Chapter 4

Running Programs

What use is an operating system if you don't have any software to run on it?

In many ways, the operating system exists as the infrastructure that enables you to run various software programs on your PC. If the operating system is doing its job, you almost forget that it's there. You use the OS to launch your programs, but after they're launched, it stays out of your way.

In this chapter I show you how to use Windows XP to launch your programs. I also show you how to use Windows XP to install and remove programs from your computer system. I even give you a few tips on what to do if a program freezes on you.

When you get your programs up and running, however, you're on your own!

Adding and Removing Software

Even though most new computers come with a decent selection of software installed, at some point in time you're going to want to add something new. When you need to add a new program—or remove an old one—you'll find that Windows XP works pretty much the same way Windows 9X/Me did. Which means, of course, that if you already know how to add and remove software, you don't have much to learn.

Installing New Programs

Almost all software programs have their own built-in installation utilities. Installing the software is as easy as running this built-in program.

If the program you're installing comes on a CD-ROM, all you have to do is insert the program's main or installation CD in your computer's CD-ROM drive. The program's installation program should then start automatically, and all you have to do is follow the onscreen instructions.

If the installation program *doesn't* start automatically, you have to launch it manually. To do this, click the Start button, click the Run icon, and then type **x:\setup** into the Run dialog box. (Replace *x* with the letter of your CD-ROM drive.) Click OK to run the installation program. (If this doesn't work, know that some older programs name their installation programs "install" instead of "setup," so change the filename if necessary.)

> **TIP**
>
> If you're installing from floppy disks, you launch a program's setup program by inserting the first floppy disk into your PC's disk drive, selecting Start, Run, typing **a:setup** into the Run dialog box, and then clicking OK.

If the program you're installing doesn't have an automated setup program, or if you prefer to install a new program manually, you can run Windows XP's Add or Remove Programs utility.

Follow these steps:

1. From the Control Panel, click the Add or Remove Programs icon.

2. When the Add or Remove Programs utility opens, click the Add New Programs button (shown in Figure 4.1), and then click the CD or Floppy button.
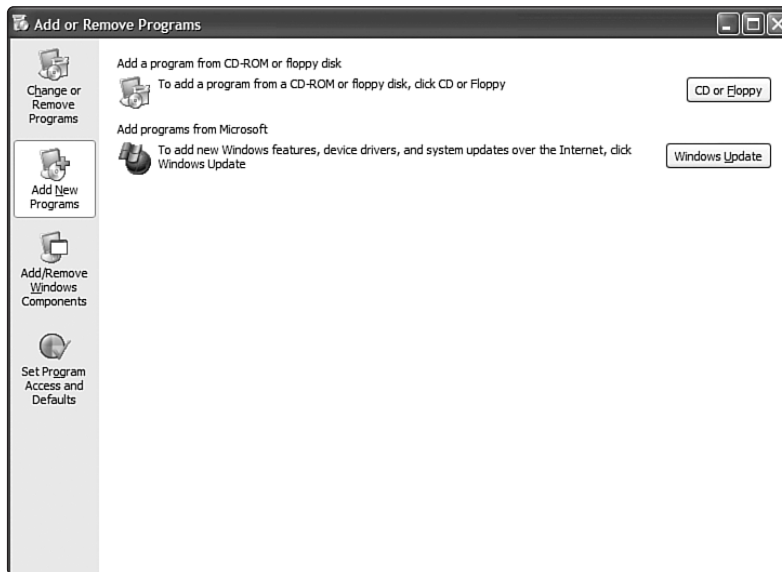

Figure 4.1

Manually installing a new program.

3. When the Install Program from Floppy Disk or CD-ROM dialog box appears, insert the program's installation disk or CD in the appropriate drive and click the Next button.

4. Windows now searches for the installation program and displays the command line in the Run Installation Program dialog box. If the Wizard did not find the installation program, click the Browse button to locate the program manually.

5. Click the Finish button to run the program's installation program and be sure you follow all the onscreen instructions to complete the installation.

Removing Old Programs

Removing a software program from your system can be easy—or it can be complicated.

Most newer Windows programs include their own utilities to uninstall the program automatically. If you want to uninstall a program, you should use this publisher-supplied utility when it exists. You can generally find the program's uninstall utility in the folder where the program's other files reside.

