

Computer Tips

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De-Mystifying Types of Files—1

As you all know, there are thousands of different files on your computer. Program files, photos, emails, documents, video and music files are some of the more common. But what we will look at this issue is what identifies, or sets apart, these different types of files.

Files on your computer are identified in two ways: the first is the most familiar to us, and that is the file NAME. In the case of computer programs, the file name is usually set by the software creator, and that name is carried across to the computer when you install the program. File names however can also be changed by the user, like when you transfer photos from your digital camera, or when you save a document. File names is the first way of identifying files on your computer.

The second way of identifying files is by the file EXTENSION. This extension is 3 characters at the end of the file name, and is separated from the name by a full stop (.). For example, a typical Word document is named mydocument.doc. The .doc identifies what type of file mydocument is. A music file might be named mymusic.mp3, the .mp3 identifying what type of file mymusic is.

Usually, the file extension is hidden from your view when you look at your files in My Computer. To change this, go to Start, Control Panel, Folder Options, and click View. Then remove the tick in front of 'Hide Extensions for Known File Types'. Now go back to, say, My Documents, and look at the different files you have in there. Each file will now have its name, plus the . and its 3 identifying characters after it.

Another purpose of the 3 character file extension, is that the file extension signals what software program opens, or uses that file. In our example, the .doc file type signals that the Microsoft Word is used to open that file type. The .mp3 file extensions signals that an MP3 music player will open that type of file.

In our next issue, we will look at some of the common file extension types, and what they mean for the average computer user.

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