



Set and Use File Associations

by
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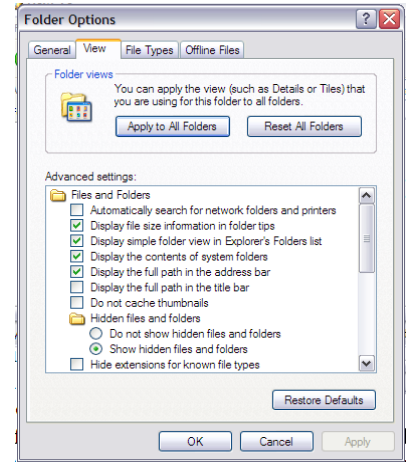
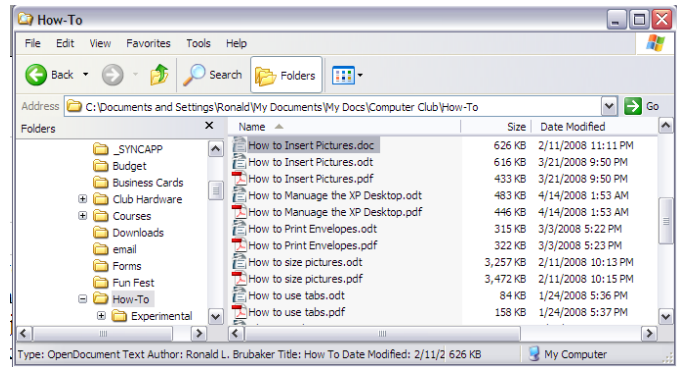
Over the years I have been involved with computing there have been a number of very significant changes in the way we look at things. Among these there was a paradigm shift in which it was realized that the data is really central to what we are doing, not just a nuisance that has to be accommodated. In computer programming this resulted in what is called “object oriented programming.” Microsoft also realized that their operating systems needed to change how they looked at data. The data became the focus and the application programs that manipulate the data faded into the background.

Let's look at this from a user's viewpoint. Prior to the above paradigm shift you would call up your word processor and then load the document you wished to edit. After the shift you would call up the document and your word processor would automatically start up with the document loaded ready to edit. In point of fact, either paradigm has been supported since the beginning of Windows but the more recent editions have made the latter the focus. I'm sure, however, you have noted that Documents is now front and center with applications hidden.

What are File Associations?

You may or may not be aware that file names have a second part called the extension. The extension is what tells us and the operating system what application is associated with this file.

In their typically inexplicable manner Microsoft has set the default to “hide” the file extensions so that the user never sees them. With this option in place the user may be faced with multiple files with the same name and no way to tell which file is which. The example on the right shows a portion of the file directory where I store files for the How To articles. You will see files with the extension .doc (MS Word), .odt (OO Writer), and .pdf (Adobe Acrobat Reader). Without the extensions you can't tell them apart.



Check out your system, open Windows Explorer (not Internet Explorer). Select Tools|Folder Options| from the menu and the View tab to bring up the dialog on the right. To enable the display of extensions make sure that the item “Hide extensions for known file types” is not checked and then click OK. You will note that I have also changed the option to Show hidden files and folders. To me it seems more dangerous to show a system folder as if it is empty than to show me the files. I'm inclined to delete empty folders.

Common Extensions and Their Corresponding Applications

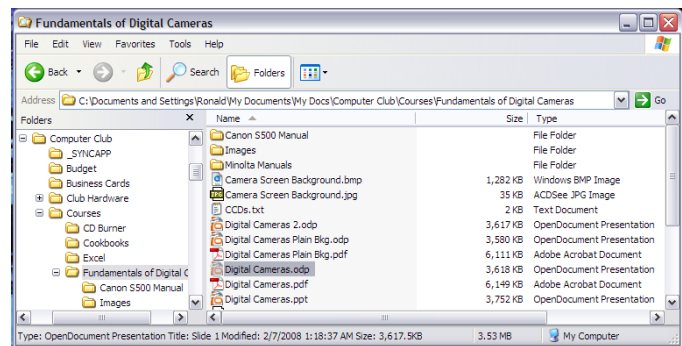
.avi	Audio Video Interleave File	.pps	Power Point Slide Show
.doc	MS Word	.ppt	Power Point Presentation
.fnt	Font File	.psd	Photoshop Document
.gif	Graphical Interchange Format File	.psp	Paint Shop Pro Image File
.htm	Internet file	.qt	Apple QuickTime Movie
.jpg	JPEG Image File	.ra	Real Audio media
.js	JavaScript File	.rm	Real Media File
.mov	Apple QuickTime Movie	.tif	Tagged Image File Format
.mp3	MP3 Audio File	.tff	TrueType Font
.mpg	MPEG Video File	.txt	Text File
.odp	OO Presentation	.wav	Windows WAVE Sound File
.ods	OO Spreadsheet	.wma	Windows Media Audio File
.odt	OO Document File	.wmv	Windows Media Video File
.pdf	Portable Document Format File	.xls	MS Excel Spreadsheet

