

Z-DESK

Version 3.0

The Active Wallpaper Utility for Windows 95 / 98 / ME

A Desktop Control Application for Windows 95/98 that brings control over your computer to your desktop – full-screen, instantly available, non-intrusive.

Designed to resemble the computer displays shown in the TV programs Star Trek: The Next Generation and Star Trek: Voyager, Z-DESK is a program that runs as a full-screen window without borders or menu bars, effectively replacing both your desktop and wallpaper. It consists of a number of screens that enable the user to start programs, launch Desktop shortcuts, access Control Panel applets, establish Dial-Up and HyperTerminal connections and much more, all with a single mouse-click.

Z-DESK is ready for your command at all times through an icon in the system tray and it can just as easily be sent to the background, behind all other open programs or hidden completely.

REQUIREMENTS

Z-DESK is written to work with all versions of Windows 95/98 and later; although most functions should work with Windows NT, version 4.0 or later, no testing has been done under NT, 2000 or XP.

In addition to the files included in this archive, you need a copy of the Visual Basic 5 Virtual Machine, MSVBVM50.DLL – please see the Installation section below for further details.

To run Z-DESK in its default Random Color mode, a high- or true color display with a color depth of 16 bits (65536 colors) or better is recommended. Although the program will run with any display setting, the color dithering at lower color depths may not look very attractive. If you have to run at a lower color depth and have problems with the display of the colors, you can change the base colors and turn off the Random Color mode in the Options dialog.

For best visual results, a display resolution of 800 x 600 or better is recommended.

INSTALLATION

Z-DESK is written in MS Visual Basic 5 and requires one additional file, the VB 5 Virtual Machine, MSVBVM50.DLL. You can download this file from most Online Systems and BBS's. Once you have obtained a copy of the DLL, simply move it into your \windows\system directory.

Important Note:

You may already have a copy of this file on your system; some versions of MS Office come with a copy of it. However, that version of the file is intended to run VBA (Visual Basic for Applications) programs and may not be compatible with compiled VB 5 programs. There are also several different version of MSVBVM50.DLL distributed with VB. This program was

compiled with the Service Pack 2 Version and requires the file version 5.00.4319 (SP2) or later; it will not work with earlier versions. If you get error messages about Missing or Invalid entry points in MSVBVM50.DLL when you try to start Z-DESK, you will need to get a newer version of the file. In this case, save a copy of the file to a different directory or disk before replacing it. This will enable you to revert to your previous version if you run into problems with other programs after installing the new file.

If you have problems finding the correct version of this file, you can download a zipped version over the web from the following address:

<http://www.zet-net.com/download/msvbvm50.zip>

To install Z-DESK, first unzip the contents of the archive to an empty directory. Open Explorer, go into this directory and double-click setup.exe to start the installation. You will be given a choice of where to install the program; the default is a directory named Z-DESK under your “Program Files” directory. You can change this location to any drive and/or directory you like. The Setup program will expand and copy the files to the specified directory and will create a shortcut to start Z-DESK in your Programs menu.

After Setup has completed, please check that the font “Z-Desk Display” has been installed into the Fonts folder. This is a True Type font required by Z-Desk – please do not delete this font from your system.

Z-DESK does not require any initial configuration; while it is highly configurable through a number of options, you can start using the program with all features immediately after installation.

Once setup is finished, you can delete the temporary files. Do not forget to save or print this document.

UN-INSTALLATION

To uninstall Z-DESK open Control Panel and start the Add/Remove Programs applet. Browse the list of installed applications until you find entry for Z-DESK. Mark this entry and click the Uninstall button.

FIRST STEPS

To start Z-DESK, click its shortcut in the Programs menu. The program will appear on-screen. If this is the first time you use it, it will display its “Desktop” screen.

These elements are common among all screens:

- A colored frame on a black background. The frame color of the top left block and middle horizontal lines will also identify the currently active display.
- A title bar on top.
- On most displays, a numerical “status display” or a picture display in the left part of the main display (please refer to the section “Displaying custom pictures” below).

- A main menu in the top part of the screen, where the different displays can be selected.
- Direct targets to execute the “Run” and “Find” functions from the Windows start menu.
- A date and time display below the main screen menu.
- Master volume control with “+” and “-“ keys and a mute function.

