

Creating a Smarter Interface in Version 2007

When we first began to dive into Version 2007, we were disappointed in the program's apparent lack of support for customization. Most of the cool techniques reported in the previous chapter are not available in V07.

We advanced users were initially disappointed with the bone that it seemed Microsoft was throwing us with the Quick Access Toolbar. However, I have discovered some aspects of the V07 interface that mitigate the situation to some degree. It might not be enough for the truly disgruntled; be that as it may, this short chapter explores several important solutions, most built into the program and one that requires extra software.

The Version 2007 Downgrade

While PowerPoint 2007 reflects improvements in many areas, interface customization is not one of them. Program developers are so enthused about the Ribbon and the way it has been designed, they do not want us tinkering with it. At the Office website, the word is pretty clear about this. Here is what you cannot do:

- Add to or rearrange the commands on the Ribbon.
- Change or remove a command or group on the Ribbon.
- Add tabs to the Ribbon without programming code.
- Use toolbars and menus from earlier versions of PowerPoint.
- Change the font or font size used on the Ribbon.
- Remove seldom-used commands and replace them with other commands.
- Save, swap, and migrate your customized interface to other places and to other people.

Version 2007 sports a much-improved look and accessibility for all of the settings within the PowerPoint Options dialog, including an Advanced tab shown in Figure 26.1—sort of a one-stop shop for all geeky stuff across the application. You access these options from the Office Button, the round icon at the top-left of the PowerPoint screen.

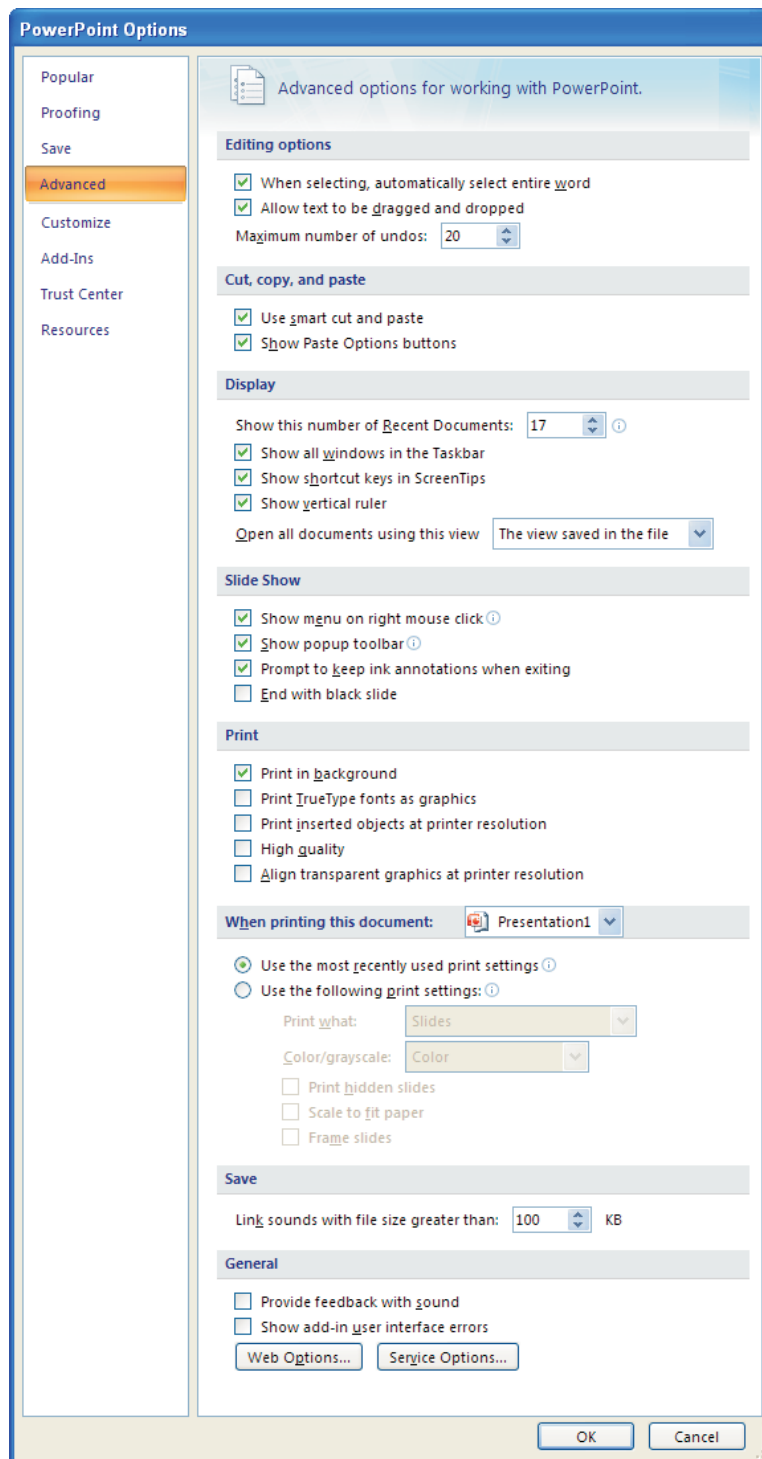
The less fulfilling interface change for advanced users is called the Quick Access Toolbar (QAT), a row of icons across the top of the interface. You can place any command you want there and it will hold many. But you cannot change them from icon to text and the QAT can only live in one of two locations—above the Ribbon or below it.

