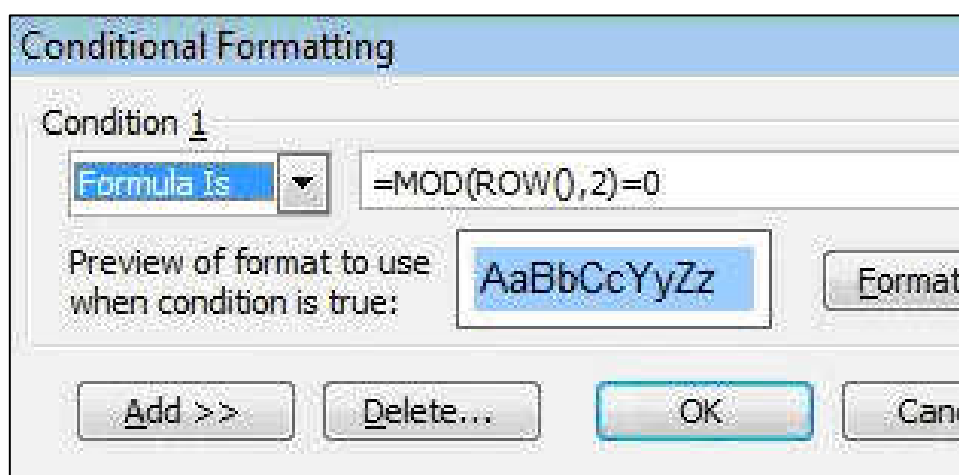# Computers and stuff

Sam Houliston

Excel Tip

When working on a large Excel file with entries in multiple cells, it's a lot easier to read and understand when you colour every second row. There are two ways of doing this, one is to hold down the Ctrl key, highlight every second row and then click FORMAT, then CELLS, then PATTERNS then select a colour. This works well, but, if you delete or insert a row or a cell at any time after doing this, it throws the whole thing out of whack. The other way, which is a heap easier, is to do the following

1. Select and highlight the range of cells you wish to format.
2. Click Format then Conditional Formatting.
3. In the drop-down box, select "Formula Is".
4. In the box type: **=MOD(ROW(),2)=0**
5. Click the Format button and then click the Patterns tab.
6. Select a colour for the shaded rows and click OK twice.

The real beauty of this method is that even if you delete a row or cell in your table, the banding will be maintained automatically. If you find you don't like your chosen colour, simply select the range once more, open the Conditional Formatting box and choose another colour.

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Web Address Shortcut.

Let's say you want to log onto the following address www.webaddress.com. Instead of having to type the full address into your browser, all you have to do is type the bit in the middle, ie "webaddress" then press Ctrl+Enter and Voilà, Internet Explorer and/or Firefox will automatically add the "WWW" to the beginning and the ".Com" bit to the end. If you want to go to www.webaddress.net, just press "Shift+Enter" instead. Try it!!

To DVD or not to DVD

Are you looking to buy a new DVD burner for your computer but I don't know what format to choose, well, you ain't Robinson Crusoe there…There are burners for DVD-R, DVD+R, DVD-RW, DVD+RW and some that support a combination of the formats. There's also DVD-RAM, HD-DVD and Blu-ray, enough different formats to confuse anybody. SO!! - Which one do you choose??

The best way to tackle this is to have a look at each category separately.

The first distinction is "**DVD –**" media vs. "**DVD +**" media. These two types of DVD media were developed separately by different companies. They are conceptually the same from an end user's point of view, but internally they are made differently, and they work differently. All you need to know is that they are different, and that you cannot automatically assume interchange-ability. While virtually all recorders made today can record both types, (and can record CD's too) not so long ago, a recorder was either - or + and would work only with that type of media. So, rule 1, make sure your recorder is dual format. You can actually tell what the recorder will handle from the logos on the front of it (Click HERE to see the "-" logos). Hybrid drives that can handle both are usually labelled "DVD±RW".

On the player side, about 80% of players (and just about 100% of newer players) will play both types, but, again, you may run into players that play only one format or the other. The bad part that there is no way to tell other than by trying a sample of recorded media, and in a few cases players may also be finicky about the brand of media. So, really, to be absolutely sure, you have to actually try the media that you plan to use. However, most modern computer drives do play both, where you usually see issues is with older "set top box" DVD players.

As a comment here, my own experience, and I know that most experienced DVD users would agree, is that the "-" media is slightly more compatible than the "+" media, which is interesting because during the design phase, and "on paper", it was supposed to be the other way around. But the "real world" didn't read the design specs.

Now that we have the +/- issue resolved, the +/- will be followed by "R" or "RW". "R" media is "one-time" media; recording is permanent and cannot be erased. You can, however, "add to" a partially recorded "R" DVD, if it was recorded in multi-session by recording software that supports this. On the other hand "RW" media can be erased and reused, becoming "completely blank" media over and over again.

One comment here, however, I'd recommend that you avoid "RW" media for permanent projects. It is not as stable as "R" media, and many, many people have found that a recorded "RW" disc "faded" over time and that the data (their recording) was lost. RW media is also both slower and more expensive (a LOT more expensive) than "R" media, so I think that the best advice is probably just to avoid it.

So that takes care of 4 media types: DVD-R, DVD+R, DVD-RW, DVD+RW.

Now we can add "dual layer", which you will see as a "DL" suffix. This media has almost twice the capacity of single layer media (9 gigabytes vs. 4.7 gigabytes). Currently, DL media is only commonly found as "+R" media, although "-R" dual layer media has been approved and may be found on the market in the future.

