



SIMPLE WAYS TO TAP YOUR LAPTOP'S LATENT TALENT!

You may be using your laptop daily, but are you deriving the maximum returns on this investment by using your prized possession to the fullest?

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Laptops these days come packed with a variety of features like cameras, Bluetooth and so on. A lot of these functions may not be used very often but if they are, they can ease your daily tasks, save time, help you secure your data and sometimes even your computer, and a lot more. But to take full advantage of these powerful features and functionalities, you need to first learn about the various ways in which these applications can make your computing devices double their performance.

However, while several of these features can be great resources to improve productivity and ease of use, some could expose you to security risks. Hence it is best to know about both the pros and cons of using these features.

Cameras

Almost all the laptops available in the market today come with an embedded camera. Did you know that these cameras can be put to various interesting uses?

For video conferencing: These cameras usually do not have high enough resolutions to replace digital cameras, though they're useful to take profile pictures and also for video conferencing. Currently, when video conferencing has proved to be a better option to travelling, the in-built camera is quite advantageous to business people.

As a security tool: The camera can also double up as a security device!

Let's see how this can happen. Some laptops have face or eye recognition software that is used to log in a particular user. How this works is: after you switch on the laptop, the camera is started. If the software recognises the face or the eye scan of those in front of

the camera, it allows such users access to the computer by logging them in. Multiple people can also share the same laptop with different usernames and passwords, and the camera can help in authenticating all these users. If you want to share the login rights of your computer with a colleague or subordinate so that they can access data from your computer in your absence, then you can take the help of your IT administrator to enter the user details and the facial features of the other user(s) before hand.



There's another security advantage that a camera can offer if teamed with a laptop tracking software. When a laptop that's loaded with laptop tracking software is stolen, the camera can take pictures of the new user and send it to a central server over the Internet. Depending on the network location from where the pictures are coming in and the pictures themselves, the thief can be tracked down.



Bluetooth

If your laptop has the Bluetooth functionality, then you can use it in various innovative ways.

To communicate with other devices: The in-built Bluetooth functionality in laptops can be used to

There are various ways in which you can make your computing devices double their performance.

communicate with other Bluetooth-capable devices, like laptops and mobile phones. The communication modes include accessing files on the phone from the laptop and vice-versa. Files can be dragged and dropped between the two connected devices. This eliminates the need to search for those LAN cables to connect laptops or for USB cables to connect your mobile phone! Apart from this, by using the Bluetooth functionality you can access the Internet on your laptop using the GPRS/Internet connection of your mobile phone, sending or receiving SMSs and even calling from the laptop.

To convert your phone into an input device for your laptop: A Bluetooth mobile phone can be used as an input device for the computer, i.e., as an additional keyboard, so that when making presentations, slides can be advanced by pressing the keys on the phone, which is connected to your laptop via the Bluetooth connection. This gives you the freedom to move around and not carry any additional pointing devices.

It is important to remember that when not using Bluetooth, it's best to switch the functionality off to conserve power. This will ensure the laptop battery lasts longer. This can usually be done via a key combination indicated on your laptop keyboard or from the control panel of the operating system.



Wireless

Wireless networks these days are ubiquitous. They have helped us do away with the cables that interconnect computers and that connect to corporate intranets to access the Internet. It is important to be aware of the following points while accessing the Internet via wireless networks: 1) Connect only to those networks that you trust (e.g., your company network or your home network). 2) Connecting to unknown networks at coffee shops or elsewhere may put your username or passwords at risk as wireless networks are easily hacked.

Also, as in the case of Bluetooth, when not using a wireless network, it's best to turn off the functionality to conserve power and extend the laptop's battery life. This can also be done via key combinations as well as from the network icon in the task bar or from the control panel.



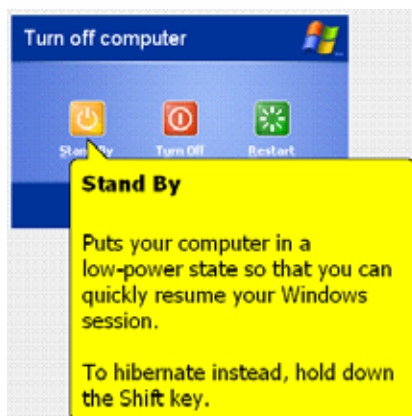
Fingerprint scanner

Some laptops come with fingerprint scanners on them. If you have selected a laptop equipped with this functionality, you can ease your login process by swiping your finger over the scanner instead of having to type in the password at the login or unlock screens.

