

Using Two (or more) Monitors

Since Windows 95 Microsoft has built-in support for the use of multiple monitors. Most people, however, have never explored this uncharted territory. In fact, I had not explored the idea of using more than one monitor until I switched computers from a desktop to a laptop. When my firm was purchasing the laptop, I decided against getting a docking station. The only real benefit that I saw from having a docking station would be that it would connect my notebook to a full sized keyboard and monitor. I quickly determined that I could handle those chores better myself.

By choosing not to get a docking station, I knew that I would be able to keep my monitor from my desktop and use it in conjunction with my new notebook. After receiving my notebook, however, I quickly determined that I could not see its screen very well when I placed it on my desk. I found a great Off-Desk Shelf <<http://tinyurl.com/bhsjq>> at Office Depot that places the notebook at the proper height for working. As an added bonus, I can also store items (such as paper clips and my PDA cradle) under the shelf. To enable myself to type, I also added a full sized keyboard and mouse.

I now had my notebook, which sits in front of my on a shelf, and my monitor, which sits slightly to its left. Connecting the second monitor was a breeze. Windows XP has built in support for dual monitors. I had only to plug in the external monitor and go to settings to enable dual monitor support. I am now set up with two monitors (the one on my notebook and my external monitor that I used to use with my desktop). Once I started working this way, I fell in love with it. It really is great to be able to work on two different documents, with one on each monitor. This makes it much easier to cut and paste from different documents. Also, even if I am working on only one document, I will typically have that document open on one monitor and have my email program open on the other. This allows me to quickly check emails as they arrive without disturbing what I am doing in Word.

Another great benefit is that it is that the set up is very useful when doing legal research. I can have Westlaw open in a window on one monitor and have the document I am working in open on the other. Again this makes it easy to cut and paste. It also makes it easy to check citations or to review cases as I am paraphrasing what happened in the case.

An additional benefit to using the two monitor setup is the surprised look I get from most people who have no idea that such a thing can even be done. Once I had a vendor in the office demonstrating a product. He had to access his product using Internet Explorer. I already had IE open on my external monitor. However, my mouse pointer was currently on my notebook monitor. I turned my seat over to the vendor and he could not understand that he could use the mouse to get to the external monitor. He kept telling me that he needed a mouse for the other monitor. I tried explaining that he just had to move the mouse over and it would go to the other monitor. Despite what I said, he still did not understand that the two monitors were connected. Finally, I had to take the mouse from him and move it to the external monitor before he understood that the monitors were connected.

In my situation adding a second monitor was extremely easy and, because I was already switching from a desktop to a laptop, it cost me nothing. This is so because I was using my

monitor from my old desktop setup. Also, I needed no additional hardware because my laptop already had a connection for an external monitor.

You can also have multiple monitor support using a desktop setup. In such a situation, you will have to either find an extra monitor (I have found that in most offices there is usually at least one spare monitor laying around) or you will have to purchase one. Also, to enable multiple monitor use on a desktop, you will have to install a video card with dual monitor support, add a second video card to your desktop, or use a video splitter. Depending on how your desires and requirements, this could cost anywhere from as little as \$50 to more than \$200. Regardless, you will quickly find that the expense well worth it.

Once you go to a set up like this, you will wonder how you ever worked with only one monitor. The only drawback I have found is that I get to used to working that way and I miss my second monitor when I am outside the office. I highly recommend adding a second monitor to your set up. I wish I had done it years ago.

UltraMon 2.6

As I mentioned above, Windows comes with built in support for multiple monitors. Although this works fine, there is very little that you can do to tweak your monitor use. I have found a program called UltraMon <<http://www.realtimesoft.com/ultramon/>> that is a perfect utility for multiple monitor management.

The best feature about UltraMon is that it adds two additional buttons to your windows. Windows creates standard buttons in the upper right hand corner of each window. These buttons allow you to minimize, maximize, and close your window. UltraMon add two additional buttons. One button allows you to send that window to your other monitor. One click, and the window is on your second monitor. The second button allows you to maximize the window over all of your monitors at once, creating one large desktop. Although I rarely use UltraMon's maximize button, I use the switch monitor button constantly.

UltraMon also allows you to manage the desktops on your two monitors separately. Thus, you can have a different wallpaper on each monitor. This works great in a situation where you have two kids and want to have a picture of each as your wallpaper. With UltraMon you can also have different screen savers running on each of your monitors.

UltraMon also creates a smart taskbar on your second monitor. With the smart taskbar each taskbar shows only the applications from the monitor it is on. This way, you will not have to search for an application after activating it. If you move an application to a different monitor, its taskbar button will be moved to the corresponding taskbar.

Also, UltraMon allows you to mirror your monitors. This is useful, for example, to show documents to a client or other person who is sitting opposite of you. Also, UltraMon supports the use of more than 10 monitors.

UltraMon is available for download for a 30 day trial period. A single user license costs \$39.99. I purchased UltraMon soon after I added a second monitor. I find it absolutely invaluable and would not run a multiple monitor setup without it.