Z-DESK will always adjust to the currently available display workspace, taking into account not only the display size but also any permanently visible taskbars on either side of the screen. If you change the display size or your taskbar arrangement, you can simply click on the title bar or make a new display selection; the program will automatically adjust to your new setup. You can also click on the title bar to instantly change the random colors used for the menu items.

By clicking the main menu items to the right, you can switch between displays. You will note that every time a selection is recognized, the selected item is briefly highlighted and a sound is played. While these main items were displayed in random colors in version 1, version 2 has been changed to always display them in the same color, the base color associated with each display. Daily use has shown that this makes recognition of each selection much faster and easier.

Clicking the “Run” and “Find targets will start the respective Windows functions, as if you had selected them from the Windows Start Menu.

Below the “Run” and “Find” items is a volume control. The label will show you the current level of the master volume control in percent; you can increase or decrease the volume in steps of 5 percent by clicking the “+” and “-“ items. By clicking the label itself, you can mute all sound. Note that the text displayed in the label may vary between systems – Z-DESK will extract these texts from your actual system software.

Selection is cued to the “MouseUp” event, so you can back off a selection by moving the mouse pointer away from a selection before releasing the button. Releasing the left mouse button over an item will select it; hence all items can be selected with a single click (no double clicks required anywhere).

The program always runs on the full screen – you cannot move or minimize it. You can, however, send it to the background by clicking with the right mouse button on an empty section of any display. That will display any and all open windows and bring Z-DESK to the back of the screen. In effect it behaves like a regular wallpaper, except that you can bring it to the foreground and do something useful with it. To get instant access to the “real” Windows desktop, you can also hide Z-DESK completely without exiting it. For more information on this, please refer to the “System Tray Icon” section below.

DTOP

This is the Desktop display. This screen will read in the shortcuts you have installed on your desktop. You can launch any one of them with a single click here. This includes system items like “My Computer” or “Recycle Bin”, any shortcut to programs or documents that you have created yourself as well as any folder or briefcase on your desktop. If there are more than 15 Desktop items, they will be displayed in two columns.

You can add items to the Windows Desktop, and thus the DTOP screen, by drag-and-dropping them to Z-DESK. Please refer to the section “Adding new items” below.

As with the main menu, all items will be briefly highlighted and a sound will be played when you select them.

COMM

The Communications section. The left column in this display lists all Dial-Up Networking connections defined on your system. Clicking one of them will initiate the connection. Please note that you will not be able to start a DUN Server session from here.

If the connection is saved with the login name and password and Dial-Up Networking is set to dial without prompting, a launched connection will instantly start to dial. Otherwise, the usual “Connect To” dialog will be displayed. In the OSR2 (4.0.950 B) or later versions of Windows, you can start Explorer and go to the Dial-Up Networking folder to change this option for all defined connections. Select “Settings” from the “Connection” menu and unmark the option “Prompt for Information before dialing”.

A second column to the right of the DUN connections lists all HyperTerminal connections (.ht files) found in your HyperTerminal folder. Clicking any one of these items will launch HyperTerminal with the selected connection.

CPNL

This is the Control Panel. This display will show all installed 32-bit control panel applets installed on your system. Some 16-bit applets, which are processed in a different way by Windows, may not be recognized. Z-Desk is checking for a predefined set of 16-bit applets but cannot detect all of them as it does with 32-bit applets

Similar to all other displays, clicking any of the displayed items will instantly launch the matching applet. Using this display, all system settings as well the “Fonts” and “Printers” folders are only one mouse-click away, no matter what you currently do.

FVRT

The Favorites display. This screen will list the contents of your Favorites folder. You can use it to start your web browser and immediately go to any of the locations that you have saved as favorites, all with a single mouse click. This screen is available only if a Favorites folder is actually present and registered on your system.

Depending on the number of items in the folder, up to four columns are used to display your favorites. Subfolders are displayed in a different style; clicking on them will display all links and subfolders that they contain. The title at the top of the screen will show you in which folder you currently are. To return to higher-level folders, click the link labeled “<<<”.

Please note that only physical subfolders that are part of the regular file system and contain shortcut files can be accessed. If you are using MS Internet Explorer 4 or later, you will find that the “Links” folder, established by IE, is accessible, while the “Channels” folder is not. Any subfolder created by yourself will be accessible, though.

