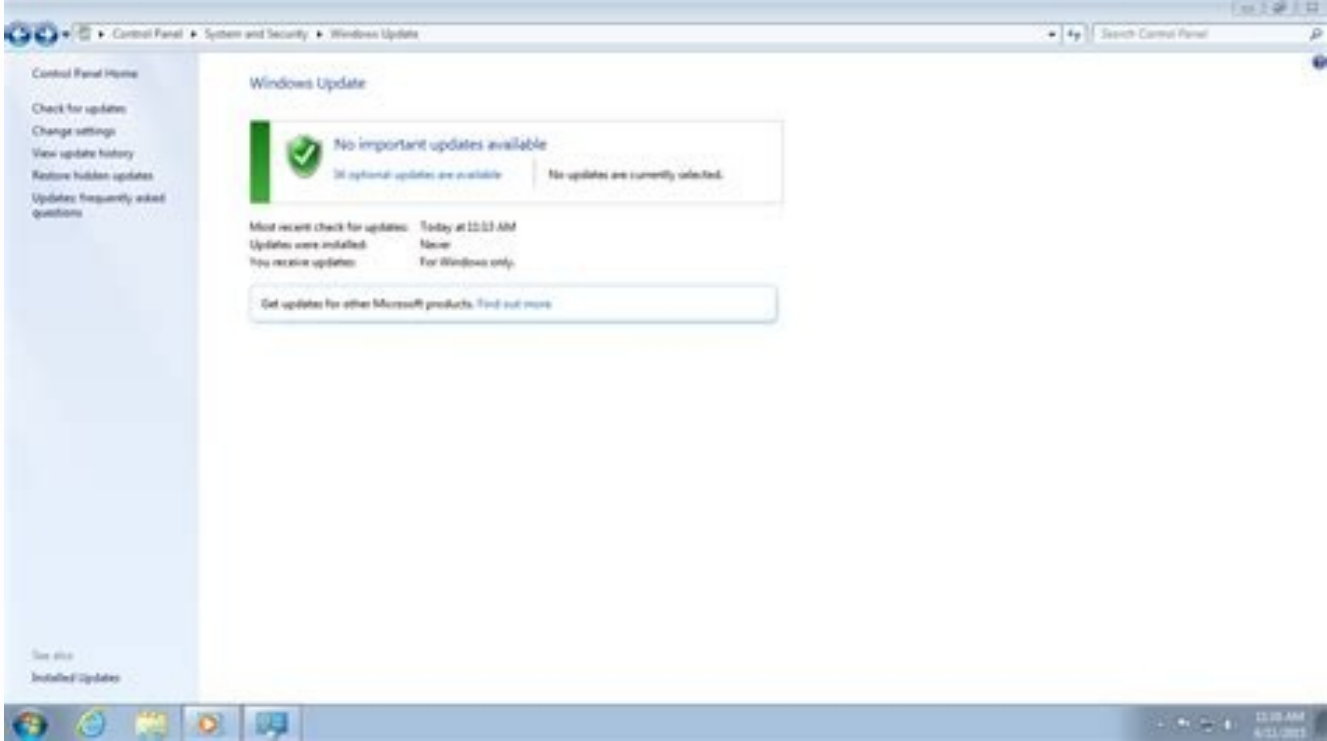


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Just got a copy of Windows 7 and you're looking to bend it to your will? Then you'll want a copy of Windows 7 Manager, which lets you tweak, customize, master and improve just about every aspect of Windows 7. Whether you're looking to tweak security, improve optimization, clean your system, master your network or more, you'll find something here. Though it covers a lot of territory, everything is laid out cleanly in Windows 7 Manager. Click what you want to improve, such as Security, Network, Optimizer, and so on, and you'll come to a screen full of options. In some cases you won't need to know anything about the innards of Windows 7, because sets of wizards guide you through the task. In other instances, you'll need to have some technical background, because you have to make choices among check boxes—for example, if you want to accelerate your network connection, you'll need to understand terms and technologies such as Maximum Transmission Unit (MTU) size, TCP/IP Timeout Life (TTL), and "Enable SackOpts." The amount of control Windows 7 Manager gives you is extraordinary. Want to change the mouse hover time before a pop-up displays? You can do that. Want to manage what programs run at startup? You can do that as well. You can also repair hardware and software problems, optimize your broadband connection and more. The same developer makes a similar program for Windows Vista, called Windows Vista Manager, which looks and works very much like Windows 7 Manager. Anyone who used Windows Vista Manager will very easily make the switch to Windows 7 Manager; the interface and functions are very similar. The program doesn't come cheap, though. You'll most likely only want to pay for Windows 7 Manager if you want to do a great deal of customization. Note: This software comes in 32-bit and 64-bit versions. This is the 32-bit version. If your 64-bit PC is running a 64-bit OS, please download the 64-bit version instead. —Preston Gralla Your computer is probably running a 64-bit version of Windows. But take a look at Task Manager and you'll see that many apps on your system are still 32-bit. Is this a problem? Most modern computers—definitely those sold since around the Windows 7 days—are 64-bit capable and ship with a 64-bit version of Windows. If you're unsure about your own PC, it's easy to check whether you're running 32-bit or 64-bit Windows. There are many differences between 64-bit and 32-bit versions of Windows—enough that if your PC and apps support it, you should be running the 64-bit version. Even if every app you run is a 32-bit app, running a 64-bit OS is still going to be more secure and reliable. But, what about those apps? Things get a bit trickier, there. The first thing to know is that 64-bit versions of Windows can run 32-bit apps, but 32-bit versions of Windows can't run 64-bit software. Another little wrinkle—and one that applies only to a very small number of people—is that 32-bit versions of Windows can run old 16-bit apps, but those 16-bit apps will not run on a 64-bit version of Windows. So, let's dive into that a bit more and see when it might matter to you. RELATED: How Do I Know if I'm Running 32-bit or 64-bit Windows? How to Check Which of Your Apps Are Still 32-bit RELATED: Beginner Geek: What Every Windows User Needs to Know About Using the Windows Task Manager You can use Task Manager to see which of your programs are 64-bit and which are 32-bit. To open it, right-click any open area on the taskbar, and then click "Task Manager" (or press Ctrl+Shift+Escape). On the "Processes" tab, take a look under the "Name" column. If you're using a 64-bit version of Windows 8 or 10, you'll see the text "(32-bit)" after the name of any 32-bit app. If you're using a 64-bit version of Windows 7, you'll see the text "x32" instead. In all versions, 64-bit apps have no extra text after the