If you want to remove a Windows application that doesn't include its own uninstall utility, you should use Windows' Add or Remove Programs located in the Control Panel. This utility identifies every component of the application you want to remove, and automatically deletes them from your hard disk.

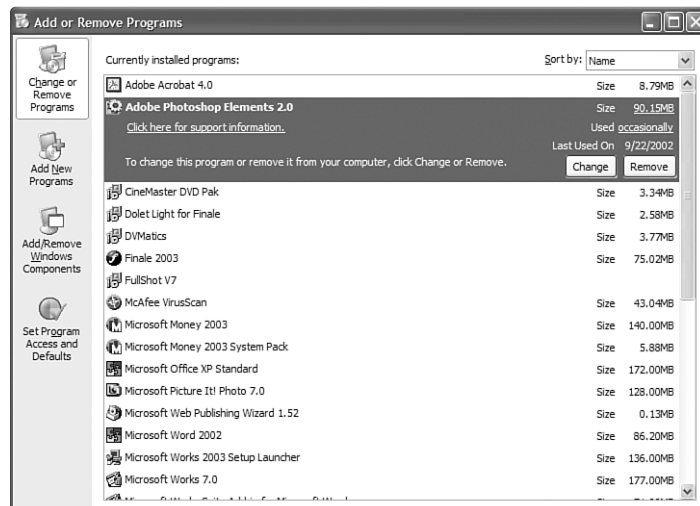To remove a software program from your PC, follow these steps:

1. From the Control Panel, click the Add or Remove Programs icon.

2. When the Add or Remove Programs utility opens, click the Change or Remove Programs button (shown in Figure 4.2). This part of the dialog box looks a bit different from the one in Windows 9X, in that it provides more detail about the programs listed. It works the same way as the old Windows 9X version, however.

> **TIP**
>
> A well-behaved uninstall program should not remove your personal files, even if they are stored in the application's folders. Just to be safe, however, you should move any personal files you want to keep to a new folder before removing the application.

Figure 4.2

Choose a program to remove from your system.

3. Select the program's name from the Currently Installed Programs list, and then click the Change/Remove button. (For some applications, this is a single Remove button.) If prompted, confirm that you want to continue to uninstall the application.

4. Answer any other prompts the uninstall utility presents for removing the program. Some programs, such as Microsoft Word, may require you to insert the original installation disks or CD to perform the uninstall.

5. After the uninstall routine is completed, click the Close button to close the Add or Remove Programs utility.

> **TIP**
>
> If you've manually created any Start menu or desktop shortcut icons for the deleted program, the uninstall program might not know they exist—and thus might not delete them. If this is the case, you have to delete these icons manually.

If the program you want to remove does not have an automatic uninstall utility, you have to delete the program's files manually, using My Computer. The problem with trying to delete a program in this way is that miscellaneous files associated with the program are often scattered throughout various folders on your hard disk. You may want to purchase a third-party uninstall program (such as Norton Systemworks, which includes the Norton CleanSweep utility; learn more at www.symantec.com) to find and remove all program remnants from your system.

Installing Programs from the Internet

Nowadays many software publishers make their products available via download from the Internet. Many users like this because it provides immediate gratification via instant download. However, it only works if the download is a relatively small file, or if you have a fast broadband connection to the Internet. If you try to download a big file over a slow connection, you're going to get really tired of waiting for the download to complete.

Downloading Commercial Programs

When you download a program from a major software publisher, the process is generally fairly easy to follow. You probably have to read a page of dos and don'ts, agree to the publisher's licensing agreements, and then click a button to start the download. After you specify to which folder on your hard disk you want to save the downloaded file, the download begins.

A dialog box should alert you when the download is complete. From this point, installing the program is almost identical to installing from CD or floppy disk. Use My Computer to

navigate to where you saved the downloaded file, and then launch the file. The software's installation program should then take over, and lead you through the rest of the process step-by-step.

> **TIP**
>
> If you expect to do a lot of downloading, you might want to create a dedicated My Downloads folder in your My Documents folder, and use this folder to hold all your downloaded files. It wouldn't hurt to have your antivirus program do a scan on this folder after you download a file, just in case.