Also be aware that there is a distinction between creating a subfolder under the Favorites folder and placing a shortcut to a folder into the Favorites folder. Any subfolders actually residing below the Favorites folder can be browsed with the FVRT display; a shortcut to a folder elsewhere on the system will be displayed as a regular item and launching it will open an Explorer window on this folder.

PRGM

The Programs display. This screen lists all links in the top-level Programs folder. Click on any link to start the program.

The left side of the display frame will display all available Program subfolders. Click there to go deeper into the Program menu’s structure. The title at the top of the screen will show you in which folder you currently are. Once you go into the subfolders, the top item in this menu will be “<<<”. You can click there to go back up one level. Unlike Windows’ start menu, this screen retains the currently selected folder during screen changes, so you can go to a different screen do to do something else and still have the subfolder selected when you return to PRGM.

You can add items to the currently open program folder by drag-and-dropping them to Z-DESK. Please refer to the section “Adding new items” below.

PSNL

Personal display. This display is a bit special. If you call it up, Z-DESK will check for a directory with the same name as the logged-in user, under the directory that Z-DESK is located in. If it does not find one, it will automatically create it. For example, if you have Z-DESK installed in the default directory “c:\program files\Z-Desk” and are logged into Windows as user “XYZ”, Z-DESK will create a directory named “c:\program files\Z-Desk\XYZ”.

Using Explorer, You can copy or create any kind of shortcut, program or document into this directory. If there are different users on a system, each will have its own directory, so in theory everyone in the family or different workers can have their own links on this screen, provided they log in with different user names. User Profiles do not have to be enabled to use this feature. If the user is logged in with a blank username, Z-DESK will create and use a directory named “Unknown”.

You cannot access any subdirectories created under your personal directory. You can, however, create shortcuts to other directories on your system or network. Clicking these items will then launch an Explorer Window to those directories.

As with the DTOP and PRGM screens, you can add items to your Personal folder by drag-and-dropping them to Z-DESK. Please refer to the section “Adding new items” below.

SYST

System information. This screen will display the names of user and machine, the OS type, version and build, the processor, main memory size and usage, disk drives with sizes and available space and, on laptops, the power status. Note that the total disk space and percent free will **not** be displayed for floppies and CD-ROM drives.

The available disk drives are presented as clickable menu items – clicking on one of them will open an Explorer window opened to the root directory of that drive. This will work for any kind of drive, so you can have quick access not only to your local, but also to mapped network drives.

By moving the mouse cursor over a drive target, you can also have a tooltip displayed that will give you lots of information about this drive, such as name and file system of the inserted volume, type, brand and version of the drive as well as technical details including IDE Master device status, activated DMA, synchronous transfer or, for CD drives, auto-insert. For network drives, the path to the connected network resource is displayed.

Note:

Early versions of Windows 95 had a fault in an API function used to retrieve the available disk space that can possibly lead to wrong sizes being reported for large disk volumes. OSR2 (OEM Service Release 2, version 950 B) as well as Windows NT version 4.0 introduced a new function that corrected this problem. Z-DESK will try to call the new function first; if this function call fails, it will call the old function. If your version of Windows 95 is an early one (950 or 950 A), the displayed disk size and/or reported percentage of free space may be wrong or, in cases where the function reports zero space, not be displayed at all.

TSKL

The Task List display, in orange. This screen displays the currently active user tasks, similar to the “Close Program” dialog that you can call up with Ctrl-Alt-Del. Unlike that dialog, TSKL will not display system tasks and you also have no possibility to terminate a task from this screen. These capabilities have been omitted intentionally. You can use this screen to view the active programs and switch over to any running program; clicking on a task will bring that window to the foreground, restoring it first if it was minimized.

The Tasklist screen will update itself every 60 seconds to reflect the currently active tasks on your systems. You can change the refresh interval or disable the automatic update completely in the Options dialog.

The TSKL display has one advantage over Windows’ regular task switcher; it is able to display active dialogs like file property sheets or control panel applets and allows you to switch to these tasks as well.

Note that you may not be able to switch to all displayed tasks. User tasks that run only as a tray icon, with no visible window, such as the WinFax Manager program, may be included in the task list, but clicking on such tasks has no effect.

OPTN

Although Z-DESK does not require any configuration to run, you can use the Options dialog to change a number of settings that will let you tune the display to your personal preferences.

