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- Using Windows XP
- Downloads
- Support
- Expert Zone
- Worldwide Sites
- Microsoft Update
- Windows Marketplace
- Windows Family



[Using Windows XP](#) > [Computer Setup and Maintenance](#)

## Using Multiple Monitors with Windows XP

Published: July 26, 2004

By [Tony Northrup, Windows XP Expert Zone Community Columnist](#)



Blink. Blink. Blink. It's an instant message from my wife. I'll check it as soon as I finish this paragraph. Blink. Blink. Could be important. Okay, I'll check it after this sentence. Blink. I'd better just check it.

I multitask all day and I'm not using "multitask" in that buzz-term kind of way. Between e-mail, instant messages, and news updates, it seems like I need one computer for communications and another computer for work. I run several different applications simultaneously and constantly switch among them.

At times, I'm testing an application while taking notes in Microsoft Word. Other times, I'm instant messaging with a friend about a Web page or running [Virtual PC](#) to test a procedure in a book I'm editing. Often I'm doing all those things simultaneously. It seems like I waste half the day clicking the taskbar to switch between tasks.

Turns out I didn't need another computer—I just needed another monitor. Windows XP supports using multiple monitors and has the [Dualview feature](#) built in. Dualview lets you add a separate monitor to your laptop and view different programs on each display.

In this column, I'll explain how to configure multiple monitors using the Dualview feature in Windows XP. And I'll help you set up an old laptop as a second monitor by using some cool third-party software that works with Windows XP.

### Configure Multiple Monitors and Dualview

If you have a desktop computer and you want multiple monitors, your best bet is to buy an external monitor and a second video adapter that supports multiple monitors. Here's a list of [Supported Display Adapters for Multiple Monitors and Dualview](#). Alternatively, you can upgrade your current video adapter with an adapter that can connect directly to multiple monitors. You can find such video adapters for less than \$200 at most electronics stores—just make sure that it's compatible with your computer and has connectors that match the monitors you plan to use.

If you're a laptop user like me, you don't have the option of adding another video adapter, but your laptop might support using **Dualview** with an external monitor and the laptop's built-in display. If it does support Dualview, just do what I did: plug a monitor into the external VGA port of your laptop and turn on the Dualview feature of Windows XP. To turn on Dualview, follow these steps:

1. Right-click the desktop, and then click **Properties**.
2. In the **DisplayProperties** dialog box, click the **Settings** tab.
3. Click the **Display** list and select your external monitor. If you do not see multiple monitors listed, your computer hardware may not support Dualview. You can still use MaxiVista to configure a second computer as an additional display, however.
4. Select the **Extend my Windows desktop onto this monitor** option. Click **Apply** or **OK**.

Now I can have different windows open on my laptop's built-in display and the external monitor. I can move windows between the two displays and even stretch windows across both displays. For more information on how to move from one monitor to the other, see [Expand Your Workspace with Multiple Monitors and Dualview](#).

[Top of page](#)

#### Related Links

- [Windows XP General Newsgroup](#)
- [Windows XP Performance and Maintenance Newsgroup](#)
- [Expand Your Workspace with Multiple Monitors and Dualview](#)
- [List of Supported Display Adapters for Multiple Monitors and Dualview in Windows XP](#)
- [Multiple Monitors Overview](#)
- [Configure and Use Multiple Monitors in Windows XP](#)
- [Multi-Monitor Resources](#)
- [Ultramon](#)
- [MaxiVista](#)
- [Previous Columns by Tony Northrup](#)

## Repurpose an Old Laptop

Dualview has made my life much easier, but I still find myself without enough desktop space. It seems like I'm constantly juggling windows, but I can't add a third display because my laptop only supports a single external monitor. So I investigated higher-resolution monitors that would allow me to fit more windows on a single screen. Unfortunately, the 20" LCD displays that I like cost more than \$1000, which is far more than I can justify for saving a few mouse clicks.

If money is not much of an object, check out the [DigitalTigers](#) product called [SideCar](#) that lets you run as many as four external monitors from your laptop. You end up with a huge desktop display and still have the mobility of a laptop.

However, I have an old laptop with a perfectly good display going to waste in my basement. The laptop itself is almost useless—the keyboard is flaky, the mouse buttons don't work, and the hard drive is barely large enough to install Windows XP. I found a way to turn that laptop into a second external monitor though, and it didn't require any extra hardware.

[↑ Top of page](#)

## What is MaxiVista?

[MaxiVista](#) turns any networked computer into an external monitor. MaxiVista's only hardware requirement is that the two computers must connect to each other across a network, so it's perfect if you can't add an extra video adapter. I have a network adapter for my old laptop, so I connected it to my network and installed the free MaxiVista demo. It worked and my laptop's desktop was immediately spread across three displays, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: MaxiVista at work.

If you don't have an old laptop lying around, you can buy a used laptop for cheaper than an external monitor would cost. It doesn't need to be fast—even very old hardware will work with MaxiVista.

