

A few good reasons to upgrade from Win7 to Win10 (Excerpt)

By Lincoln Spector

That "Get Windows 10" icon sitting in Win7's notification area will get you a free upgrade, but you haven't decided whether it's worth taking the plunge. For most Win8 users, upgrading is a virtual no-brainer; for Win7 users, however, the case is not so compelling. Here are a few enhancements that might tip the balance toward Win10. We all know that Windows 7 is an excellent and firmly established operating system that has a familiar and fully functional Start menu. And for classic, non-touchscreen systems, Win10's new Start menu offers no real advantages over Win7's.

However, Windows 10 is far more than a revamped Start menu; it has numerous features that either don't exist in Win7 or have been significantly improved. Not all of these enhancements were introduced with Win10; some are familiar to Win8 users. But Win7 users can now get the latest Windows features for free — and never have to cope with Win8's "neither fish nor fowl" interface.

You might be happy to have Windows 10 — for a variety of reasons. Here are five of them.

1. Task View: Get a quick glance at running apps

Managing and sorting through a bunch of open windows can get annoying. Win10's Task View gives you a clean, easy-to-see view of all of your open windows — including warnings and dialog boxes. The displayed boxes are smaller than the actual windows but bigger than icons or thumbnails (see Figure 1), so you can really see what's in them.

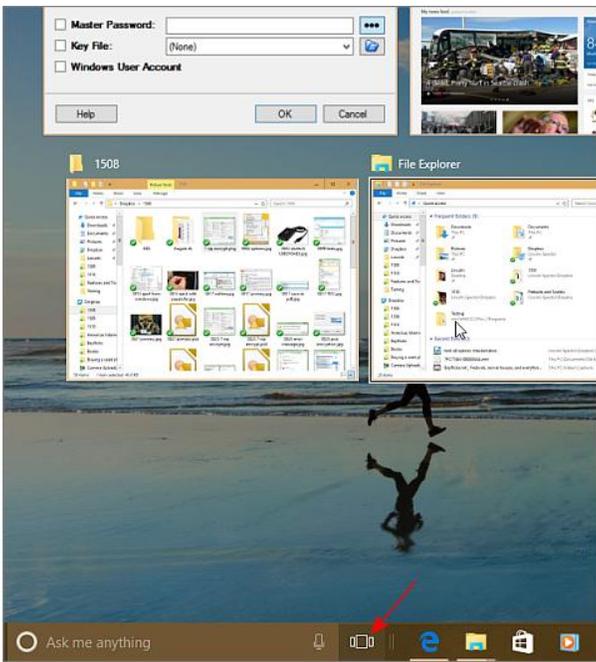


Figure 1. Task View gives a quick view of what's open on the Win10 desktop.

To enter Task View, click or tap the Task View icon (which looks like a box with big ears) to the right of the Search bar. Or, if your fingers are on the keyboard, press Window key + Tab. (If the icon is missing, right-click the taskbar and select "Show Task View button.")

To work with a particular open window, simply click it in Task View. All of your windows will return to their previous size and position — with the selected window will be up front.

Task View is also the gateway to one of Win10's coolest new features: Virtual Desktops.

2. Virtual Desktops: The better way to multitask

When you think about it, every Windows desktop is virtual — the only real desktop is the wooden one that holds up your monitor, keyboard, and other molecule-based stuff. But with Win10, a virtual desktop can bring order to a cluttered screen.

Although virtual desktops have been around for years, Win10 is the first Windows version to have them seamlessly integrated into the OS.

Most busy PC users have two, three, or a dozen applications running on the desktop at any particular time. Often, they're a mess of overlapping windows. Virtual Desktops give apps or groups of apps their own desktop. For instance, run Word

and OneNote on one desktop, and place your browser and email client on another. A third desktop can contain that game you like to play when the boss is away.

To create a second desktop (the first was created when you booted Win10), open Task View and then click the + sign/New desktop icon in the lower-right corner of the screen (see Figure 2). While in Task View, you'll see — just above the taskbar — thumbnails of all running desktops.