name. Windows also installs 32-bit and 64-bit apps in different places—or at least, tries to. 32-bit apps are usually installed to the C:\Program Files (x86)\ folder on 64-bit versions of Windows, while 64-bit programs are usually installed to the C:\Program Files\ folder. This is more of a guideline, though. There's no rule forcing 32-bit and 64-bit apps into their respective folders. For example, the Steam client is a 32-bit program, and it gets installed properly into the C:\Program Files (x86)\ folder by default. But, all games you install through Steam are installed to the C:\Program Files (x86)\Steam folder by default—even 64-bit games. If you compare your two different Program Files folders, you'll find that most of your programs are probably installed to the C:\Program Files (x86)\ folder. They're likely 32-bit programs. Is Running 32-bit Apps on 64-bit Windows a Bad Idea? RELATED: Why the 64-bit Version of Windows is More Secure On the surface, it might seem like running 32-bit apps in a 64-bit environment is bad—or less than ideal, anyway. After all, 32-bit apps aren't taking full advantage of the 64-bit architecture. And it's true. When possible, running a 64-bit version of the app provides additional security features to apps that are likely to come under attack. And 64-bit apps can access much more memory directly than the 4 GB that 32-bit apps can access. Still, these are differences that you're just not likely to notice running regular apps in the real world. For example, you're not going to suffer any kind of performance penalty by running 32-bit apps. In a 64-bit version of Windows, 32-bit apps run under something named the Windows 32-bit on Windows 64-bit (WoW64) compatibility layer—a full subsystem that handles running 32-bit apps. Your 32-bit Windows programs will run about the same as they would on a 32-bit version of Windows (and in some cases, even better), so there's no downside to running these programs on a 64-bit OS. RELATED: Why the 64-bit Version of Windows is More Secure Even if every program you use is still 32-bit, you'll benefit because your operating system itself is running in 64-bit mode. The 64-bit version of Windows is more secure. But 64-bit Programs Would Be Better. Right? As we mentioned earlier, there is an advantage to running the 64-bit version of an app, if one is available. On a 64-bit version of Windows, 32-bit programs can only access 4 GB of memory each, while 64-bit programs can access much more. If a program is likely to come under attack, the additional security features applied to 64-bit programs can help. Many apps offer both 32-bit and 64-bit versions. Chrome, Photoshop, iTunes, and Microsoft Office are a few of the most popular Windows programs, and they're all available in 64-bit form. Demanding games are often 64-bit so they can use more memory. Many apps haven't made the leap, though, and most never will. You can still run most ten-year-old 32-bit Windows programs on a 64-bit version of Windows today, even if their developers haven't updated them since 64-bit versions of Windows came along. A developer that wants to provide a 64-bit version of their program has to do additional work. They have to make sure the existing code compiles and runs correctly as 64-bit software. They have to provide and support two separate versions of the program, as people running a 32-bit version of Windows can't use the 64-bit version. And in many apps, people just wouldn't notice a difference anyway. Let's take the Windows desktop version of Evernote as an example here. Even if they provided a 64-bit version of Evernote, users likely wouldn't notice a difference at all. The 32-bit program can run just fine on a 64-bit version of Windows, and there'd be no noticeable advantages with a 64-bit version. In short, if you have a choice, definitely grab the 64-bit version of your app. If you don't have a choice, get the 32-bit version and don't worry