DVD RAM is an older format that you can pretty much ignore.

Blu-Ray (BR or BD) is a specification for future drives with very high capacity (25 to 100 gigabytes), however it is not currently in production and on the market as a drive that you can add to a PC (however that will surely change in a matter of months). At this time, BR is totally incompatible and will not work on any drive designed for the other DVD±R format. However, I would not be surprised to see "multi format" drives at some point, but it's years away, since even the single format drives are not yet on the market..

So, I suggest you look for a dual-layer, dual format drive. This will do just about anything as it supports all of the formats. However, virtually all drives currently being manufactured fit this description, so it doesn't do much to help you narrow the choices. The top brands of drives, in my opinion, are Pioneer, NEC, Sony, Benq (Acer) and LG (other blokes will have their own preferences and ranking).
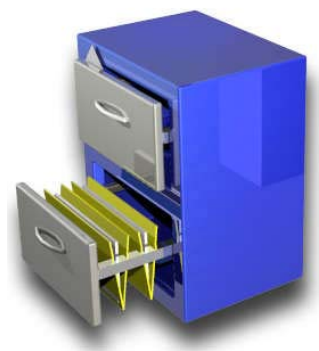
> A picture is worth a thousand words, but it uses up three thousand times the memory.

New Folder

If you're like me, and use Windows Explorer a lot, you've probably wondered why Microsoft hasn't equipped it with the "New Folder" facility. When you access the Open or Save dialog box in any application, you know that the toolbar contains the Create New Folder button, however, Microsoft has never put such a handy button on the toolbar in Windows Explorer.

Fortunately, you can add a "New Folder" command to Windows XP's context menu. Here's how:

- Launch Windows Explorer and select Tools | Folder Options.
- In the Folder Options dialog box, select the File Types tab.
- In the Registered File Types list, select Folder, and click the Advanced button.
- In the Edit File Type dialog box, click the New button.

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- In the New Action dialog box, type Create New Folder in the Action text box and **CMD.EXE /C MD "%1\Create New Folder"** in the Application Used To Perform Action text box.
- Click OK twice and then click Close to close the three dialog boxes.

Now, whenever you want to create a new folder in Windows Explorer, simply right-click on the folder in which you want to create the new folder and select the "Create New Folder" command from the context menu.

Prefetch

One of Microsoft's big selling points for Windows XP was that it loads applications much faster than its predecessors. To accomplish this feat, Windows XP uses what is called the "Prefetch technique," in which the operating system gathers information about each program that you launch and stores that information in the \Windows\Prefetch folder. Then on subsequent restarts, Windows XP uses the information in the Prefetch folder to essentially preload parts of those programs at boot time. Thus, when you launch your application, it appears to load really fast.

Vista RUN.

Where's the Run entry on Vista's Start menu gone? If you're familiar with the Windows XP Start menu, you might realize that "Run" is missing in Vista. On Vista, Microsoft decided to hide this feature. It's still there, though. Just press the Windows Key and R together and the dialog box will appear. However, if you want it to be on the Start Menu permanently, you can do it. Here's how:

- Right-click on the Start button and click Properties. On the Start Menu tab, click Customize.
- The Customize Start Menu dialog will then be displayed.
- Scroll down to the Run command and check the box.
- Finally, click OK and OK again.

Analyse your hard drive.

If you're like most people, your hard drive quickly fills up with all sorts of stuff, music, pictures, data files, programs and other data. And even if you're good at archiving content onto DVDs or external drives, no matter how big it is, your PC's hard disk is often just about chockers. To keep your machine running at top speed, you have to perform regular maintenance and sometimes it helps if you know just what you have stored on that drive. Here is a handy little program which allows you do just that.

This free software, based on the Linux application KDirStat, gives you an informative visual display of your hard-drive usage. Click HERE and download the program **WinDirStat**. Run the program and you'll see all of your files (for the drive or directory you decided to scan) displayed in a rainbow of colours. WinDirStat assigns colours to each file type, such as MP3, ZIP, EXE, JPG, and so on.

By default, the files that take up the most space are coloured blue, the second heftiest are red, and the third largest green. After the first 10 colour-labelled file types, the rest appear in gray--but you can change these settings and colours through the Options menu.

Once you've identified where your disk space has gone, you can then more easily decide where you can save space. WinDirStat is loaded with features for managing your files, such as the ability to automatically delete files without even bothering with the Recycle Bin.

Morris and his wife Esther went to the state fair every year, and every year Morris would say, 'Esther, I'd like to ride in that helicopter.'

Esther always replied, 'I know Morris, but that helicopter ride is fifty dollars, and fifty dollars is fifty dollars'

One year Esther and Morris went to the fair, and Morris said, 'Esther, I'm 85 years old. If I don't ride that helicopter, I might never get another chance.'

To this, Esther replied, 'Morris that helicopter ride is fifty dollars, and fifty dollars is fifty dollars.'

The pilot overheard the couple and said, 'Folks I'll make you a deal. I'll take the both of you for a ride. If you can stay quiet for the entire ride and not say a word, I won't charge you! But if you say one word, it's fifty dollars.'

Morris and Esther agreed and up they went. The pilot did all kinds of fancy manoeuvres, but not a word was heard. He did his daredevil tricks over and over again, but still not a word.

When they landed, the pilot turned to Morris and said, 'By golly, I did everything I could to get you to yell out, but you didn't. I'm impressed!'

Morris replied, 'Well, to tell you the truth, I almost said something when Esther fell out, but you know, fifty dollars is fifty dollars!'

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