Downloading Shareware and Freeware

You can also find a wealth of shareware and freeware programs that you can download free-of-charge. (If it's a shareware program, you typically receive some sort of free evaluation period, after which you need to pay to continue using the program.) These programs are typically found in large Web-based archives, and can be easily downloaded with your Web browser.

Web-Based Archives

The biggest of these download archives includes thousands of applications and utilities of all different types. You'll want to search for programs that are Windows XP-compatible, of course—although any program that works on Windows 2000 should also work on Windows XP with few, if any, problems.

If you're searching for freeware and shareware, these are some of the best software archives to check out:

- CNET's Download.com (`download.cnet.com`)
- IT Pro Downloads (`www.itprodownloads.com`)
- Jumbo (`www.jumbo.com`)
- Shareware.com (`www.shareware.com`)
- Tucows (`www.tucows.com`)
- WebAttack.com (`www.webattack.com`)
- ZDNet Downloads (`www.zdnet.com/downloads/`)

> **NOTE**
>
> If you download a lot of files, check out the Go!Zilla download manager (`www.gozilla.com`). Go!Zilla lets you schedule your downloads for low traffic periods, organize and categorize your downloaded files, and even resume broken downloads without having to start over.

All these archives offer typical Web-based downloading. Some other file sites use a different protocol, called File Transfer Protocol (FTP) for file downloading.

FTP Servers

FTP servers can be accessed via special FTP client software, or with your Internet Explorer browser (IE). You access an FTP site with IE by entering the address of the FTP site into the Address box, but with FTP (instead of HTTP) in front of the address. For example, the full address of the Microsoft FTP server looks like this: `ftp://ftp.microsoft.com`.

When you access an FTP site with Internet Explorer, the directories and subdirectories on the server are displayed as folders and files in the browser's main window, as shown in Figure 4.3. (This makes Internet Explorer look—and work—just like My Computer or My Documents.) Downloading is as simple as clicking on the icon for a specific file.

> **TIP**
>
> If you prefer to download with a dedicated FTP client, check out CuteFTP (`www.cuteftp.com/cuteftp/`), LaplinkFTP (`www.laplinkftp.com`), or WS_FTP (`www.ipswitch.com/Products/WS_FTP/`).

> **TIP**
>
> If an FTP site asks for your ID and password, it doesn't support anonymous login. And any site that doesn't support anonymous logins is likely to be off-limits to the general public and reserved for private use.
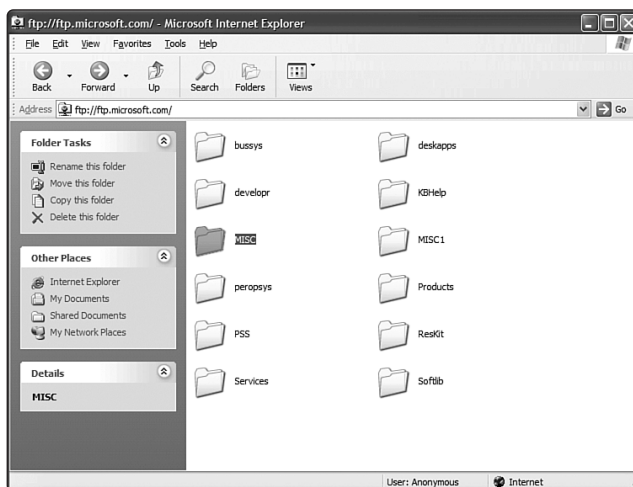

Figure 4.3

Viewing the folders and files on Microsoft's FTP site with Internet Explorer.

Hunting for an FTP server is a bit of a task because there are not as many FTP servers as Web servers. You can find lists of FTP servers at the following Web sites:

- FtpFind (`www.ftpfind.com`)
- TILE.NET/FTP (`tile.net/ftp/`)

Checking for Viruses

A computer virus is a malicious program that can infect other files, and do untold damage to your computer system. One of the most common ways of contracting a computer virus is through program files downloaded from the Internet.

If you're downloading from a commercial software publisher or major software archive, you probably don't have to worry about accidentally downloading a computer virus. Almost all publishers and archives virus-check their files before they're posted for download.

