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User Profiles - Relocate to another Partition or Disk

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02 Mar 2012

#1



User Profiles - Relocate to another Partition or Disk

How to Relocate User Profiles to another Partition or Disk in Windows 8

Published by **Kari**
02 Mar 2012

User Profiles - Relocate to another Partition or Disk

How to Relocate User Profiles to another Partition or Disk in Windows 8

Information

The method described in this tutorial allows relocating user profiles and folders already while installing Windows 8, before any user accounts are created, as well as after installation on an already installed system.

The advantage of this method is that it changes some internal Windows 8 **environment variables**, being a "Do it once and forget" procedure. Changing the variables takes care of all existing and future user profiles, locating them when created to selected drive or partition. The method is fail proof and reversible.

When Windows 8 is installed, 5 or 6 system folders are created depending on chosen bit-version:

- **PerfLogs** (Performance Logs), where Windows stores performance and reliability logs
- **Program Files**, where applications and software are installed. Windows x86 (32-bit) stores all applications here, Windows x64 (64-bit) only native 64-bit applications
- **Program Files (x86)**, exists only in Windows x64. All non-x64 applications are stored here
- **Windows**, which contains core operating system files and **drivers**
- **ProgramData**, where some applications store application and user specific settings and configuration files.
- **Users**. This is the "home" of all user profiles. When a new user account is created and this new user logs in first time, Windows creates a set of user specific folders (Users\Username)

Microsoft does not recommend relocating, moving **Program Files**, **Program Files (x86)** and **Windows** folders. Too much is depending on information and data stored on these three folders. However, there's simply nothing preventing us to move the **Users** folder. In this tutorial we show how to move (relocate) the **Users** folder by changing an internal **Windows Environment Variable**.

Moving **Users** folder can save a lot of space on system disk. Pictures, mp3's videos, documents and so on, a user folder with its subfolders can be tens, sometimes hundreds of gigabytes.

Personally, when installing Windows 8 I always use **Audit Mode** to relocate Users folder, leaving system drive only for Windows and applications.

Note

Screenshots from pre-release version Windows 8 Consumer Preview. Actual Windows 8 has different colors but the functions are the same, tutorial can be used as it is.

Warning

An upgraded Windows cannot be sysprepped. As this method is based in sysprepping, this tutorial is valid only for Windows setups which have not been upgraded.

This means that if you have for instance in-place upgraded Vista or Seven to Eight you cannot sysprep and this tutorial cannot be used in your case. The same applies if you have upgraded Windows 8 to Windows 8 Pro.

Notice that a repair install is also an upgrade install, so if you have ever done a repair install (= in-place upgrade to same edition), you cannot sysprep.

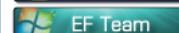
When sysprepping an existing Windows setup, it only works if the Windows 8 was installed clean and has never been upgraded or repaired using repair install, or if it is the original pre-installed Windows 8

Published by



Kari

Old geek, new tricks



Join Date: Jul 2009
Location: A Finnish immigrant in Leipzig, Germany
Posts: 697

Tutorial Tools

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never been upgraded or repaired using repair install, or it is the original pre-installed Windows 8.

Although I have repeatedly told that relocating **ProgramData** will cause **Windows Store** and **Apps** as well as **PC Settings** not to function, people keep doing it using the method described in this tutorial.

DO NOT RELOCATE PROGRAMDATA! YOUR WINDOWS STORE AND APPS WILL NOT WORK IF PROGRAMDATA IS MOVED FROM ITS DEFAULT LOCATION.

