

Upgrading a Drive to NTFS

A supplement to Chapter 21 of "Windows 7: The Missing Manual"

File Systems

A *file system* is a scheme of formatting your hard drive, a system of dividing up its surface into little parking spaces for data. It's a very technical issue, and, mercifully, one that's largely invisible to you except for the day you install the operating system.

Back in the Windows XP days, you had a choice of two file systems, geekily named *FAT 32* and *NTFS*. *FAT 32* (file allocation table) is the descendant of the original DOS formatting scheme. *NTFS* (NT file system) is far more advanced and modern; it was introduced with Windows NT in 1993.

A Windows 7 drive (and a Windows Vista drive), however, must be formatted using *NTFS*.

NTFS offers a long list of attractive features:

- It can handle bigger hard drives than *FAT*—in fact, it can handle drives with capacities up to two terabytes (that's 2,048 gigabytes). No, drives that big aren't available today, but it's only a matter of time.
- It offers automatic file compression, conserving disk space.
- It makes your hard drive much more immune to corruption (of the sort that used to require the old *ScanDisk* program to scurry around, cleaning up glitches).
- It lets you take advantage of a long list of advanced hard drive and file features, including mounted drives and private folders that nobody else on the network can see. Both of these features are described in *Windows 7: The Missing Manual*.

Windows 7 is perfectly content, however, to recognize *external* drives that use the *FAT 32* scheme—flash drives, external hard drives, and so on.

Tip: You can never convert an *NTFS* drive to the older *FAT* system, but you can convert a *FAT* drive to *NTFS* at any time.

Here's how to format a drive, if indeed Windows doesn't offer to format it for you:

1. Choose Start→All Programs→Accessories→Command Prompt.

The Command window opens.

2. Type *convert D: /FS:NTFS* and then press Enter.

Of course, replace *D:* with whatever drive letter you're trying to reformat.

That's all there is to it!