

Windows 7 SECRETS

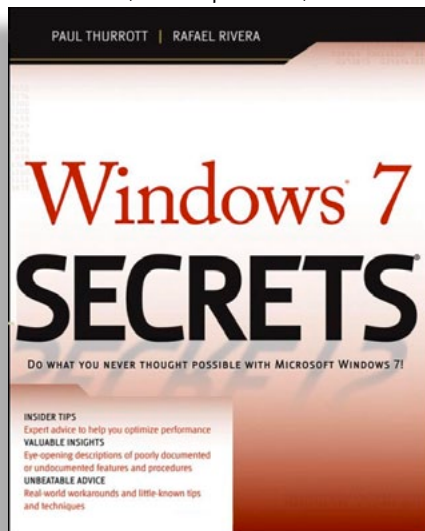
Ken Blake

Before I begin to review this book, let me tell you a little about my experience with *Windows 7*. The *Windows 7* Release Candidate 1 became available on April 23, 2009, and I ran it from then until August 6, when the Release to Manufacturing became available and I switched to it. (Note that although *Windows 7* won't be available for sale until October 22, in August all testing ended and it was finalized and made available to a limited group of people as well as to OEMs that will be distributing it with their computers starting on October 22).

I mention this just to make it clear that I already have six months of experience using this version of *Windows* and this book is not at all my first look at it.

And before I begin to talk about the quality of its contents, let me address what the book is, and what it contains.

First its title, and in particular, the word "SECRETS" (in all upper-case):



despite that word, the book is not about secrets. It's a book trying to tell the reader almost everything about *Windows 7*, and is both an introduction to *Windows 7* for those who are completely new to it, and a reference book for those who already know something about it.

There's nothing at all secret about the great majority of what it contains. However, some of the things discussed in the book are marked with an icon containing the word "secret." Are these secrets? No, not at all; they are meant

to be, as it says in the preface, "little-known facts." Something isn't a secret just because it's little-known; moreover, not all of the items marked "secret" are little-known, and worse, not all of them are 100% accurate. My view is that the word "secrets" is just exaggerated advertising, and completely inappropriate.

Emblazoned on the paperback front cover of the book, in all caps, is the sentence "DO WHAT YOU NEVER THOUGHT POSSIBLE WITH *Windows 7*!" Everybody may not agree with me, but that kind of advertising, especially overstated advertising, on the cover of the book is a major turnoff for me.

The book is enormous, containing 1009 pages of text in 26 chapters, and a large index that brings the total to 1054. Although I might have presented some of it in a slightly different order than what these authors did, the organization is generally well done. But some of these chapters have nothing to do with *Windows 7*, and as far as I'm concerned don't belong in this book at all.

For example, chapter 10 is about *Windows Home Server*. *Windows Home Server* is a completely different operating system that if you run at all will run on a different computer in your home network, and it's been around since well before *Windows 7*. It's an excellent product and I run it myself, but this book is not where a description of it and help in using it belongs.

And chapter 14 is about Zune, another Microsoft product that has nothing to do with *Windows 7*. Chapter 18 is about the *Windows Mobile* Smartphone, a hardware product. Chapter 21 is about *Windows Live Mail*, a software product that doesn't come with *Windows 7*. Chapter 13, "Digital Videos and DVD Movies," also is largely about software products that are not part of *Windows 7*. Much the same is true of chapter 23, "Your Life in Sync—*Windows*v and Live Services."

Are these topics important and worth talking about and including in the book, even though they are not part of *Windows 7*? Arguably yes, and apparently the authors think so. On the other hand, I think someone who buys a book should get what the title promises he will get, and not other things as well.

Some people may be glad these non-*Windows 7* topics are included, but others (me, for example) will feel that they just make the book more expensive as well as bigger, heavier, and containing more to read. My view is that this sort of stuff simply doesn't belong here—not unless the title of the book is dramatically changed, so purchasers get what they expect to get.

Oddly, in the font used for the text of the book the “*7*” of “*Windows 7*” is slashed, but in the fonts used for headings and other things, it's not. It's not a serious complaint, but slashing the “*7*” is unusual in the USA, and the inconsistency of its use is mildly annoying.

Throughout the book, whenever a particular feature is talked about, it's described as wonderful, and an improvement over what it was in previous versions of *Windows*. I'm a big fan of *Windows 7*, and I think that it's the best version of *Windows* ever, but I don't think that everything about it is wonderful. If I had my 'druthers, some things would be done differently.