Starting Programs From Their Data Files

While I realize that the following may not be the way you work with your computer and it isn't entirely how I work with mine it is an attempt to do it the way Microsoft intends us to do it. First, you need to realize that the primary tool for viewing the directory of your computer is Windows Explorer. If you haven't created a desktop shortcut for this tool you really should. You can create the shortcut from Start|All Programs|Accessories| and right clicking on Windows Explorer and then left clicking on Send to|Desktop.

Bring up Windows Explorer and navigate to the directory where you are saving the files with which you wish to work. Find the data file and double click on it. This should start the correct application program running with the desired file loaded.

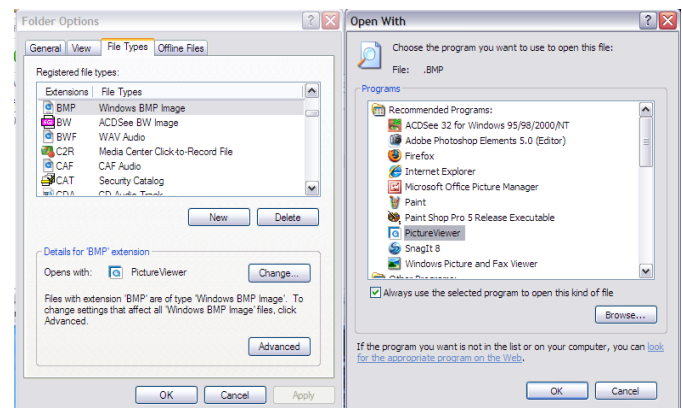
In the example shown on the right double clicking on the file Digital Cameras.odp will bring up the presentation I wrote for the class Fundamentals of Digital Cameras. The application will be OO Impress which is the equivalent of MS Presentation manager.



What to Do if the Wrong Program Starts

This is actually the main topic I want to cover. It is very easy to do but it takes quite a bit of background to prepare you for it. First, note the column in the window above that is titled Type. This will tell you the

application that is currently associated with the the program. If you wish to change this association click on the Windows Explorer menu item Tools|Folder Options and select the File Types tab. The dialog that comes up contains a very long pull down list of extensions. Use the down arrow on its right to move down to the extension that you wish to change. For example in the dialog above I noted that the .bmp file was identified as a Windows BMP Image and I would prefer to have it associated with ACDSee, a graphics viewer I commonly use. Once the correct extension has been selected move down to the lower box and press the Change button. This will bring up the Open With dialog on the far right. You will note that Windows suggests a number of programs that can be used with this extension. The contents of the list of suggested applications will depend on what has been installed on your computer. I selected ACDSee 32 for Windows and clicked on OK. I tested my work by double clicking on the file Camera Screen Background.bmp and it came up in ACDSee as desired. That's how it is done.



Cautions

When setting a file association you should be quite sure that the program you select will actually work with the target file type. For example, while you can read and write MS Office documents with OpenOffice.org's application programs you cannot read OO's data files with MS Office applications, at least not without a new conversion program that Microsoft has recently commissioned.

A good way to test to assure that your intended application will work with the target file is to right click on the file name and select Open With from the menu which will appear. This will bring up a list of all the application programs that Windows suggests will work with your file. Go ahead and try opening the file with the application of your choice. If it works correctly then you can make this association more permanent as outlined above.