This seemed very meager when compared to the extraordinary capabilities described in the previous chapter. We'll outline here the tricks that we have learned about the V07 interface that help soften the blow a bit.

If You Know It, Type It!

If you're like me, one of the more frustrating aspects of PowerPoint 2007 is the where-did-they-put-it syndrome that has us searching every ribbon for a function that we used to access in our sleep. For instance, in V03, I would type Alt+D | S to reach the Set Up Show dialog box in about two seconds. I could pull down the Slide Show menu and then click Set Up Show, but the keystrokes are faster and seem easier to me.

Figure 26.1
Version 2007 enjoys a redesigned and much more accessible set of options.



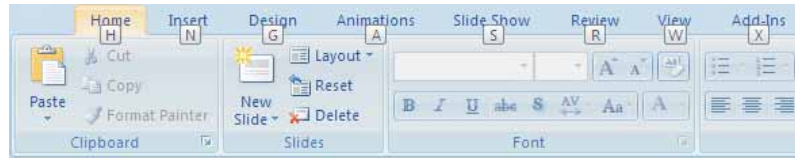
So imagine my pleasant surprise to discover that V07 honors V03 key-stroke access. Alt + D by itself doesn't mean anything to V07, but if you just keep going and complete the sequence, the software figures out what you mean and executes the command for you. So...

Alt + F U	To reach Page Setup
Alt + E S	To invoke Paste Special
Alt + V P	To switch to the Notes page
Alt + I P F	To insert a photo
Alt + O R	To open Replace Fonts

All of these keystrokes work in V07. There are no cues on the interface—you just type them blind, as if you were in V03.

When in Doubt, Press Alt

While learning your way around might be a chore for months to come, there is an easy way to embark on that journey, and once you find what you're looking for, an easy way to access it. Just press Alt once and note the keys that promptly appear under the main menu:



From here, press the corresponding letter to activate the desired ribbon. Once you learn the key designations, you won't have to wait for them to appear: press Alt+N to go immediately to the Insert menu. And once there, note all of the keystrokes that appear:

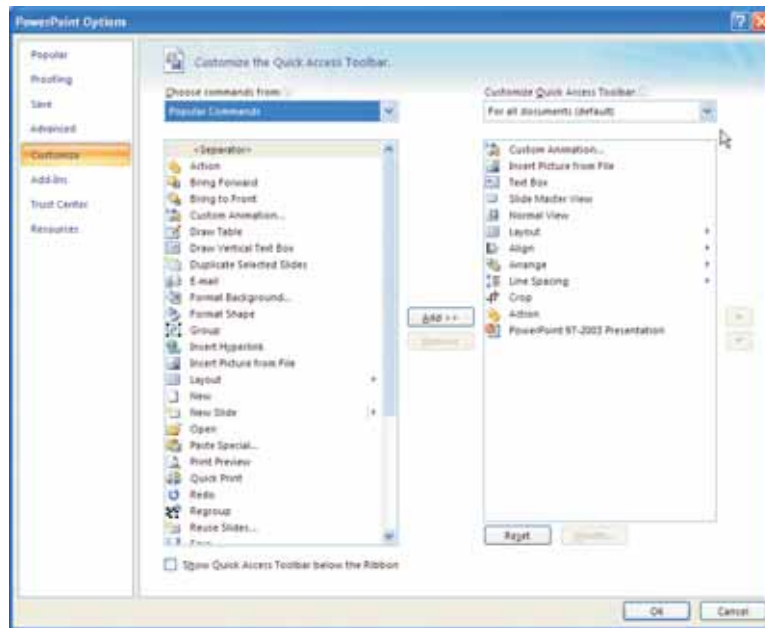


This becomes a handy cheat sheet as well as the door to fast access.

The QAT: Blunt but Effective

Because I'm a keyboard-aholic, these two techniques were tremendously gratifying for me to discover. Mouse-centric users, on the other hand, won't find much cause to celebrate here. For them the QAT is as good as it gets without purchasing extra software.

Figure 26.4
Adding commands
to the QAT is
powerful and easy.



The QAT's virtue is the ease with which you can place onto it any command you can find. And as you can see in Figure 26.4, it's pretty easy to do: browse the commands on the left and add any you want to the list on the right. The Choose Commands From dropdown includes sets of commands based on category as well as a vast master list of every command that exists within the application, including a few dozen that do not live on the Ribbon and would therefore never be found except via a trip to this dialog.

