System of Another Color

This month I decided to do something very daring. After acquiring Virtual PC and learning to dread the slowness of the program (although it IS faster than SoftWindows), I decided to try an older hack. A long time ago, programmers and software vendors released some programs that would self-boot, not really like the Startup Items folder, but more like only the one program is working and nothing else, not even the Finder. I wanted to re-create this for those of us who have non-state-of-the-art Macs and want to run those state-of-the-art games and programs.

First I want you all to know that this hack IS NOT for the faint of heart. This hack could cause a lot of havoc getting back to your good old MacOS if you don't follow the directions thoroughly. That said, here we go.

electing the Application

First, choose the program you'd like to "self-boot." I chose Virtual PC because it is a memory hog and is inherently slow. I did, however, try this same hack out using the popular shareware game Escape Velocity from Ambrosia Software at http://www.ambrosiaSW.com/. In both cases, the hack worked, so I don't see why it wouldn't work for any application you could choose.

Second, decide how you want the software set up and configured. Mainly this pertains to what disk or hard drive you want to use. I chose to create a partition on my internal HD and am now using that as my Virtual PC drive. I would suggest doing the same thing, as it does seem to be easier to get back to the MacOS when you're done, but it is your choice. I have seen this accomplished using a Syquest or a Zip drive as well.

Once you have set up your drive, you need to install or copy a system folder to it. When the copying is finished, delete ALL the extensions and Control Panels except the following: Appearance CP, Appearance Ext, and any special drivers for your hard drive or CD drive. After this, drag the Finder to the trash and empty it. You should notice that the new System folder loses its blessed status (the special icon on the folder disappears). Now install the program software to your new drive following the normal instructions and place the application and all needed files into the the new System Folder.

You are now ready to go on to the next step.

ime to Get Info

his is where you will prepare your application to load as your "system." Launch ResEdit and open the application you want to edit. Once you see the window with all the icons of resources, you need to go to the File menu and select Get Info for the application. This should bring up a dialog box (similar to the one at right). Here you will be able to change the file type and creator code. Change the Type from whatever it is to "FNDR" and the Creator to "MACS" (no quotes). This will tell the application that it is now the Finder. Save your changes and quit ResEdit. Go to your new drive and open the system folder where you put all of your new software and select the application you just altered. Change its name to "Finder" (again without the quotes) and deselect the file. This should cause the phony system folder icons to become blessed once again.

oing There and Back Again

Now, I need you to do something. Go get your MacOS boot disk (the disk that came with your Mac or your most recent MacOS purchase). You will need this to get back to your MacOS drive when you're finished using your new "system." Once you have the disk in hand, go to the Control Panels on your MacOS drive and choose Startup Disk. Choose your new drive. Restart, and then you should see the results of your toils. Your Mac should start

normally until the point where the desktop would normally appear. At that point, it should launch the hacked application instead. To get back to your Finder-based MacOS, insert your emergency floppy disk or boot CD and restart your computer (and since you don't have a Finder, you need to do this by either pressing the reset key on the back of your Mac or by using the keyboard shortcut: command-control-power). When the floppy or CD boots up, go back to your MacOS drive and open the Startup Disk control Panel and choose the drive the MacOS is on. Restart using the restart menu and you should be back to your good old MacOS.

As always, I hope you all like this hack. If you have any questions or comments, please email me at john@applewizards.net . I try to reply quickly to those who send me email. Thanks!

esEdit Info

ResEdit can be very useful and it can be very harmful. ALWAYS, and again, ALWAYS use a backup copy of the file you are hacking. One little mistake can wipe out the program and render it useless... sometimes along with your System. Be very careful and be sure that you know what you are doing at all times.

Apple Wizards isn't to blame for any problems caused by hacking into files. The hacks talked about are always tested to be safe before posting, but these tests were only performed on a minimal number of systems and may not include your specific system.

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