TIP

Sites that specialize in providing bootleg software and hacked code are sometimes called warez sites. (That's pronounced "wares," as in "softwares.")

If you download from a smaller or independent site, however, the possibility exists that you could be downloading infected files. Sites that offer games, pirated software for download, or quite openly cater to hackers, are high-risk for viruses.

Windows XP provides no built-in defense against computer viruses, which means you need to install a third-party antivirus program. I recommend any of the following programs:

- AVG Anti-Virus (`www.grisoft.com`)
- McAfee VirusScan (`www.mcafee.com`)
- Norton AntiVirus (`security.symantec.com`)
- PC-cillan (`www.trendmicro.com`)
- Sophos Anti-Virus (`www.sophos.com`)

Whichever antivirus program you choose, you need to go online periodically to update the program's virus definition database. New viruses are being created every week—and they need to be tracked!

Launching Programs

After you have all your software installed, you can use Windows XP in several ways to launch your programs. You should use the method that's most convenient to you.

Launching from the Start Menu

Using the Start menu is probably the simplest way to launch an application. If you've used the program recently, it appears on the left side of the Start menu. If not, you need to open the Programs menu and launch the program from there. Just follow these steps:

1. Click the Start menu and select All Programs. The Programs menu now appears next to the Start menu, as shown in Figure 4.4.

2. Point to the application's folder or name on the menu. When you point to a menu item with an arrow, a submenu opens. If the item you want is on that submenu, point to it. The item you point to is highlighted.

3. Click the highlighted item to launch the application.

> **TIP**
>
> To learn how to place a permanent shortcut icon on the Start menu, see the "Managing the Start Menu" section in Chapter 2, "Changing the Way Windows Looks—and Acts."
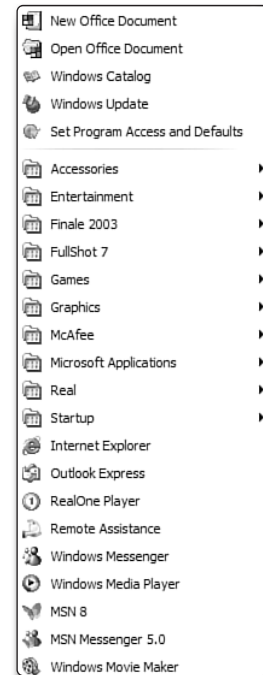
Figure 4.4

Launching an application from the Programs menu.

Launching from My Computer

Another way to launch applications is to click the application file from My Computer.

Follow these steps:

1. From within My Computer, navigate to the folder that contains the program you want to start.

2. Click the folder icon to display the files stored within that folder.

> **TIP**
>
> You can also launch an application by right-clicking an application file and selecting Open from the pop-up menu.

3. Click the icon for the application file that you want to open. The application starts automatically.

Launching from a Desktop Shortcut Icon

Although Windows XP tries to force you into an uncluttered desktop, you can still create desktop shortcuts to launch your favorite programs. Many users feel that using a desktop shortcut is the fastest way to launch those programs they use all the time. Clicking an

> **TIP**
>
> To learn how to create a desktop shortcut, see the "Working with Desktop Shortcuts" section in Chapter 2.

icon is certainly a lot quicker than wading through layers and layers of menus and folders.

To launch a program from a desktop shortcut, all you have to do is click the program's icon.

Launching from the Run Command

If you know the name and location of the program you want to run, you can use Windows XP's Run command to launch the program. The Run command is the Windows equivalent of the old DOS command line, when it comes to launching programs.

To use the Run command, follow these steps:

1. Click the Start button and then click the Run icon.

2. When the Run dialog box appears, as shown in Figure 4.5, enter the path and name of the application file into the Open box. If you don't know the location of the file, click the Browse button to find it.
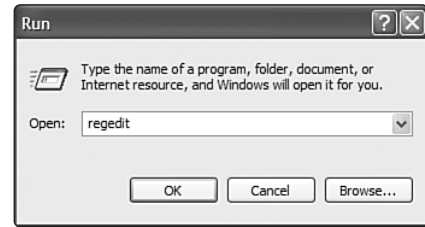
3. Click the OK button to launch the program.

Figure 4.5

Use the Run command to launch a program directly.