about it. Getting 64-bit Apps How you get 64-bit apps when they're available differs based on the app. Sometimes, when you go to a download page for an app, the page will detect whether you're using a 32-bit or 64-bit version of Windows and automatically direct you to the right installer. Apple iTunes works this way. Other times, you'll download a single installation app that contains both the 32-bit and 64-bit versions of the app. When you launch the installer, it will detect at that point whether you're using a 32-bit or 64-bit version of Windows and install those files. Photoshop for Windows works this way. And still other times, you'll actually get a choice on the app's download page to download the version you want. Sometimes the version will say "64-bit," sometimes it will say "x64," and sometimes both. When you see a choice like this, go ahead and download the 64-bit version. In the end, what's important isn't making sure you're running 64-bit apps—it's making sure you're running apps that work well for you. If there's a 64-bit version of an app, by all means use it. If not, using the 32-bit version is just fine. For most apps, you won't even notice the difference. Ericuse165 asked the Windows forum which is better: the 32- or 64-bit version of Windows 7. You can run today's versions of Windows on 32-bit processors—a standard that's been around for about 25 years—and on newer, backward-compatible 64-bit processors. Of course, everything has to have an acronym in this industry, so the Windows-compatible 64-bit standard is also known as x64. That's fine, but the 32-bit standard is abbreviated as x86. If you don't understand the history, that's just plain confusing. Because x64 processors are backwards-compatible, you can install and run 32-bit as well as 64-bit versions of Windows onto them. Of course, if you bought an x64 computer from a major manufacturer, it almost certainly came with 64-bit Windows pre-installed. You cannot install or run 64-bit Windows on a 32-bit PC. The 64-bit version of Windows has certain advantages. While the 32-bit version is limited to 4GB of RAM—and can't really make use of all that—the 64-bit version can address up to 8TB. While you won't be able to actually install that much RAM (or afford it) for a long time to come, you can buy a 64-bit computer today with 12GB installed. Speaking of things that aren't quite there yet, 64-bit applications should run faster than their 32-bit equivalents. But as I write this, very few native 64-bit applications exist, and they're not necessarily improvements (most 32-bit applications run just fine in Windows x64). In fact, although Microsoft Office 2010 comes with 32- and 64-bit versions on the same DVD, Microsoft recommends you install only the 32-bit version. And, of course, 64-bit Windows has its disadvantages: While most 32-bit applications have no problem in a 64-bit environment, utilities—which tend to work close to the OS's core—are seldom as versatile. For instance, a program that inserts itself into Windows Explorer's context menu has to be rewritten to work with the x64 version of Explorer. More and more utilities today are getting rewritten to work properly in Windows x64. Another problem: Early, 16-bit Windows (and DOS) programs, written to be compatible with pre-Windows 95 Microsoft operating systems, will not work at all in the 64-bit environment. (They will work in a 32-bit version of Windows running on 64-bit hardware.) That's significant from a historical point of view—for the first time, we have Windows operating systems that won't run the original, IBM-PC version of VisiCalc. But for most people, that shouldn't be an issue. Read the original forum discussion. Add your comments to this article below. If you have other tech questions, email them to me at answer@pcworld.com, or post them to a community of helpful folks on the PCW Answer Line forum.

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