## Configure MaxiVista

To configure the MaxiVista demo, follow these steps:

1. Connect your primary PC (the one to which you'll connect your keyboard and mouse) and your secondary PC (the one that will act as an extra monitor) to a network. If you don't have a network yet, connect the two computers with an [Ethernet cross-over cable](#).
2. Download [MaxiVistaDemo.Zip](#) and open the file in Windows Explorer.
3. Run **MaxiVista\_Setup\_PrimaryPC.exe** on the primary PC and follow the wizard's instructions.
4. Run **MaxiVista\_Setup\_SecondaryPC.exe** on the secondary PC and follow the wizard's instructions.
5. Right-click the MaxiVista icon in the notification area and then click **Enable Secondary Display**.

MaxiVista isn't quite as nice as having an external monitor directly attached to my laptop, but it's close. I can't run any 3-D games on the MaxiVista display nor can I watch DVDs on it. I can, however, keep my instant messages, e-mail, Web browser, or word processor on the display. Though it has its limitations, MaxVista gave me the desktop space I needed without requiring me to buy any new hardware.

[↑ Top of page](#)

## Manage Multiple Monitors with Ultramon

There's a downside to using multiple displays—it's hard to keep track of your windows. Arranging windows on each of the different displays requires dragging and dropping, which takes as long as switching between windows with the taskbar. The [Windows XP General newsgroup](#) has many questions from people with similar complaints, and everyone gets the same answer: [Ultramon](#).

Ultramon makes it easier to work with multiple displays by adding a taskbar to each monitor, adding a button to the title bar of every window that you can use to move it to a different monitor, and letting you quickly switch between different monitor configurations. I configured Ultramon so that pressing F4 moves a window one display to the right and pressing F3 moves it one display to the left, as shown in Figure 2.

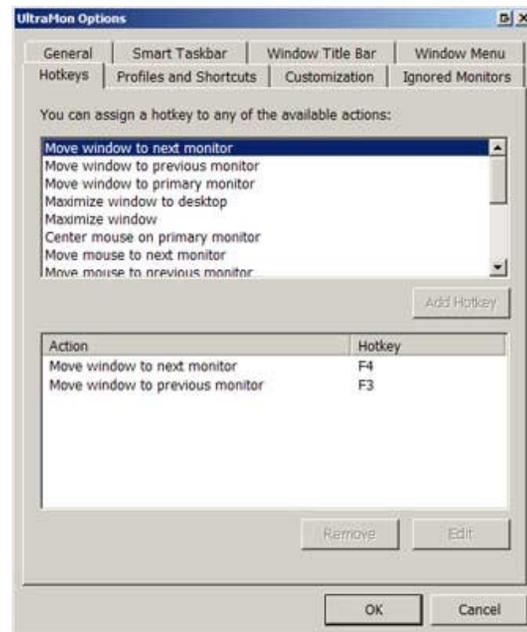


Figure 2: Configuring Ultramon's hotkeys.

Ultramon also includes features to make it more fun to work with multiple displays. I used it to stretch desktop pictures across multiple screens and to set up a screensaver that shows a photo slideshow with different pictures on each of my three displays, as shown in Figure 3. I knew the screensaver was a hit at the last party I threw when I found people gathering in my home office to watch the slideshow.

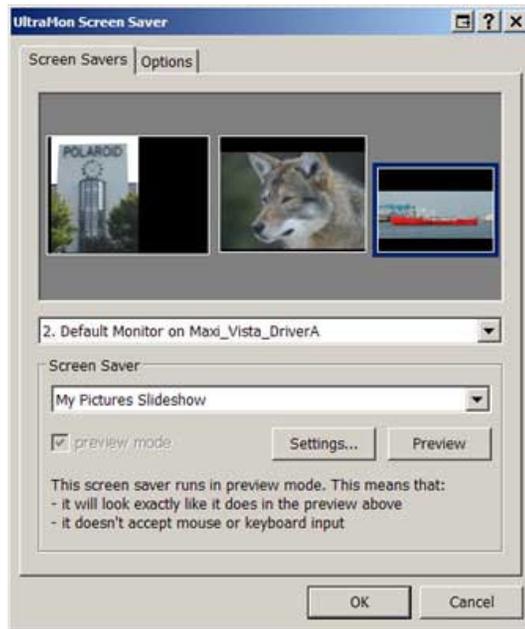


Figure 3: Configuring Ultramon's screensaver.

[↑ Top of page](#)

## Face the Learning Curve

I have a friend who doesn't use multiple displays because she finds it disorienting. I can't blame her, because it was disorienting to me at first too. My monitors don't line up perfectly, so my mouse jumps about six inches when I move from one screen to another. Additionally, each of my three monitors uses a different resolution, so windows change size as I drag them between displays.

Using multiple monitors was confusing at first, but so was every other upgrade that I've ever done. Unlike many of my other upgrades, using multiple monitors has been well worth the effort. In fact, my desktop already seems crowded and it might be time to look for a fourth display.



**Tony Northrup** is a writer, an Internet engineer, and a digital photography enthusiast. Tony has a decade of experience making networks and servers connected to the Internet run smoothly. He has authored and co-authored eight books about using Windows and written dozens of articles about Internet technologies. When he's not on his deck writing, he toys with home automation technologies and takes pictures for display in a Web photo album. He lives in the Boston area with his wife, Erica, and cat, Sammy. You can learn more about Tony by visiting his Web site at <http://www.northrup.org>.

[↑ Top of page](#)

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