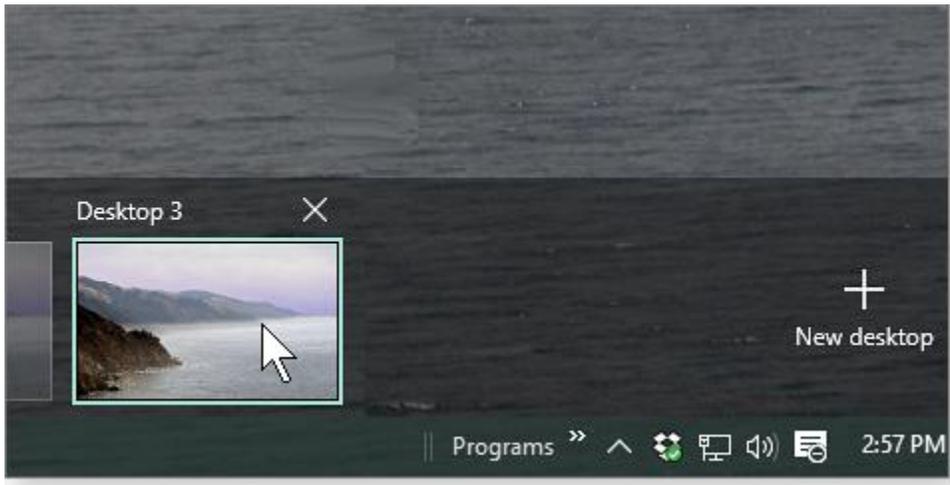


Figure 2. Windows 10 makes it easy to open and close virtual desktops.

Clicking a thumbnail opens the desktop, but you can switch faster by pressing **Ctrl + Win + left arrow** or **Ctrl + Win + right arrow**.

When you launch a new program, Windows opens it in your current desktop.

You can move open windows from one desktop to another. Go to the desktop it's currently in, enter Task View, and drag the window to the desired desktop's thumbnail just above the taskbar.

To close a desktop, go to Task View and click the **X** just above its thumbnail image.

3. Cortana: Smart local and online searches

I came down pretty hard on Win10's digital-assistant/search tool in my Sept. 24 Top Story, "Win10 tweaks to improve computing work and play." I recommended changing its settings to make it behave more like Win7's search tool.

And when I start using Windows 10 on my new work PC, I'll do exactly what I recommended in that article.

But I acknowledge that many Win10 users will find Cortana-based searches more of a benefit than an annoyance. So this section is for those who like universal and intelligent searches.

When you click Win10's "Ask me anything" search field, some possibly useful information will immediately pop up. For example, you'll get the current weather, maybe a reminder of something on your calendar, some news, and so on (see Figure 3).

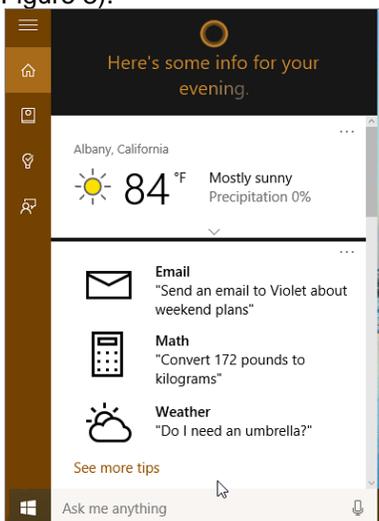


Figure 3. Before you even ask it a question, Cortana provides some potentially useful information.

Type in a search string, and you'll get both local and Web-based search results. It's like using the Win7 search tool and a browser at the same time.

And Cortana-based searches should become more useful over time, as the system learns your preferences and interests from previous searches. For instance, after searching "Buster Keaton" and "Charlie Chaplin," a search for "Harold" popped up another great silent-film comedian, Harold Lloyd. Assuming you have a compatible microphone (not a given), Cortana will respond to both vocal and typed questions.

4. File Explorer: Better file and folder management

Almost every good operating system has basic file management — a way to find, organize, open, copy, move, and delete files. (We're still waiting, iOS.) Win7's Windows Explorer is great, but Win10's File Explorer is even better. (It's almost identical to Win8's.)

Even the name is an improvement. File Explorer is a more intuitive name than the old Windows Explorer.

Catching up with the way Microsoft Office has looked since 2007, File Explorer replaces the classic menus with tabbed ribbons (Figure 4) — a huge advantage on touchscreens. Even with a mouse, the ribbon is faster to use and makes more sense, once you've become familiar with it.

