Windows Phone 7

SECRETS

DO WHAT YOU NEVER THOUGHT POSSIBLE WITH YOUR WINDOWS PHONE 7

Paul Thurrott

PAUL THURROTT

+ Insider Tips
  Expert advice to help you optimize performance

+ Valuable Insights
  Eye-opening descriptions of poorly documented or undocumented features and procedures

+ Unbeatable Advice
  Real-world workarounds and little-known tips and techniques
Windows® Phone 7 SECRETS
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DO WHAT YOU NEVER THOUGHT POSSIBLE WITH WINDOWS PHONE 7
Paul Thurrott
To Stephanie, Mark, and Kelly, I love you all.

-Paul Thurrott
About the Author

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Thanks, too, to Rafael, my Windows 7 Secrets co-author, for the occasional, friendly reminders to rejoin the world, usually in the form of an “are you still alive?”-type IM. Yes, I am still alive. And I look forward to rejoining you on the next book.

Finally, thanks to my readers and listeners from around the world. I’ve always thought about my work as a conversation about technology, and that was never truer than during the development of this book, when I wrote about both Windows Phone and, for the first time, the process of writing a book from beginning to end. Let’s keep the conversation going: It’s this back and forth that makes the whole thing worthwhile.
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In early 2009, I infamously wrote an article called “Saying Goodbye to the iPhone” (winsupersite.com/alt/iphone_goodbye.asp) in which I expressed my desire to drop Apple’s iPhone in order to adopt a device based on Microsoft’s then-current smart phone platform, Windows Mobile. The article was written more for my own benefit than anything else, and I was transparently using it as a prod to drop what was then the superior product—the iPhone—to use something dramatically inferior.

The reasons for this were many, but what it came down to was misguided pragmatism. I’m the Windows guy, after all, and had been writing about Microsoft technologies for over 15 years by that point, most notably via the SuperSite for Windows. Using and writing about the iPhone didn’t make much sense from a product coverage perspective. In isolation, Windows Mobile made plenty of sense.

There was just one problem. And boy, was it a doozy. Windows Mobile, to put it bluntly, was terrible. The version that was current at the time, Windows Mobile 6.1, was a stinker, with an underlying user interface that had roots dating back over a decade to the days of PDAs and tiny metal styluses. (Not surprisingly, Windows Mobile 6.1 phones still shipped with the little metal toothpicks. It was the only way to accurately press some of the tiny onscreen controls.)

In early 2009, there was an iota of hope that Microsoft would turn Windows Mobile around, and I clung to that hope like it was a virtual life preserver. That year, I went through several Windows Mobile devices, and while I won’t embarrass any of the companies or products by naming names here, suffice it to say they were all horrifically bad compared to the iPhone.

Microsoft’s plan, we were told, was to provide Windows Mobile with a multitouch-compatible user interface that would bring it up to speed with the iPhone. This interface would debut in Windows Mobile 6.5 in late 2009 and be accompanied by new services like Windows Marketplace for Mobile (an Apple App Store clone) and My Phone, a surprisingly decent way to synchronize and back up important smart phone data to the Web.

Windows Mobile 6.5 was big on promise but weak on execution. And while the details of why this release was so disappointing are almost too complicated to bother with, I’ll at least offer up a few relevant points here.
First, the initial batch of Windows Mobile 6.5 devices that shipped in late 2009 did not include an iPhone-like capacitive touch screen. Instead, they all shipped with inferior resistive touch screens. The difference is profound, and important. Where capacitive touch screens are silky smooth and easy to use, resistive touch screens require more pressure—causing you to press down on the screen harder than you feel is comfortable—and they are prone to mis-taps.

Second, while Microsoft did indeed provide an iPhone-like multitouch interface for Windows Mobile 6.5, this interface was only made available on the system’s lock screen, Start screen, and in a handful of apps, such as the updated version of Internet Explorer that shipped with that product. The rest of the UI was based on that horrible, old, stylus-based UI from 10 years earlier. And you didn’t have to navigate too far into the UI to reach these crusty, older bits, none of which were touch-friendly in the slightest.