Launching Programs When Windows Starts

If you want a particular program to always launch whenever you turn on your computer, you can add that program to Windows' Startup menu. Any file in the Startup menu launches whenever Windows starts.

This is how you do it:

1. From My Computer, navigate to the \Documents and Settings\All Users\Start Menu\Startup\ folder.

2. Select File, New, Shortcut.

3. When the Create Shortcut wizard opens, enter the location of the program you want to launch, or use the Browse button to navigate to and select that file. Click Next.

4. Enter a name for the shortcut, and then click the Finish button.

> **TIP**
>
> You can also add a program to the Startup menu by dragging the icon for that program onto the Startup folder.

Switching Between Programs

After you've launched a program, it's easy to switch between that program and other open programs. You can

- Click the application's Taskbar button.

- Click the application's title bar.

- Click any visible part of the application's window.

- Hold down the Alt key and then press the Tab key repeatedly until the application window you want is selected. (This cycles through all open windows.) When you're at the window you want, release the Alt key.

If you have multiple windows open at the same time, you can determine which is currently the active window by its title bar. The title bar for the active program is brighter, and the title bar text is bright white. An inactive title bar is duller, with off-white text. If you have over-lapping windows on your desktop, the window on top is always the active one. The active application's Taskbar button looks like it's pressed in.
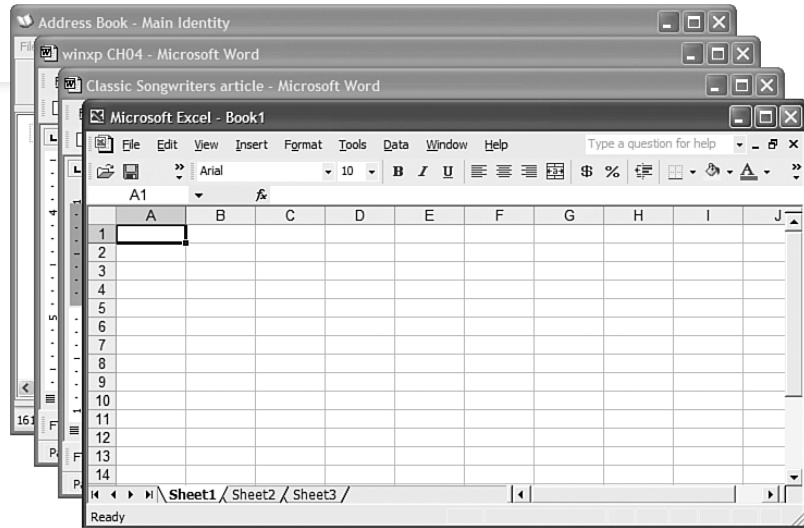
Arranging Windows on Your Desktop

Some users like to run all their programs full-screen. Others like to look at all their open programs at once, in overlapping windows. Still other users like to arrange their windows neatly on their desktop.

If you're a neatnik, it's easy to have Windows arrange your windows for you. All you have to do is right-click an open area of the Taskbar and then select one of the following options from the pop-up menu:
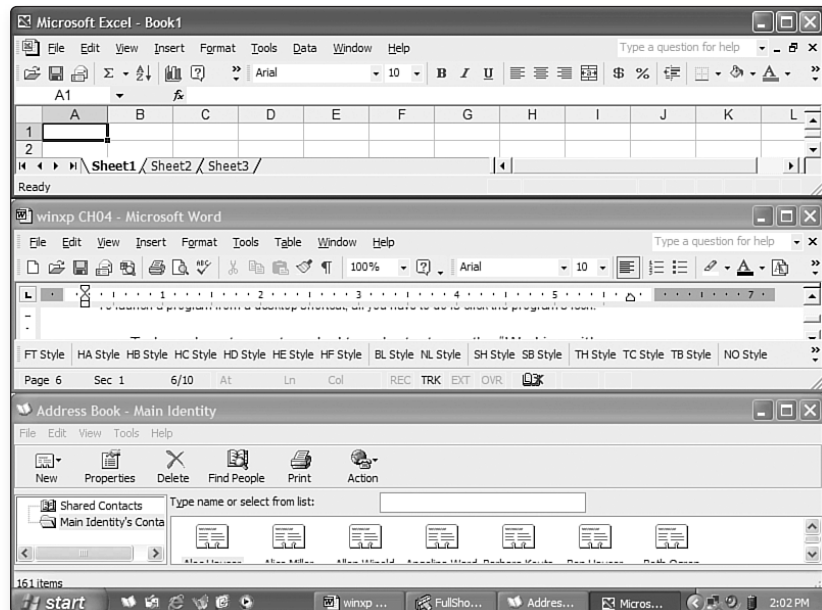
- **Cascade Windows.** Creates a stack of windows starting at the top-left corner of your screen and continuing diagonally down and to the right, as shown in Figure 4.6.