Since version 3, some options have been taken out. The new basic design is centered around the eight “basic” colors of the “Library Control And Retrieval System” LCARS. Likewise the font selection is gone, since Z-Desk is now based on its own special font, which contains some special characters used to draw the screens.

Language

System-defined, English or German. System-defined will check your system’s locale ID and switch to German if one of the German language locales is found or to English if a different locale is found. The other options fix the setting to either language, so that a user on a German language system can have the display in English or vice-versa. The default is “System Defined”.

Animation

The settings in this section will give you control over the animation effects that are new in version 2 of Z-DESK. By default, animation is turned on. There are several effects; status messages will scroll through a window at the top of the screen, pictures will change and display fields will change values.

Please note that, while some of these messages may appear to relate to actual events or components, they are *not* real system messages.

The “Frequency” setting determines how often items are animated while the “Duration” setting will determine how long the animation effects last. You can change these settings to values from 1 (least often or long) to 10 (most often or long). By default, “Frequency” is set to 8 and “Duration” to 4. The actual frequency and duration of the effects is selected at random, within values calculated from these two settings.

Changing either or both these settings to zero will turn off the animation effects completely.

The checkbox “Display” can be used to animate the construction of the various displays. If turned off, the default setting, Z-DESK will first construct and render each screen completely when you switch from one display to another, then show the whole display. On slower systems or on displays with many items, especially with gradient fills turned on, this can take a few seconds. To avoid the seemingly idle pause (or simply to add another animation effect), you can turn this feature on. The program will then display each item on the screen as it is rendered.

Lng.Text

By default, Z-DESK truncates the names of display targets to a maximum of 32 characters. The complete name will be displayed as a tooltip if you move the mouse cursor over the target.

If you wish to have all names displayed in full, check this option. Please be aware that this may result in very small font sizes, since the program will scale the font to accommodate the longest text.

Sounds

Four different sounds are supported:

“Select” is played when a screen is selected

“PRGM” is played when you select a different program subfolder

“Launch” is played when any item is launched (“Launch”)

“COMM” is played when you launch a connection from the COMM display.

By default, the supplied .wav files are used, but you can change these to any other wave file on your system by clicking the respective buttons and selecting a different file. If you prefer not to have any sounds at all, you can check the “Mute” option.

Display Interval

With this setting you can change the refresh interval of the Tasklist screen. By default, the Tasklist will be updated every 60 seconds, but you can change that interval to any number of seconds from 1 to 3600 (1 hour). Setting this value to “0” will disable the automatic update of the tasklist completely.

Date/Time

By unchecking this option, you can suppress the date & time display below the main menu on all screens.

Background

Activating this option will instruct Z-DESK to stay in the background as much as possible, more acting like a wallpaper. If this option is selected, the program will start up behind other already active applications. You can still bring it to the front by clicking on a visible part or on the tray icon and you can change active displays or program folders, but as soon as you select any item to be launched, Z-DESK will automatically send itself back to the bottom of the screen. Of course, Z-DESK will, as a program remain part of the list of active programs and may be brought to foreground by Windows itself.

EXIT

The Logoff display. Here you can end the program or shut down Windows, restart your system or logoff as a user and logon again. Neither of these choices will display the usual shutdown dialog of Windows. Instead, you will get a confirmation screen (similar in style) with a simple Yes/No choice. Select Yes and the selection is activated immediately.

DISPLAYING CUSTOM PICTURES

All displays except PRGM and FVRT, which require the maximum available screen real estate, the left part of the main display will show either a series of random numbers or a picture, which are part of the display animation. You can have your own pictures displayed here, changing at

random intervals. To do this, simply copy any picture you wish to display into the folder where Z-DESK is installed. Possible file types are .JPG, .GIF, .BMP and .WMF. The size of the picture is not important, since the program will automatically scale it to the maximum available height or width, but keep in mind that huge picture files will have longer loading times and require more system resources.

ADDING NEW ITEMS

Shortcuts to programs or documents can be added to the DTOP, PRGM and PSNL screens by drag-and-dropping the files onto Z-DESK. Open My Computer or Explorer and locate the file that you want to create a shortcut for. Now move your mouse pointer over the file, click and hold the left mouse-button and drag the file over Z-DESK's screen. To add an item to your desktop, drag the file over the DTOP selection in the right-hand main menu and release the mouse-button. Z-DESK will ask for your confirmation to create a shortcut. You can cancel the operation by selecting "No". Selecting "Yes" will create a shortcut to your file in the \windows\desktop directory.