Finally, Microsoft continued to bifurcate the market for its mobile platform by supplying two different versions of Windows Mobile, Standard and Professional, which ran on different kinds of hardware. Standard was designed for smaller, non-touchscreen–based devices, while Professional was aimed at more capable devices. Annoyingly, this strategy created a situation where apps written for one version often wouldn’t work on the other.

I could go on, but you get the idea. By the close of 2009, I had purchased and evaluated several Windows Mobile 6.x phones, and they were all horrible. Moving from the iPhone to one of these lackluster devices wasn’t going to be like taking a step back. It would be like taking a step back in time. They weren’t even close.

What I didn’t know at the time was that, internally, Microsoft had already given up on Windows Mobile. Yes, there was a half-hearted side effort to shore up Windows Mobile 6.5 with a few minor updates throughout early 2010. But for the most part, Microsoft was simply letting Windows Mobile run its course. Separately, and secretly, it was plotting a new mobile platform, one that would replace Windows Mobile and allow the company a rare mulligan, a do-over, a chance to finally right the wrongs and set its mobile wares down the right path. This new platform, which became known simply as Windows Phone, was like a sudden, bright shot of light in a dark room. And while it would take a year and a half, it allowed me to finally make good on my promise to abandon the iPhone. I’m not looking back.

Windows Phone is to the mobile industry what the iPhone was years ago, but is no longer: A new way of doing things, a better way of doing things. Windows Phone supports applications, or apps, like other smart phone platforms. But it also provides its users with a simpler way of doing things, a more visual presentation, and a more personalized and customizable experience. While Apple is busy cementing its position, Microsoft has
been forced to retrench, and this necessity has resulted in a far more thoughtful platform, one that doesn’t copy what others are doing.

The older I get, the harder it is for me to become excited by new technology. I remember key products along the way that renewed my excitement and interest—things like Windows 95, Windows Media Center, Windows Home Server, and Windows 7. Windows Phone is such a product, and I hope my excitement is transmitted throughout the book. No technology is perfect—and Windows Phone is no exception, as I’ve tried to document here—but Microsoft’s new mobile platform has the right feature set and underlying capabilities to redefine the way we consume computing and online services on the go. I’m excited to be part of it, if only in a small way. I suspect you will be as well. Welcome aboard.

—Paul Thurrott
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Who This Book Is For

This book is for people, average users, not technical experts. I assume you have at least a passing familiarity with mobile phones like the iPhone or those based on Google Android, but it’s not a requirement. I assume you use a Windows-based PC, and not a Mac. (Though I will at least point out that, despite the incongruity of using a device called Windows Phone in tandem with a Mac, it is at least possible for those who are interested in reverse switching. Yes, they’re out there.)

The book doesn’t need to be read from cover to cover. That said, I do recommend reading at least the first three chapters in sequence, since this is the foundation for understanding how the phone works and why things are the way they are. From that point on, feel free to cherry-pick as needed, and as you discover and wonder about specific new features.

What This Book Covers

Windows Phone is a brand-new mobile platform, and experience with a Windows Mobile device is no more relevant than iPhone or Android experience. For this reason, the book covers some background material related to the “whys” as well as the “hows” of Windows Phone before delving into specific applications and features. This background material is, I feel, very important to gaining an understanding and firm grounding in Windows Phone.

This book covers only those applications, hubs, and services that come with every Windows Phone. It is possible—no, almost a certainty—that Microsoft, device
makers, and wireless carriers will bolster this base functionality with additional features, including custom applications and hubs, and more. It’s also as likely that the basic Windows Phone feature set will expand over time, and Microsoft is working to shore up the missing features that will be present at launch. It’s impossible to see the future, of course, but I will be covering any changes to Windows Phone over time at this book’s web site, Windows Phone Secrets (windowsphonesecrets.com), as well as at my main web site, the SuperSite for Windows (winsupersite.com). More so than any product I’ve ever covered, Windows Phone is going to change, and change a lot. It should be an interesting ride.

**How This Book Is Structured**

This book is divided into logical sections that should help you easily find what you need to know. As noted before, I recommend starting with, and reading through, the first three chapters in sequence, if possible. This will give you a firm grounding in Windows Phone.

From there, the book progresses through sections dedicated to integrated experiences, entertainment, Internet and online services, productivity, phone and messaging, and settings and configuration. There’s no reason to read these sections and chapters in order. Instead, treat *Windows Phone Secrets* as reference guide, referring to it as needed as you explore your own phone. Alternatively, you could use the book as an early exploration tool to find out about new features before you dive in yourself.