- **Tile Windows Horizontally**. Creates horizontal rows of windows on your desktop, as shown in Figure 4.7.

- **Tile Windows Vertically**. Creates vertical columns of windows, as shown in Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.6

Arrange your windows in a cascade effect.

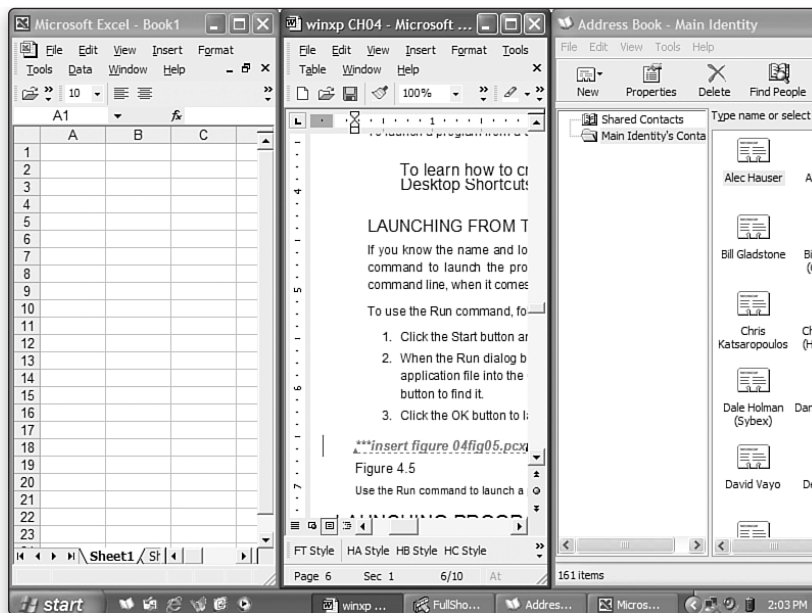**Figure 4.7**

Arrange your windows in horizontal rows.

Figure 4.8

Arrange your windows in vertical columns.

Closing Stuck Programs

As robust as Windows XP is, there still are occasions where a program freezes on you. This is typically a less serious situation than with older versions of Windows, when a stuck program could bring down your entire system. Now when a program freezes, it seldom affects any–thing else. All you have to worry about is closing the stuck program.

The first thing to look at is whether the program is really stalled, or whether it's just slow. If your computer is low on memory, some programs might take forever to do some complex operations. You can run into this situation if you have a lot of programs open at the same time, or if you're printing a large file while you're trying to do something else.

You should probably wait a minute or so to see if the program eventually responds. If it doesn't, you should try switching to another open program, either from the Windows Taskbar or by pressing Alt+Tab to shuttle through all open programs.

If the program is definitely frozen, press Ctrl+Alt+Del (what old-timers call the "three-fingered salute") to display the Windows Task Manager. This is a souped–up version of the old Close Program dialog box found in previous versions of Windows, and it offers a lot more functionality. I discuss this utility in more depth in Chapter 24, "Keeping Windows Healthy and Happy," but for now let's just focus on using it to close frozen programs.
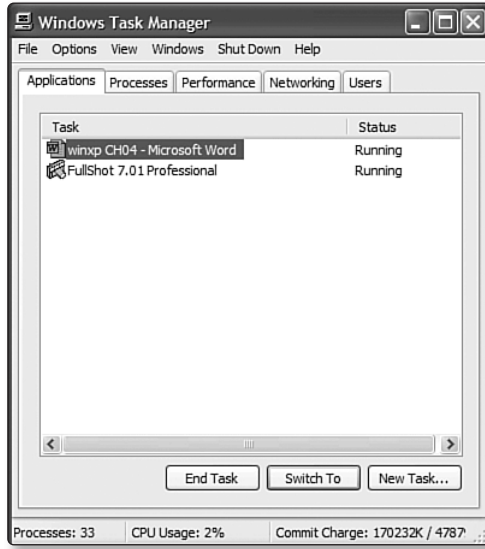
Figure 4.9

Use the Windows Task Manager to unstick stuck software.

