

Chapter 6

More Tips and Tricks

Changing System Icons

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Changing System Icons

ActivIcons is a separate program included with *IconForge* (32-bit version only). It is normally installed into the same directory folder as *IconForge*. You may access *ActivIcons* from the *Change Windows Shell Icons* function which is found under the *Edit* menu.

ActivIcons is a convenient way to edit various Windows Registry settings for such things as system cursors, desktop icons, etc.

Use the slider on the left side to switch between screens containing lists of various desktop settings which may be changed. Use the buttons at the bottom/right portion of the screen to assign a new image or to restore a Windows default image.

Once you've made any changes, click the *Off (X)* button at the top of the screen to close the program.



The ActivIcons Utility

To leave ActivIcons running in the background (e.g., to animate the desktop or to monitor your settings), click the *Minimize* (_) button instead.

If you wish to know what a particular control does, simply pause your mouse cursor over the control, and a short description will be displayed. You will also notice a “?” button in the windows upper/right corner. Click this button to access the *Help* system’s topic regarding the current screen and its functions.

- ⚡ **Note:** Some functions, such as animating desktop icons or making icon text backgrounds transparent, must be reset by *ActivIcons* periodically. If you close *ActivIcons*, these items may revert to their normal appearance and behavior. For this reason, we recommend that you configure *ActivIcons* to be run each time you restart your system. To do this, go to the *Interface* screen and checkmark *Place ActivIcons on System Tray at Startup*.

The Windows Icon Cache

Windows stores desktop and program icons in a cache file. Because of this, Windows sometimes refuses to update icons you have changed. *IconForge* itself contains a function under its Edit menu to *Rebuild the Windows Icon Cache*. Using this will usually cause Windows to display your changed icon. If it does not, or if you experience problems with corrupted icons being displayed, then there are more powerful functions built into the *ActivIcons* utility.

The Windows icon cache is fairly small by default, and when you have many icons on your system, its cache may become overloaded, causing frequent redraws of the desktop, wrong icons, black icons, etc. To prevent this, go to the *Desktop Controls* screen and use the *Icon Cache Size* option to increase the size of your Windows icon cache and to prevent this problem from recurring. A size of 2048 is suitable for most users, though you may want to experiment with a higher size if your system contains many icons and programs.

If a desktop icon you've selected does not appear, or if the icons do not appear correctly, click on the *Rebuild Icon Cache* button at the bottom of the screen to force Windows to read the new icon. To purge the Windows icon cache of old, unused and corrupted icons, click the *Delete Icon Cache* button (immediately to the right of the *Rebuild* button). If you delete the cache, your system will need to reboot to complete the process.

- ⇒ **Note:** Sometimes it is necessary for you to reboot your system a couple of times before Windows will recognize that you have changed its icon cache settings.

Creating Favorites Icons

You may use *IconForge* to create an icon to display next to your web site address when a user bookmarks your site. Aside from distinctively branding your link in their Favorites lists, you can also look at your site's download statistics for these icon files to determine how many of your visitors are actually placing your web pages in their bookmarked lists. Not all browsers display Favorites icons, but they can still be extremely useful.

To Create Icons for Individual Web Pages

This method is a bit more work, but has the advantage of allowing you to specify separate icons for each web page on your site. If you create an icon for each web page, you will be able to determine how the number of people who are bookmarking each page simply by looking at the number of downloads for the icons corresponding to each page. This method of creating favorites icons is also more likely to be supported in the future by browsers other than Internet Explorer. To create an icon

- Create your icons (*see Tip 2 below*);
- Save each icon using the *.ICO File Type*, and using any *File Name* you wish;
- Copy these *.ICO* files to a publicly accessible location on your web server (or on another site, if your ISP does not allow you to store icons);
- In each document, you will need to create a link in its *Header* section to point to the location for that page's icon (the *Header* is the area between the `<head>` and `</head>` markers). Insert a line which reads:

```
<link rel="SHORTCUT ICON" href="http://www.yourURL.com/yourICON.ico">
```

```
<link rel="icon" href="http://www.yourURL.com/yourICON.ico">
```

- Substitute your web address for “yourURL.com” and substitute your icon’s filename for “yourICON.ico”

Tip 1: When copying the icon to your web site’s server, be sure to set your FTP client (or other software used to transfer the file) to transfer using Binary mode. If you use the ASCII transfer mode (which is used for transferring text and HTML pages), your icon may become scrambled in the process.

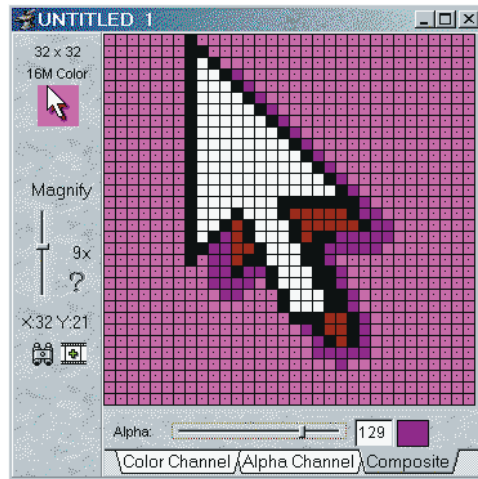
Tip 2: Favorites icons can appear in several locations throughout Windows (URL address, Favorites bar links, etc.). As the icon will be displayed at various *Sizes* and *Color Depths*, you may wish to use a *Multi-resolution Icon* (see Chapter 3) to ensure that Windows automatically chooses the best icon for each situation.

XP Alpha Channel Icons

If you are creating an icon for use under Windows XP, some areas can be made semi-transparent (Alpha Channel). Alpha icons work only in Windows XP, and it is best to avoid using them if you are creating icons which are intended to be displayed on a variety of systems running different versions of Windows.

To make an Alpha icon or cursor:

- 1) Select *New* from the *File* menu, and select the 16.7M (32-bit XP) option
- 2) When editing an existing icon, you can convert to Alpha icon by clicking on the *Options* menu, selecting *Icon Color Depth*, and choosing the 16.7M (32-bit XP) option;
- 3) When editing a Multi-Resolution icon, click the green + icon, and in the *Colors* field, choose the 16.7M (32-bit XP) option;



4) The editing window for Alpha icons and cursors has 3 tabs along the bottom:

- Paint onto the *Color Channel* tab if you want to edit with normal, non-transparent paint (e.g., for blocking in large areas of solid color without having to worry

about semi-transparent areas (you can set this using the other 2 tabs at the bottom of the editing window).

- Use the *Alpha Channel* tab to adjust only the transparency attributes of the image. Darkening areas on this layer will result in the colors in those areas being more solid and less transparent. Making an area lighter will cause the colors in that area to become more transparent;
- The *Composite* tab allows you to paint with adjustable transparency. Use the slider to adjust the transparency of the selected color. Moving the slider to the left makes the color more solid. Moving it to the right makes the color more transparent. (a value of 0 is solid, and 255 is completely transparent)

⇒ Notes: You will not be able to preview alpha transparency in your work unless your version of Windows supports alpha-channel icons and cursors. Using the *Test* (binoculars) icon will only accurately display the transparency in its preview panel.

The *Inverse* paint button on the *Color Palette* is disabled when you are editing XP-style icons. This attribute is not used for alpha-channel icons or cursors.