The point here is simple: For the most part, this book doesn’t need to be read cover to cover. Instead, you can read it in the order that makes the most sense for you.

**What You Need to Use This Book**

To use a Windows Phone, and thus *Windows Phone Secrets*, effectively, you will need a Windows-based PC, preferably running the latest version of Windows, which is Windows 7 at the time of this writing. You will need a Windows Live ID, as I discuss in Chapter 1. And you will need the latest version of the Zune PC software, since that software is the sole link between the phone and your PC.

**Web Site Supporting the Book**

This book is only the beginning: More secrets can be found online, and of course since Windows Phone will be evolving over time, there’s much more to come. For updates, errata, new information, and an ongoing blog with interactive discussions,
please visit my Windows Phone Secrets blog (windowsphonesecrets.com). I will also be covering Windows Phone and related topics on my main web site, the SuperSite for Windows (winsupersite.com).

Features and Icons Used in This Book

The following features and icons are used in this book to help draw your attention to some of the most important or useful information in the book, some of the most valuable tips, insights, and advice that can help you unlock the secrets of Windows Phone 7.

SIDEBARS

Sidebars like this one feature additional information about topics related to the nearby text.

TIP

The Tip icon indicates a helpful trick or technique.

NOTE

The Note icon points out or expands on items of importance or interest.

CROSSREF

The Cross-Reference icon points to chapters where additional information can be found.

WARNING

The Warning icon warns you about possible negative side effects or precautions you should take before making a change.
Before you even set foot in a store and start thinking about which Windows Phone you want to buy, you need to do a bit of legwork. Don’t worry, it’s not painful. But if you put the right pieces in place before you buy a device, you’ll have a much better experience with Windows Phone.

The first step is to create and cultivate a Windows Live ID. Strictly speaking, you don’t need a Windows Live ID to use Windows Phone. But you’re going to want one regardless, because the Windows Phone experience is dramatically better when you do have such an account. Windows Live provides an amazing variety of services, including integration with the social network and online services you really do care about, and integration with Microsoft’s numerous online services, including Hotmail, Zune, and Xbox Live.
Next, you need to understand which hardware features come with every Windows Phone, and which do not. By understanding what’s available, you can make more intelligent choices about the type of phone you’ll eventually buy. So bone up on the basics and then hit the stores better educated, and ready to get exactly the phone you want.

**WINDOWS LIVE ID: ONE ONLINE ID TO RULE THEM ALL**

Way back when the Internet was dominated by gray web pages with blinking text, Microsoft created a *single sign-on service* called Windows Live ID. The point behind the service was that you could create a single account, with a username and password, and use that one account to securely access multiple web sites. That way, you wouldn’t need to create and maintain multiple accounts, one for each web site.

**NOTE** Windows Live ID, like a certain underworld denizen, has gone by many names. When it was originally announced in the late 1990s, it was called Microsoft Wallet, because the software giant hoped it would prove popular with the budding e-commerce sites of the day. But it went through a series of other names over the years, including Microsoft Passport, .NET Passport, and even the awkward Microsoft Passport Network, before it settled on Windows Live ID.

Like many good ideas, Windows Live ID was a better theory than reality. Third-party web sites—that is, those sites not created and owned by Microsoft—ignored Windows Live ID for the most part, and while there are a few exceptions, this system is today used almost exclusively by Microsoft’s own web sites and services, such as Hotmail, MSN, Windows Live, Xbox Live, and Zune.

While a single web-wide sign-on would be nice, being able to access Microsoft’s many services via a single account is still pretty convenient, even more so if you’re heavily invested in what I call the Microsoft ecosystem. And if you’re going to be buying a Windows Phone, this single sign-on, or Windows Live ID, is the key to having the best experience. And while I hate to ruin the ending, this simple fact is arguably the most important secret in the whole book.