TIP

If you're forced to use the "end processes" method to shut down a program, you probably should restart Windows to clear up any loose ends still floating around system memory.

When the Windows Task Manager opens, select the Applications tab (shown in Figure 4.9). This tab displays a list of all programs currently running on your system.

If a program is frozen, this might be indicated in the Status column. Or it might not. In any case, you want to select the frozen program, and then click the End Task button. Nine times out of ten, this should take care of your problem.

If this doesn't make the program close, go back to the Windows Task Manager and click the Processes tab. Find the file that's frozen, select it, and then click the End Process button.

The worst-case scenario is that you can't close the frozen program no matter what you try, and it then starts to affect the rest of your system. If this happens to you, you need to restart Windows. If things get so bad you can't restart the operating system, you have to reboot your computer by pressing Ctrl+Alt+Del twice.

Occasionally, that doesn't work either.

Then it's time to turn to sterner stuff. Try pressing your computer's on/off button. If that doesn't work, unplug your computer, or if you have a notebook, unplug it and remove the battery. That should work.

The Bottom Line

Installing, removing, and launching programs with Windows XP are all fairly common-sense activities. Just remember these important points:

- Whenever possible, use the built-in installation program that comes with a new software program.

- If you have to install a program manually, use Windows XP's Add or Remove Programs utility; you can also use this utility to uninstall programs from your hard disk.

- If you're looking for freeware or software programs to download, be sure they're Windows XP/2000-compatible. If you're not downloading from a major software archive, be sure you check the files for viruses.

- With Windows XP, you can launch programs from the Start menu, from My Computer, from a desktop shortcut icon, or from the Run command.

- To switch between open programs, click the appropriate Taskbar button—or press Alt+Tab to cycle through all open programs.

- To manually close a frozen program, press Ctrl+Alt+Del to open the Windows Task Manager, and then select the program and click the End Task button.

TechTV Tip #4: Remove Ads from XP's Messenger

By Morgan Webb, Associate Producer of *The Screen Savers*

Ads are everywhere. Why tolerate them in Windows XP Messenger? In just a couple of short steps, you can be ad-free forever.

First, get rid of the little Messenger men in the background of your buddy list. You can turn the semi-transparent Messenger logo into a picture of anything you want. I used a picture of myself but vanity is by no means a prerequisite for this little project.

1. Open your Messenger program folder and locate lvback.gif, or do a search for it on your computer.

2. You can modify this picture to whatever you want, or you can save a different picture in its place. The new picture doesn't even have to be the same size!

3. Exit out of Messenger and restart it.

4. Your new picture should be ready for all to see.

Now, if you are one of the unlucky people who has rotating ads on the bottom of your buddy list, follow the steps below to kill them dead:

1. Exit out of MSN Messenger completely.

2. Locate the file "links.txt" on your computer.

   It should be in your C:\Documents and Settings\User\Local Settings\Temp directory, but if you search your hard drive for "links.txt" it should be the only file to appear.

3. Open the file in Notepad.

4. Highlight and erase the entire contents of the file. The file should contain links.

5. Save the file.

6. Right-click the file and choose Properties.

7. Check the "Read-Only" box so MSN Messenger will be unable to write new links to the file.

8. Now when you open MSN Messenger, there will be one basic MSN logo in the buddy list instead of rotating logos.

9. This basic logo is stored on your computer, in the messenger program folder, as logo.gif. You can rename logo.gif to logobak.gif (or delete it altogether) and the normal ad space will appear blank.

10. You can change logo.gif into whatever picture you choose.

Need some suggestions? Perhaps a picture of a monkey smelling its butt, or maybe a little picture of your favorite feline companion. If you're feeling practical, you can create a little note reminding you to get back to work. The choice is yours.

So there's no need to stare at those ads anymore. Go forth and chat ad-free!