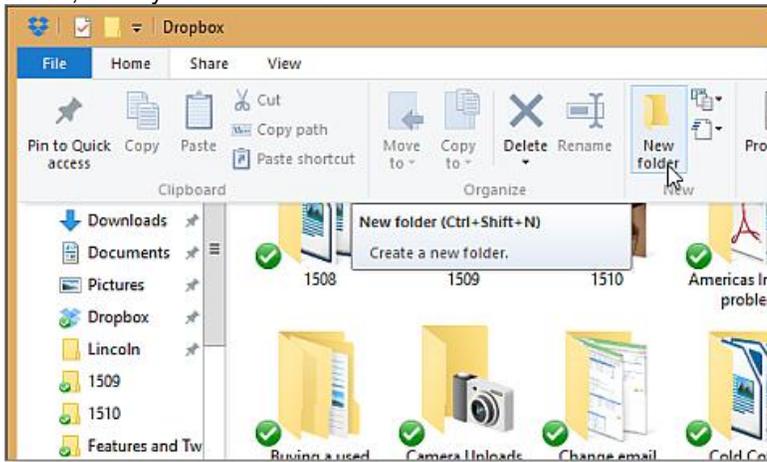


Figure 4. File Explorer uses the MS Ribbon to make file and folder management faster and easier.

If you don't see the ribbon, click one of File Explorer's tabs and the full interface will pop up. Clicking the down-pointing chevron in the upper-right corner of a File Explorer window will keep the ribbon open.

Opening a File Explorer window doesn't take you to your libraries; by default it highlights a new virtual location called Quick Access. Here you'll find the folders that you've pinned to File Manager on the taskbar, as well as folders you've been visiting a lot lately (but haven't pinned). File Explorer displays the same list of folders at the top of right-hand navigation pane. But scroll down that pane and you'll find a list of recently-used files.

File Explorer's Quick Access Toolbar is completely different from Quick Access. Found on the top left-most corner of a File Explorer window, the Quick Access Toolbar lets you run common actions without messing with tabs and ribbons. You could set it up, for example, to quickly copy the selected file's full path.

To add a tool to the Toolbar, find it on a ribbon, right-click it, and select Add to Quick Access Toolbar, as shown in Figure 5.

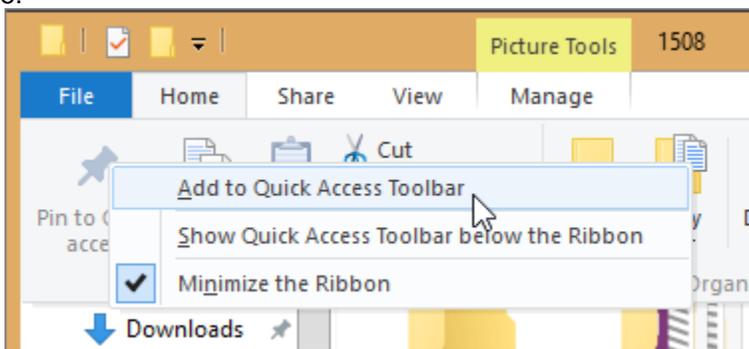


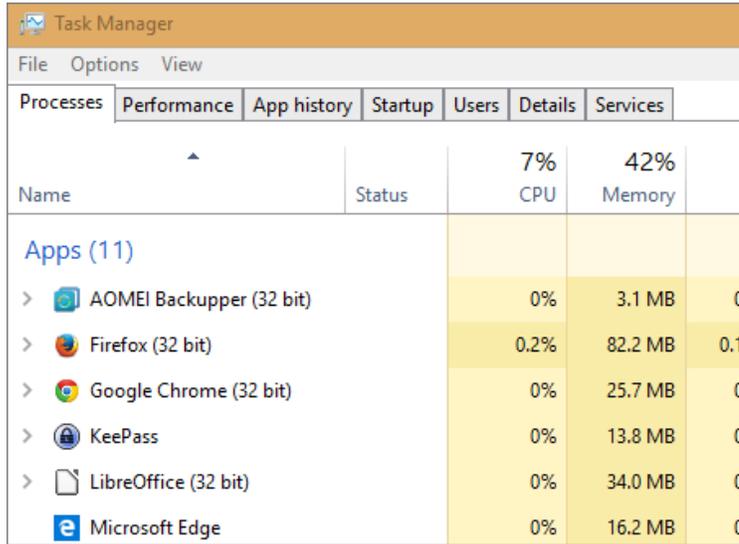
Figure 5. Add frequently used File Explorer tools to the Quick Access Toolbar.