Here’s why. After many fits and starts, Microsoft has recast its Windows Live service as a central hub of sorts, a way to “keep your lives in sync.” So instead of competing with the Facebooks and Twitters of the world, Microsoft is instead providing a way to link to third-party services, allowing you to access the third-party (read: non-Microsoft) accounts you already use, from Windows Live.
If you think about it, this is a sneaky way to achieve the original goal of Windows Live ID. That is, since the world didn’t come to Windows Live ID, Windows Live ID has instead come to the world. Using that single sign-on, you can simply access all those wonderful third-party services from Windows Live. All you need to do is create an account—though you may already have one—and then configure it to access other services.

Every Windows Phone user should take the time to configure a Windows Live ID. And this is true even if you have no interest in using any Windows Live services directly. By creating such an account and configuring it properly, you will be able to turn on your new phone on day one, sign on with your Windows Live ID, and watch it automatically populate with all of the information that’s tied to that account. This means e-mail, contacts, and calendars. Photos and news feeds from you and your friends and family, no matter where they’re found online. And, as you will soon find out, so much more. This is the key to a killer Windows Phone experience.

NOTE: Yes, you can use Windows Phone without having a Windows Live ID, but I don’t recommend it. And while this book does document how to configure your phone with other account types, I am assuming that you have a Windows Live ID. It’s that important. So please don’t skip the Windows Live ID creation and configuration steps if you want to get the most out of your Windows Phone.

Creating a New Windows Live ID

If you don’t have a Windows Live ID, you will need to create one. Note, however, that you may already have such an account. Any e-mail address ending in hotmail.com, msn.com, or live.com is a Windows Live ID, for example. If you’ve created an Xbox Live account or a Zune account, that’s a Windows Live ID too. So if you have such an account, skip ahead to the next section. If not, it’s time to make one.

NOTE: It’s possible for any e-mail address to be used as a Windows Live ID, so if you don’t want to be stuck with one of Microsoft’s domain names, you can also use your own (including competitor accounts from Gmail, Yahoo!, and elsewhere). Many educational institutions also use Windows Live services on the back end, so if you’re a student, it’s possible you have a Live ID already as well.

There are many avenues for reaching Microsoft’s Windows Live ID sign up page, but the easiest, perhaps, is to just navigate to live.com. When you do so, you’ll see the screen shown in Figure 1-1.
Click the Sign Up button to continue. The Create Your Windows Live ID page will appear. As shown in Figure 1-2, you will need to fill out a form listing information about yourself and pick a Windows Live ID, which will take the form of name@live.com or name@hotmail.com. This ID will also be used for a Hotmail e-mail address.

In the Windows Live ID field, experiment with different ID names to find one that is available. Note that common names, such as Paul, were taken long ago, so you may need to get creative. The form will make suggestions or provide an advanced search box, shown in Figure 1-3, if you pick an ID that's already taken.
When you find an acceptable ID, the form will tell you that it’s available and you can proceed (see Figure 1-4).

ALREADY HAVE A NON-MICROSOFT E-MAIL ACCOUNT?

If you already have an e-mail account with a different company, you can turn that into a Windows Live ID as well. There is one important difference between using a preexisting e-mail address and creating a new one with Windows Live, however: You won’t be able to use Hotmail for e-mail, contacts, or calendar management. Note, too, that when you configure an existing e-mail account as a Windows Live ID, you will need to create a password for this ID that is separate from the password you use to access e-mail from that account. I recommend just creating a standalone Windows Live ID and not using an existing e-mail account because it’s very easy with Windows Phone to access multiple accounts in a seamless way.
Fill out the rest of the form, paying particular attention to the password, which should be complex if possible and rated “strong” by the form. (It will rate your password as you type.) According to Microsoft, a strong password contains 7–16 characters, does not include common words or names, and combines uppercase letters, lowercase letters, numbers, and symbols.

There are some excellent tools online to help you create complex passwords for web services. I use and recommend a free tool called Last Pass (lastpass.com), which provides a plug-in for all major PC-based web browsers (IE, Firefox, Chrome, and Safari), allowing you to securely create, store, and manage the passwords for all of the services you use online.

When you’re done, click the button labeled I Accept. Windows Live will work for a bit and then display the Windows Live Home page (live.com), this time logged on with your new ID. This is shown in Figure 1-5.

As initially configured, there’s not much going on with your new Windows Live ID. But that’s easy enough to rectify, and there are a number of things you can do to make this ID more valuable. You can start with the basics: initial Windows Live ID configuration.