Some of the things described may be good for some people, but not for others, depending on what other software they use, and upon their style of working. The tone of the authors in describing many things reads like unmitigated advertising, rather than honest description and evaluation.

Here's an example of the kind of sentence I'm talking about: “Microsoft has dramatically enhanced the capabilities of the taskbar.” I know some people who like the *Windows 7* changes to the task bar (Quick Launch icons are now on it together with the other icons, not on a separate toolbar) and others who hate it. Personally, I don't have strong feelings about it either way, and I certainly wouldn't describe it as “dramatically enhanced.”

So, putting behind me the negative views I stated above, and turning to the quality of the book's contents, let me begin by stating that I generally like the book very much. It is thorough, reasonably complete, and by and large accurate (but not perfect—such books are never perfect). It explains things very well.

And in several instances, it told me things about *Windows 7* that, despite my experience with it, I didn't know. For example, it told me how, in

Windows Explorer, to add folders to the Favorites list in the Navigation pane. This was to me a very useful tip and I was glad to have learned it.

The touch support for the screen is described in the book. This was new to me, primarily because my hardware doesn't support it, but it was interesting to read about it.

I was very glad to see that in the chapter on *Windows* security, the authors recommend against Norton and McAfee anti-virus (the two worst choices, in my view) and for ESET NOD32, the product that I think is best. However, I was very disappointed to see that they consider *Windows Defender* to be adequate anti-spyware protection, and do not recommend installing any third-party antispymware programs.

Unfortunately the book has its share of errors. Most of the errors are minor misstatements, rather than being terribly significant, but still they are errors. Here are few examples of things that are clearly wrong, and some things that are wrong in my opinion:

1. It says, “A full version of *Windows 7*...cannot be used to upgrade an existing version of *Windows* to *Windows 7*.” That is not correct.
2. It says “Peek at Desktop is enabled by mousing over a new glass rectangular area found in the lower rightmost corner of the screen.” The “new glass rectangular area” is at the end of the task bar, and will be at the lower rightmost corner of the screen only if the task bar is at the bottom of the screen.
Since the task bar will be on whichever of the four sides of the screen you choose to have it on (just as in previous versions of *Windows*), what the book says about where it is is not correct.
3. It says “Like a certain demonic creature, the notification area goes by many other names. If you see references to such things as ‘the system tray’ ... these are referring to ... what's now simply called the notification area.” The word “now” is a misstatement.

It was actually always called the “notification area,” even way back in *Windows 95*. “System Tray” wasn’t its former name, just an informal name for it, both in the past and today.

4. Talking about *Windows Explorer*, the book says “So My Documents is replaced by the Documents library in *Windows 7*.” Yes, it’s true that what used to be called “My Documents” is now more simply (and better, in my view) called “Documents,” but that didn’t begin in *Windows 7*; it was also true in *Windows Vista*.
5. The book says “The *Office 2007* ribbon has proven wildly popular with users...” I can’t prove that that statement is wrong, but my experience with *Office 2007* users is that the great majority don’t like the ribbon interface at all.
6. It states “Throughout the years, all *Windows* versions have shared a common problem: they degrade in performance over time and boot more slowly the longer the computer is used.” These authors are far from alone in having this opinion, but it’s one with which I strongly disagree.
7. It states “boot-up speed, of course, is a primary concern.” I strongly disagree with this statement. My personal view is that the attention many people pay to how long it takes to boot is unwarranted. Assuming that the computer’s speed is otherwise satisfactory, it’s hardly ever worth worrying about.

Most people start their computers once a day or even less frequently. In the overall scheme of things, even a few minutes to start up isn’t very important. Personally I power on my computer when I get up in the morning, then go get my coffee. When I come back, it’s done booting. I don’t know how long it took to boot and I don’t care.

So, having complained about a number of things, what’s my overall view of this book and do I recommend it? Yes, I recommend it! Despite my list

of its errors and points on which I disagree with the authors above, those points represent only a small portion of the book.

Although I would have preferred it without the non-*Windows 7* sections included, the book’s description of *Windows 7* is thorough and most of it is accurate and well-presented. Moreover the value of whatever information is in a book like this disappears if the information within it is hard to find, and that’s not a problem here. The book contains a very good and large (40 pages) index.

About: *Windows 7 SECRETS*

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Busy bee, courtesy Paul Royston, Tucson Nature Photographer