Another nice touch: If you select **Move to** or **Copy to**, either on the ribbon or the Quick Access Toolbar (if you put them there), you get a pull-down menu rather than a separate dialog box. It's significantly faster and simpler. If you really need the dialog box, click **Choose location** at the bottom of the drop-down list.

File Explorer has one serious flaw, but it's easy to fix. Initially, you probably won't find the Libraries section — one of Win7's best innovations — in the navigation pane. To fix that, select the View tab, click **Navigation pane**, and then put a check mark next to **Show libraries**.

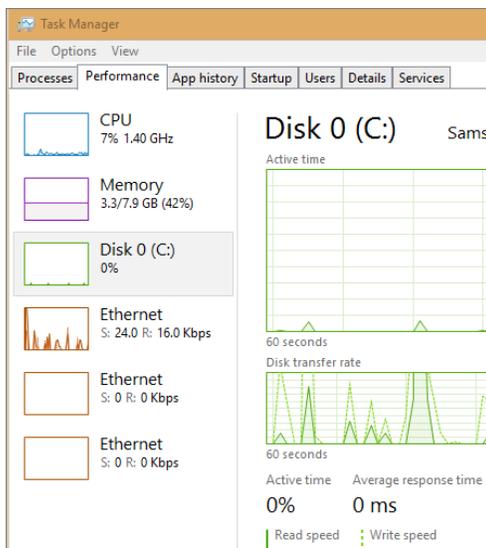
5. Task Manager: More information; easier to read

You rarely go to Task Manager when things are going well. But going there in Win10 (and Win8) is significantly better than visiting Windows 7's version. The latest Task Manager incarnation is bigger, wider, and gives significantly more informative — at least it does so after clicking the **More details** option in the lower-left corner of the basic Task Manager window.



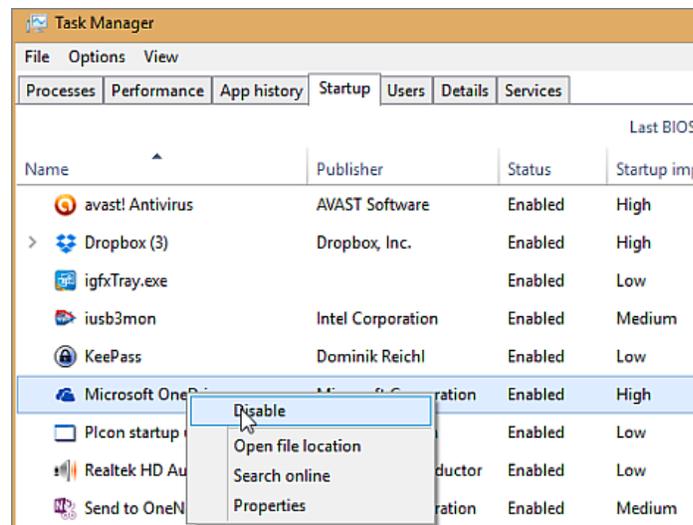
Here are three of Win10's Task Manager enhancements:

- **Process tab:** This combines the information shown in Win7's Applications and Processes tabs. It also separates the applications (called Apps, in the new parlance) and background processes. This simple bit of organization makes troubleshooting with Task Manager much easier.



- **Performance tab:** Small graphs on this window's left side gives a quick view of overall system activity. Clicking a particular graph displays more detailed information.

- **Startup:** This replaces the Startup tab in MSConfig. In fact, if you go to Startup in MSConfig, you'll see only a link back to Task Manager.



The bottom line: Even on systems without a touchscreen, there are good reasons to upgrade to Win10 — especially since it's free. I confess that after writing this article, I was tempted to click that little "Get Windows 10" icon in my Win7 notification area.

But then I remind myself: Impulsively upgrading your operating system is never a good idea, especially when the OS is still new and has a few kinks — such as support for old hardware — that need to be straightened out.