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System 7.x: Desktop File Rebuilding and Icon Recovery (8/95)

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TOPIC -----

This article describes the desktop file, when and how to rebuild it (such as when your icons change to "generic" document or application icons), why the desktop file sometimes will not rebuild, and what to do in this case.

DISCUSSION -----

What is the Desktop File?

The Desktop file is an invisible file found in the main level of your hard drive. It is the file that keeps track of all the documents and applications that are on your drive.

The file name is desktop for versions of System 6 and earlier. System 7.0 and later versions use the invisible files named Desktop DB and Desktop DF.

When to Rebuild the Desktop File

Occasionally your Desktop file may become too large or may be damaged.

NOTE: It is generally a good idea to rebuild your Desktop file once a month or so.

Symptoms of a Damaged Desktop File

One symptom of a damaged Desktop file is icons on your desktop appear as "generic" rather than "custom" icons. Rebuilding the Desktop file may eliminate the problem.

The Desktop file manages all icons on a particular hard drive or floppy disk. When you insert a new or customized icon, the Desktop file may not load it or may load a previous version of the icon. To have the special icon appear on the desktop, the Desktop file must be rebuilt to update the Desktop file and register the icon.

Icons change to generic document (blank page with a corner turned down) or application (diamond with a hand) icons for several reasons, including the following:

- Utilities such as compression or security software can alter icons.
- Custom icons become damaged or deleted.
- The Desktop file has been damaged.
- Applications that create files may not assign icons to the files.
- An application that created a file and assigned an icon may no longer be available.
- A file may have lost the bit that indicates a custom icon (this is known as the bundle bit).

Symptoms of a Large Desktop File

If the Desktop file becomes too large, the computer may have difficulty reading it efficiently and speedily. This can cause the Finder to access files more slowly. Rebuilding the Desktop file can clean up old information and speed up Finder access.

You can also make a file-by-file backup of the drive, re-initialize the drive, and then restore the files. This re-groups all the files, unfragments them, and increases the efficiency of the drive.

How to Rebuild the Desktop File

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Rebuilding the Desktop relinks documents to their correct applications and rewrites the Desktop file itself.

Before rebuilding the Desktop, be sure that you have some room available on the hard disk. The Desktop rebuilding process requires hard disk space, and does not successfully complete without it. A good guideline is to always have 5% of the hard drive or other volume available as free space.

This procedure only works when the Finder is loaded. Applications like At Ease don't load the Finder, so you must turn them off prior to rebuilding.

NOTE:

Rebuilding the Desktop file erases any comments you may have typed in the Get Info windows of files on your disk.

System 6 through System 7.1.2

You can rebuild the Desktop manually by holding down the Option and Command (Apple) keys while the system is starting up. When you see the message "Are you sure you want to rebuild the desktop file on the disk "your disk"? Comments in info windows will be lost", click okay.

System 7.5 and later

Step 1

Before you rebuild your desktop, use the Extensions Manager to save a record of the extensions that are currently turned on.

- Open the Extensions Manager control panel.
- Click on the Sets pop-up menu, and choose Save Set.
- When the Save Set dialog box opens, type a name for your currently selected extensions (for example, 'My Extensions'). When you close the dialog box, the name of your set is added to the Sets pop-up menu.

Step 2

Turn off all extensions - Click on the Sets pop-up menu again and choose All Off.

Step 3

Turn on Macintosh Easy Open - Find it in the list of control panels, click it to put a checkmark beside it.

Step 4

Restart your computer while holding down the Command and Option keys.

Step 5

When you see the dialog that says "Are you sure you want to rebuild the desktop file on the disk "your disk"? Comments in info windows will be lost," release the keys and click OK.

Step 6

When the desktop is rebuilt, click on the Apple menu and choose Control Panels.

Step 7

Open the Extensions Manager control panel.

Step 8

Turn your extensions back on - Click on the Sets pop-up menu and choose the name you gave your set of extensions in step 1 (for example, 'My Extensions').

Step 9

Restart your computer to activate the extensions.

Why the Desktop File Sometimes Will Not Rebuild

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There are several reasons why you may have difficulty rebuilding the Desktop file.

A Conflicting INIT or System Extension

An INIT or system extension can interfere with rebuilding the Desktop file. To resolve the problem you can try the following:

For versions of System 6, remove all non-Apple extensions from the System Folder. Then rebuild the desktop file by holding down the Option and Command keys while starting the computer.

For System 7 through 7.1.2, rebuild the desktop with extensions off following these steps:

Step 1

Hold the Shift key down while starting up the computer.

Step 2

As soon as you see "Welcome to Macintosh Extensions Off", release the Shift key and hold down the Command and Option keys.

Step 3

Continue pressing the Command and Option keys until the dialog asks you if you are sure you want to rebuild the Desktop file.

Step 4

Let go of the keys and click on the OK button.

For System 7.5 and later use the procedure in the previous section which utilizes the extensions manager.

If you have used compression or security utilities, and the preceding solutions do not work, contact the vendors for a solution.

Not Enough Memory to Rebuild

Changing the size of the Finder's partition should not be necessary under System 7, as was sometimes necessary under System 6. The only way to change the size of the Finder's partition under System 7 is either by using ResEdit or by booting under System 6.0.x, and changing the partition there.

The Finder needs to do a little different work under System 7.0 than it did under System 6.0.x. The system is using the Desktop Database, rather than the Resource Manager, which relieves that bottleneck in the system. The Finder can get some additional memory from other places, like the System Heap, if necessary.

There really is no reason that you should need to alter the partition size of the Finder under System 7.

Increasing the Finder's partition sets aside more memory for the Finder and increases the size of your System Heap. In doing this, you set aside the memory for the System Heap but decrease the amount of memory for applications.

If you want to try changing the partition by booting under System 6.0.x, here are the instructions. (Doing this requires you to boot up the Macintosh from a System 6.0.x diskette, and most Macintosh computers introduced after the release of System 7 (including Quadra and PowerBook computers) are not able to use this option.)

Here are the steps for Macintosh computers that can start up under System 6.0.x:

Step 1

Restart your Macintosh from a startup floppy disk that has System 6, like the 800K Disk Tools disk from the Personal Upgrade Kit (not the high-density Disk Tools disk, which contains System 7).

Step 2

Locate and click the Finder file in your System Folder on your Macintosh hard drive (not the Finder on the floppy).

Step 3

Choose Get Info from the File menu and increase the amount of memory allocated to the Finder in the Current size box.

Step 4

Close the Get Info window.

Step 5

Restart your Macintosh (from the hard drive) under System 7 once again.

What to Do If Rebuilding the Desktop Does Not Restore Your Icons

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If rebuilding the does not restore your icons, run Disk First Aid to see if there is a problem you can fix. If you have specific files (other than custom icons) that became generic icons, there are these possibilities:

- You may not have the applications that originally created them.
- These files may have lost their bundle bit. MacTools as well as other disk utilities can correct lost bundle bits. Disk First Aid does not detect or repair lost bundle bits.
- The application that created them may simply not assign an icon to them; check with the application's vendor.
- You may be using custom icons, which the Desktop file cannot rebuild. See the article titled "System 7.x: Creating and Using Custom Icon Folders".

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