

VISUAL STUDIO HACKS™

Tips & Tools for Turbocharging the IDE



O'REILLY®

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HACK

#44

Speed Up Visual Studio

Visual Studio does a lot—perhaps too much—at startup. Cut out a lot of the less important bits to get into your code that much faster.

No one has ever accused Visual Studio of being the fastest application in the world. One particular sore spot is the time it takes to launch a new instance of Visual Studio. If you are a frequent user of Visual Studio, this is not news to you. There are a couple of things you can do to speed up how Visual Studio starts—although it won't be the fastest app in the world, it will be much more bearable.

Disable the Start Page

The start page is the web page that is displayed by default when Visual Studio first starts up. By default, this page shows a list of recent projects and includes tabs that list online resources and allow you to edit your Visual Studio profile. The start page does not really add any functionality that you can't access somewhere else. The reason the start page is both a security threat and a slowdown factor is that it launches Internet Explorer. Visual Studio .NET 2003 fixes this issue slightly by loading Internet Explorer only if you are using a customized start page, so needless to say, using a customized start page is discouraged.



Visual Studio 2005 adds a completely new start page that should not affect the startup time of Visual Studio and should not create any security issues.

If you don't get a lot of use out of the start page, it is easily disabled in the Options menu. While the performance gain won't be the same between Visual Studio editions, it will be enough to be worth the effort. To disable the start page, simply go to Tools → Options, then choose General under the Environment folder (General should be selected by default). On the right of that screen, you will see a drop-down where you can specify what Visual Studio should do on startup. I recommend choosing Show Empty Environment; this means Visual Studio will not do anything special on startup.

Turn Off Dynamic Help

Another issue that Visual Studio .NET 2003 helped to resolve was Dynamic Help starting during startup. Dynamic Help is another part of Visual Studio that tends to slow everything down. It is a good idea to make sure the Dynamic Help window is not open when you start up Visual Studio—this is

done by simply making sure the window is closed when you close Visual Studio.

If you never really use Dynamic Help, you can disable it completely. To do this, you need to delve into the registry and change the value of the key located here:

```
HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\Visual Studio\<7.1>\
Dynamic Help
```

The name of the key is `Never Show DH on F1`, and you will need to change the value of this key to `YES`. Doing this will disable Dynamic Help.

Start from the Run Dialog

As with starting any application, part of the time it takes to start Visual Studio is spent hunting for it in your Start menu. Many developers find it much easier to simply open the Run dialog and enter the name of the application executable. To do this with Visual Studio, all you need to do is open the Run dialog (Windows Key-R or Start → Programs → Run), then type **devenv** and press Enter. This is by far the fastest way to get the application up and running. There is also a switch for `devenv` called `/nosplash`, which will suppress the splash page for Visual Studio. So, you can type **devenv /nosplash** into the Run dialog (or the command prompt) to have Visual Studio start up without the splash page.

Keep MRU Lists Under Control

One sure way to slow down the startup of Visual Studio is to have a lot of files and projects in the recent file and recent project lists. This is especially apparent if you have any projects in the MRU list that are located on a network share. Visual Studio checks various file attributes, and if there is a problem with the network connection (or if you're simply not connected to it when you start up), Visual Studio will hang while trying to access these files.

The best thing to do is simply keep these lists under control using the method outlined in “Edit the Most Recent File and Project Lists” [Hack #13]. If you notice any slowdowns in startup, a quick trip to VSTweak to clear out these lists is a good idea.