Similarly, you can add the file to your Personal folder by dragging it over the "PSNL" selection in the main menu or to the currently open program folder by dragging it to the "PRGM" selection.

If the screen that you want to add the item to is currently displayed, you can also drop the file anywhere on Z-DESK's screen, except over the main menu area. By selecting multiple files and dragging them into Z-DESK, several shortcuts can be created with only one operation.

The shortcuts that you create in this way will be named after the file that you are linking to, without the file path and, for executables, without the file extension. Note that file names that fit into the old MSDOS 8.3 naming convention (up to eight characters and no blanks or special characters) will result in shortcuts that are in all-uppercase. This behavior is caused by Windows' standard naming conventions.

SYSTEM TRAY ICON

After starting Z-DESK, you will find a new icon in the system tray area of the taskbar. You can use this icon to bring the program back to the foreground by clicking on it with the left mouse button. Clicking on the icon with the right mouse button will hide Z-DESK completely, thus enabling you to quickly access the real Windows desktop; you can left-click the icon to make the program visible again.

If you are a keyboard fan like myself, you can also hit CTRL-H to hide Z-DESK or CTRL-B to send it to the background. You cannot use these keys to bring it back, though, since Z-DESK, once hidden or running in the background, will not receive your keystrokes anymore.

There is one possible workaround for this, though. If you define a system-global hotkey to start Z-DESK, you can also this hotkey to bring Z-DESK back to the foreground or make it visible again. Z-DESK is programmed not to allow multiple instances of itself; if you try to start Z-DESK and an instance of the program is already running, the new instance will activate the first one and then terminate itself. To allocate a hotkey, open Explorer and call up the

property sheet of the shortcut you use to start Z-DESK. Select the "Shortcut" tab and go the field "Shortcut Key"; press a valid hotkey combination, for example Ctrl-Alt-Z.

DISTRIBUTION

Z-DESK is a shareware program; you are welcome to distribute the file Z-DESK.ZIP containing the unregistered version freely. It may be copied individually or distributed through websites, FTP archives, BBS's or similar systems, provided that no files are changed, removed or added from or to the Zip archive. You may not pass on your registration password to others.

No charges beyond the cost of media and/or duplication may be raised for the distribution.

LEGAL SECTION

This software is provided "as is". While it has been tested on several machines, the Author cannot make any warrantee that it will run with your particular system and software. The Author cannot be held liable for any damages resulting from the use of this program, including, but not limited to loss of data, time or functionality.

The User may install this software on more than one machine and make backup copies of it. However, concurrent use on more than one machine, individual or networked, requires a separate registration for each machine.

Distribution and publication of registration passwords is illegal and will be prosecuted to the maximum extent available by law.

Reverse engineering and disassembly of the program is prohibited.

REGISTRATION

Z-DESK is distributed as shareware. While unregistered, it will display a small window on start-up and closing where a user name and password can be entered. This window will also appear as a nag screen at random intervals when doing selections. This is the only difference between the registered and unregistered versions – all functionality is there. Enter the assigned name and password into this window when it appears. Once a valid registration password has been recognized, the window will no longer appear. If, for any reason, you want to view or change the registration information, you can bring it up again by pressing CTRL-R when Z-DESK has the input focus. The registration window will also display the version and build number. Registration will also entitle you to use future upgrades without additional cost.

The registration fee for Z-DESK is US-\$ 15.00 or DM 25.00.

To obtain your personal registration password, you can register online ShareIt!.

To register through ShareIt!

You can register online over the Internet at

<http://www.shareit.com/programs/100630.htm>.

Alternatively, you can go to <http://www.shareit.com> and enter the program number there:

100630.

SUPPORT

You can find Z-DESK's homepage at

<http://www.zet-net.com/zd.htm>

This site will provide you with a FAQ, online manual and download area. Registered users can contact

support@zet-net.com

for online support. Be sure to check the FAQ first; some common issues are detailed and explained there.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about or suggestions for Z-DESK, feel free to contact me by Email under:

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I hope Z-DESK will serve you well.

My Special Thanks go to Joyce for keeping up with my Beta releases and to Jacques for his detective work and for pushing me on. And on. And on ... You're a pal, pal !

Gerhard K. Ziran
MS MVP-DTS (*Most Valuable Professional - Desktop Systems*)

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