory reported as 3.5 GB before installing SP2, it dropped to 3.12 GB after SP2 was installed.

Microsoft does not deny that the problem occurs (<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/888137/en-us>):

“For example, before you upgrade to Windows XP SP2, the **System Properties** dialog box may report approximately 3.87 GB of RAM. The System Information tool may report that the total physical memory is approximately 3,540.00 megabytes (MB). After you upgrade to Windows XP SP2, the **System Properties** dialog box may report approximately

3.12 GB of RAM, and the System Information tool may report that the total physical memory is approximately 2,770.00 MB.”

Microsoft also acknowledges that the issue exists in Vista (<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/929605/en-us>):

“If a computer has 4 gigabytes (GB) of random-access memory (RAM) installed, the system memory that is reported in the **System Information** dialog box in Windows Vista is less than you expect. For example, the **System Information** dialog box may report 3,120 megabytes (MB) of system memory on a computer that has 4 GB of memory installed (4,096 MB).”

“The reduction in available system memory depends on the devices that are installed in the computer. However, to avoid potential driver compatibility issues, the 32-bit versions of Windows Vista limit the total available memory to 3.12 GB.”

“If a computer has many installed devices, the available memory may be reduced to 3 GB or less. However, the maximum memory available in 32-bit versions of Windows Vista is typically 3.12 GB.”

To state it another way, if you purchase a monster computer with 4 GB of RAM installed, regardless of the amount of RAM actually needed for hardware devices, Vista will always ignore at least 976 MB of RAM, possibly more (My Windows XP computer has a total of 960 MB available RAM).

It's a little bit of a stretch, but we understand how the conspiracy theorists could (erroneously) arrive at their conclusions.



# Office 2003 Users: Microsoft Has Something Special for You

If your computer is running Microsoft Office 2003, you might want to circle February 27 on your calendar. That is the date that Microsoft is scheduled to release Service Pack 3 (SP3) for Office 2003.

Ordinarily, the release of a Service Pack is a welcome event. Lots of bugs get fixed, and sometimes new and/or better functionality is added. SP3 will fix bugs and, depending on your point of view, improve some functionality, but there are other changes that may not make your user experience a better one.

In an effort to improve security (according to Microsoft), Excel 2003, PowerPoint 2003, and Word 2003 will no longer allow users to open certain types of files. If you try to open any of the file types on Microsoft's hit list, you will receive one of the following error messages:

- You are attempting to open a file type that has been blocked by your registry policy setting.
- You are attempting to save a file that is blocked by your registry policy setting.
- You are attempting to open a file that was created in an earlier version of Microsoft Office. This file type is

blocked from opening in this version by your registry policy setting.

If you try to open a Corel Draw (.CDR) file, a red "X" is displayed.

SP3 will not allow you to save data into those proscribed file types.

## **Which file types will be blocked?**

According to Microsoft, the file types that will be blocked are as follows:

- Corel Draw (.CDR)
- Lotus and Quattro (.WK1, .WK3, WK4, .WJ1, .WJ2, .WJ3, .WKS, .WQ1, .FM3)
- DBASE II (.DBF)
- Excel 4.0 Charts (.XLC)
- PowerPoint files that are older than PowerPoint 97 (.PPT, .POT, .PPS, .PPA)
- Any Word files created before Word 6.0

## **What if you need the ability to open or save files in the blocked formats?**

Microsoft offers several suggestions that might be helpful:

- If the file was created recently, ask the person who created it to save it



into a file format that will not be blocked by Office 2003 SP3.