Some laptops can lock the hard disk at shutdown and unlock it only if a pre-registered fingerprint is swiped.

Like face or eye recognition for cameras, the systems administrator can pre-configure the laptop with your fingerprint and associate it with your login, to ensure that whenever you swipe your finger, the operating system recognises your fingerprint and logs you in.

Some laptops can also lock the hard disk at shutdown and unlock it only if a pre-registered fingerprint is swiped. This helps in the prevention of data theft when a laptop is stolen: the thief will not be able to access your data even by physically removing the hard disk from the laptop and attaching it to another system, as it will still remain locked.



Suspend and hibernate

Instead of shutting down the laptop each time you don't want to use it for an extended period of time, you can put it into 'suspend' mode. Suspend puts almost all

of the laptop's hardware to sleep, except the memory. This means the laptop uses very little power in this state. When a laptop is started again, it resumes from the point you had last left it. This ensures you can resume your work as you had left it, instead of re-opening documents and presentations as you would normally have to do after a restart, or a shutdown and start. It is completely safe to keep the laptop in the suspended state overnight or on long travels. This saves a lot of time that would usually be spent in restarting the laptop and resuming work.

Hibernate is a special mode of suspend where the laptop is completely powered off, but the present state is saved so that when the laptop is started the next time, it's as if you had only suspended it. This mode is helpful when you want to completely shut off the laptop (for example, when passing it through airport security checks), but not have to reload all your open documents and Web pages.

If you have to temporarily leave your desk, you can choose to lock the desktop with the help of a screen password or just put the lid down. Usually, when you put the lid down while the computer is on, it goes into 'Suspend' mode. But this setting can be changed to just activate the screensaver instead so that you can quickly resume your work after coming back to your workstation. Some of you may prefer to have the network connection running while you just walk across the office or take a short break. Activating the screensaver along with locking the desktop has the advantage that no one can pry into your work and documents while you are away.



Cable lock

Most of the laptops these days come with a socket to attach a cable lock. The cable can be attached to an immovable object, like a loop in a desk that's meant for power cables to run down to their sockets. The cables are usually very strong and are not broken easily. Attaching such a cable ensures no one can steal the laptop. This can be very useful in physically securing the laptop at conferences, hotel rooms and cars.

[Note: Most laptops are designed to be compatible with Kensington cable locks.]

Brightness adjustment

The brightness of your laptop screens can be adjusted via key combinations that vary from manufacturer to manufacturer. The brightness can be adjusted to suit the ambient light, in order to be easy on the eyes. If you are seated in a place that is very bright, you may want to set the brightness levels of the screen to higher levels so that the screen is easily readable. On the other hand, in low brightness conditions, the laptop's brightness can be tuned down, so the screen is not too bright and doesn't strain the eyes.

Also, when you're running out of battery power, and want to give that one last touch to the presentation, you can dim the brightness levels, which will prolong the battery's life.



Keyboard lights

Some manufacturers also include a bulb that shines lightly on the keys or the keys have a backlight so they are illuminated. This bulb or backlight can be enabled or disabled via function keys, which is laptop-dependent. This is helpful to locate keys in low-light conditions. Besides, as trained typists are aware, the 'F' and 'J' keys are physically different to the touch. Both have raised lines below the letters, making it easy for those typing in poor light to orient themselves to the keyboard. It's a feature universally adopted to make keyboards more user-friendly for the visually handicapped.



Multimedia keys

The multimedia keys can be used to play, pause or stop audio and video content. There are also keys to skip to the next audio or video item in playlists. You can also mute and adjust volume levels. These keys are useful while delivering presentations or to quickly control the playback of audio-visual content without having to search for the application that's playing audio and selecting the appropriate buttons on that particular app's menu. ●●

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