I wish you could save your QAT settings, create different sets, and load and unload them at will. You can't. The best you can do is define a QAT for the current presentation file, distinct from your master QAT.

The other mystery is where QAT information is stored. It is not in an accessible file like the .PCB file described a chapter ago. Instead, it is buried in the Registry in a location seemingly requiring security clearance to learn about. So transferring your QAT settings to your notebook or to a colleague is not possible. You will have to recreate them for each machine that is to have them.

Figure 26.5
The author's QAT

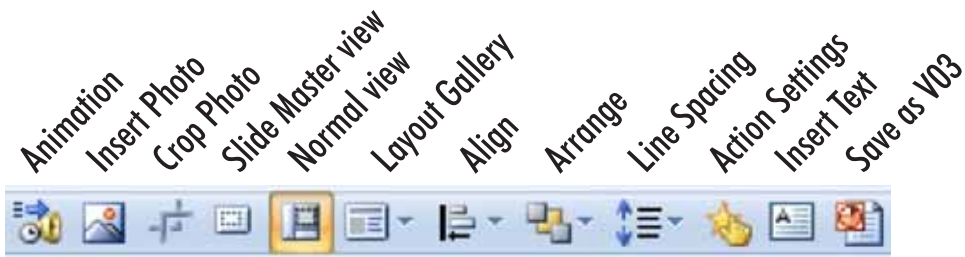
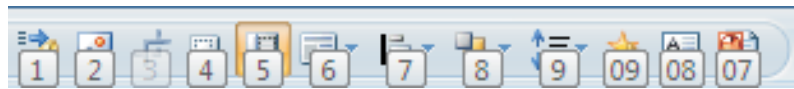


Figure 26.5 shows the 12 commands that I have placed on my QAT. I will no doubt continue to grow this list as I discover more and more commands that I would prefer to access with one click instead of a hunt across the menus and then a dive into a particular ribbon. But the first nine are essential and I chose them carefully. This is because the Alt key works on the QAT, also. Press it and you'll see this:



This brings an unprecedented level of access to my most-used commands—better, in fact, than in Version 2003:

In order to	I press
Invoke the Animation task pane	Alt+1
Crop a photo	Alt+3
Switch to Slide Master view	Alt+4
Change a Layout	Alt+6
Adjust Line Spacing	Alt+9

As you can see from the image above, once you get past nine, you need to press two keys along with Alt. As the list grows, it will reach 01 and then begin counting up from 0A through 0Z. We haven't gotten past 0Z to see what happens next—our video card runs out of resolution...

As I get more experience with V07, I find my creative workflow is exceptionally high when working with my bread-and-butter commands, and then it falls off markedly when I have to hunt through the ribbons to find an uncommon command. When I am working on a project that takes advantage of V07's expanded feature set, it is worth the tradeoff. When I'm just doing mundane things, I am tempted, and often succumb, to issue the QAT keystroke of Alt+07, which quickly invokes the Save as Version 2003 dialog so I can resume work there.

Customizing the Ribbon

▼ Download a copy as a trial or for purchase at www.pschmid.net.

This final section of the chapter involves an add-in software program created by Patrick Schmid, a member of Microsoft's Most Valued Professional team of volunteer specialists. His RibbonCustomizer enables you to arrange, rearrange, change, remove, and add ribbons and groups of commands. It's pretty slick software, only costs \$30, and can be downloaded on a trial basis.

In working with the software, there are a few things I have observed and concluded:

- The software does not work with individual commands but command groups. In Figure 26.7, you can see the personalized ribbon that I have created, and on it are the Animations group, the Background group, Slide Show Set Up group, etc. PowerPoint does not provide access to individual commands. You can't place just Set Up Slide Show command on a ribbon; you must add the entire Set Up group. It is rare that I want direct access to every function of a command group, so there remains a bit of flotsam on my customized rib-

Figure 26.7
With Ribbon-Customizer, you can create your own ribbons, with whatever groups of commands you want.



bon. I hope this changes, but I suspect that the change needs to come from Microsoft.

- With RibbonCustomizer, you can completely rearrange and redesign any of the existing ribbons. If you do that, make sure that you familiarize yourself with the Reset Ribbon command should you find yourself in close collaboration with others. Version 2007 is confusing enough to your co-workers without adding in the additional element of you completely changing around the interface.
- Unlike the QAT, you can create more than one customization scheme, save them, transfer them to other computers, send them to colleagues, and swap them out on the fly.
- Because the Ribbon is context-sensitive, PowerPoint will switch to other ribbons as you work...whether you like that or not. I was disappointed to observe—after creating the perfect custom ribbon with all of the commands I could want—that inserting a text box caused PowerPoint to switch to the Home ribbon. Again, this behavior is imposed by PowerPoint, not by RibbonCustomizer.



All in all, I find reason for optimism that the Office 2007 interface will continue to evolve. With creative developers like Patrick Schmid, the user community will get a chance to participate.

In other words, perhaps it takes a village to raise a software program these days.