- Find a computer in your office that has Office 2003 installed, but does not have SP3 installed. Use that computer to open the document and save it into a file format that will not be blocked by SP3.
- Use the batch conversion wizard in Word 2003 to convert documents created in old versions of Word to a newer Word file format. For more information about this process, refer to the Microsoft KnowledgeBase article at this link:  
<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/826174>.
- Use the Office File Converter to convert batches of Office files to 2007 Office file formats. The Office File Converter is a component of the Microsoft Office Migration Planning Manager. For more information, visit the following Microsoft Web site:

<http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?familyid=13580cd7-a8bc-40ef-8281-dd2c325a5a81&displaylang=en>

For more information about the Office Migration Planning Manager, see the Microsoft TechNet article that is titled "Introduction to OMPM." To do this, visit the following Microsoft Web site:

<http://technet2.microsoft.com/office/en-us/library/d0373697-31f5-4fc5-8dd1-1b9d7f35842f1033.msp>

### If all else fails...

Microsoft has recognized that some users may have a legitimate need to continue to work with the blocked file types and has created downloadable procedures that will selectively re-enable certain file types:

- Download the appropriate files from the Microsoft Download Center:

To re-enable Word file types only, save the following file to a folder on the computer:

<http://download.microsoft.com/download/2/8/B/28B644CE-9A30-4D99-AFEF-830A4FB5B839/UnblockWord.reg>

To re-enable Excel file types only, save the following file to a folder on the computer:

<http://download.microsoft.com/download/2/8/B/28B644CE-9A30-4D99-AFEF-830A4FB5B839/UnblockExcel.reg>

To re-enable PowerPoint file types only, save the following file to a folder on the computer:

<http://download.microsoft.com/download/2/8/B/28B644CE-9A30-4D99-AFEF-830A4FB5B839/UnblockPowerPoint.reg>

- Double-click the file that you saved in previous step(s).
- Click **Yes** to confirm the installation of the file(s).





# 3 Simple Tech Tips...

Normally, tech tips and tricks are for the more advanced computer users. This article is the exception. Here are three simple tips that most computer users will be able to make use of:

## #1: Something really easy...

Many times, when copying a group of files, Windows asks if you wish to overwrite one or more of the files. To overwrite, users have a choice of “Yes” or “Yes to All”, but only “No” to disallow the overwrite. Wouldn’t it be nice if users could select “No to All”? They can: Hold down the Shift key, then press “No”. Windows will treat the response as if it were “No to All”.

## #2: Delete a file that is in use...

Normally it is a good thing that Windows will not allow users to delete a file that is in use. Occasionally, there are circumstances when the file in use must be deleted – but Windows won’t allow it. There is a way to do it if you remember a few MS-DOS commands:

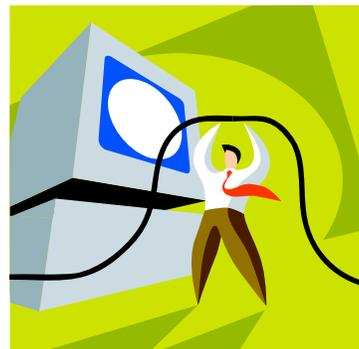
- Go to Start > Run. Type in “CMD” and click “OK” to bring up the Command Prompt window.
- Key in CTRL-ALT-DEL to start the Task Manager. Go to the Processes tab.
- Highlight the Explorer.exe process, then click “End”.
- Use ALT-TAB to navigate back to the Command Prompt window.

- Use the appropriate MS-DOS commands to navigate into the desired directory and delete the file.
- Lastly, type “Explorer.exe” in the Command Prompt window to restart Windows Explorer.
- Type “Exit” to close the Command Prompt window

## #3: Create a Shutdown Shortcut...

Want to be able to shut down without navigating through the Start menu? To place a shortcut to shut down right on the desktop:

- In the middle of the desktop, Right-click and select New > Shortcut.
- In the “Create Shortcut” dialog box, type in: shutdown -s -t 00.
- Click Next >.
- In the next screen, give the shortcut a meaningful name.
- Click Finish.





## WNYLC Web Statistics For January 2008

Total Hits.....199,414  
 Number of Pages Viewed.....67,744  
 Total Visitors.....28,919  
 Average Hits/Day.....6,432  
 Average Pages /Day.....2,088  
 Top Web Browsers Used:  
 Internet Explorer 7.x.....42%  
 Internet Explorer 6.x.....41%  
 Firefox.....11%  
 Safari.....1%

Top 5 Operating Systems Used:  
 Windows XP.....73%  
 Windows 2000.....7%  
 Windows Vista.....9%  
 Windows 98.....2%  
 Mac OS.....2%



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