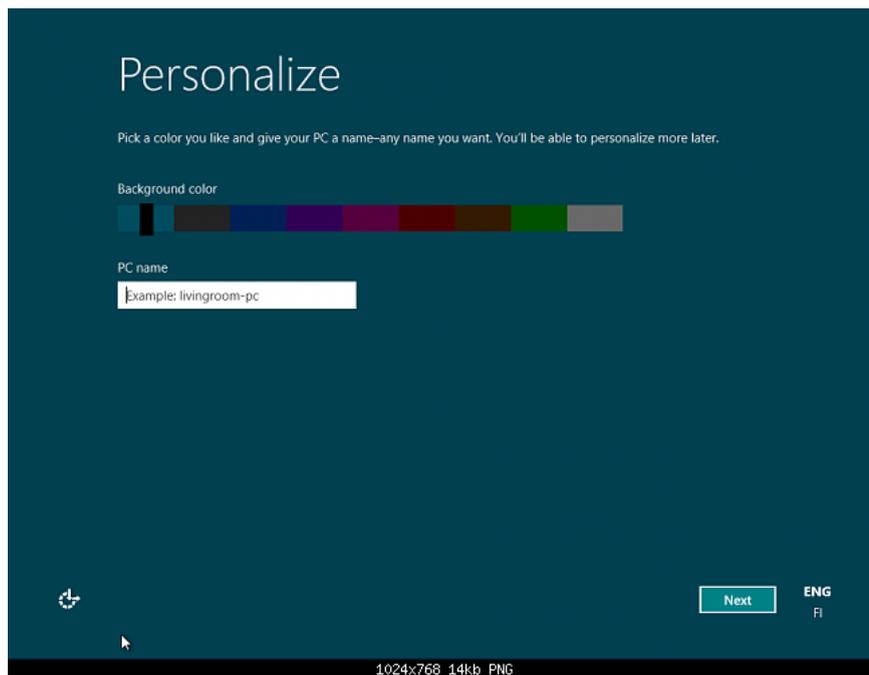
1. Audit Mode

1.1. Boot to Audit Mode when installing Windows 8

(If you have already installed Windows 8, continue from step **1.2**.)

Start Windows 8 installation normally.

When installation after a reboot or two is completed and Windows 8 comes to **Personalize** page (see screenshot below) press **CTRL + SHIFT + F3** (press and hold down **CTRL** and **SHIFT**, press **F3** still holding **CTRL** and **SHIFT** down, release all three keys).



*DO NOT ENTER PC NAME HERE OR CLICK **NEXT!** Just press **CTRL + SHIFT + F3**.*

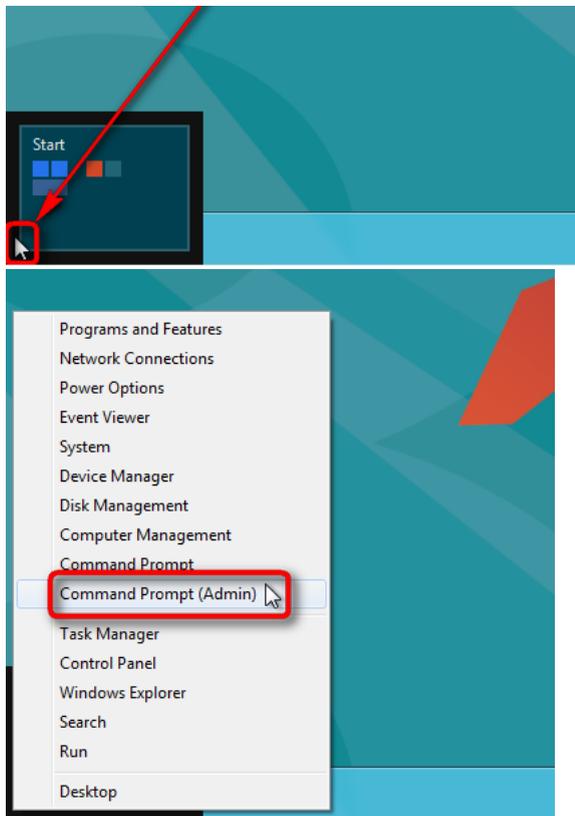
Your computer reboots now. Don't panic, it's just doing what it really should do. Windows 8 starts now in so called **Audit Mode**, using **built-in administrator account** to let you to modify Windows before any user profiles and user specific folders are created.

Continue from step **2**.

1.2. Boot to Audit Mode from existing Windows 8 installation

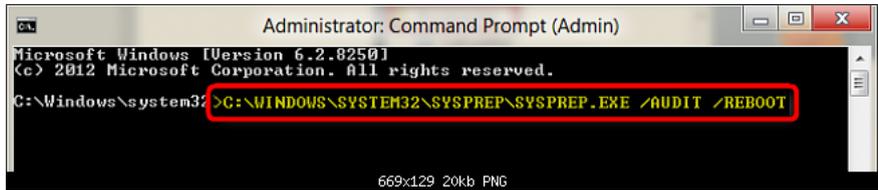
First you need to open **Command Prompt** using built-in administrative account: hover pointer over bottom left corner of the desktop, right click to open **Start Menu**, select **Command Prompt (Admin)**:





Command Prompt window opens. Type this to command prompt:

```
Code:  
C:\Windows\System32\Sysprep\Sysprep.exe /audit /reboot
```



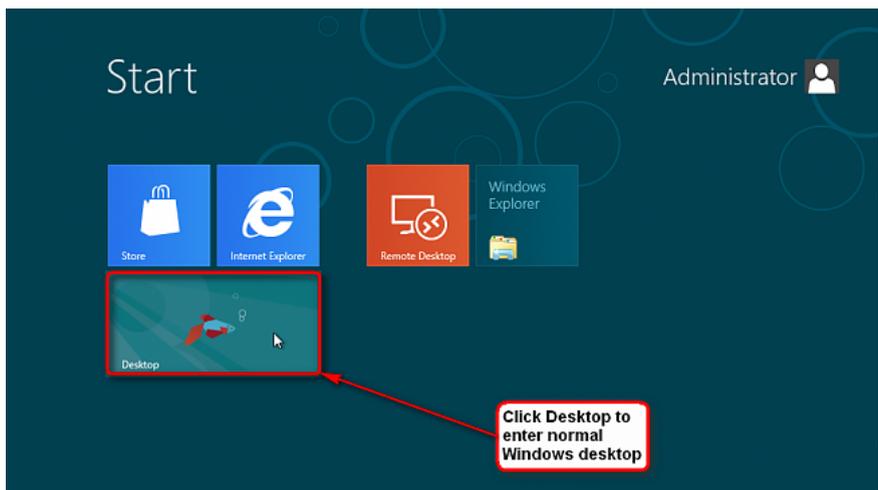
Hit Enter. Windows reboots now to **Audit Mode**, "thinking" it's been started first time. Text **Preparing** can be seen on screen.

If you are interested to know more about Audit Mode, here are some links for you to read:

- [TechNet: Understanding Audit Mode](#)
- [TechNet: Customize Windows in Audit Mode](#)

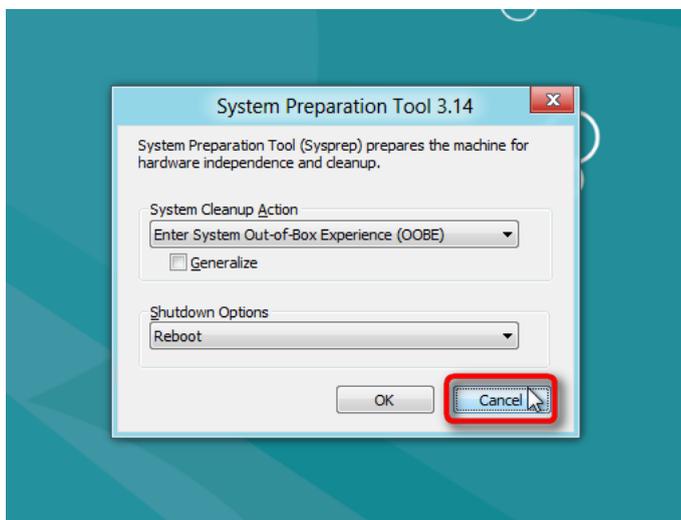
2. Audit Mode

Windows has now booted in Audit Mode using built-in administrator account, and you should see **Metro** interface. Click **Desktop** to enter classic Windows desktop:





To start, click **Cancel** to close **System Preparation Tool**:



If you don't have a second internal hard disk or you have not created and formatted an extra partition on your system disk, you need first to create one. Notice that the drive or partition don't have to be empty, but especially if relocating on an existing installation it must be big enough to allow Users folder to be moved there. When we sysprep with answer file on next step these two folders are physically moved to new location.

If you already have a formatted second HD or partition, you are ready to go.

2.1. Creating an answer file (script) for System Preparation Tool

Audit Mode lets us to start Windows without creating any user accounts. At the moment we are using the built-in administrator account. Your own accounts are created later.

We are going to use **System Preparation Tool** (sysprep) to run an XML-script (so called **Answer file**) which modifies the Windows registry and settings as we want to, relocating **Users** folder to another partition, **E:** in this example, by changing a so called **Windows Environment Variable**. You can of course use any internal drive you want to.

Extensible Markup Language (XML) is a set of rules for encoding documents in machine readable form. To make changes to Windows registry, we will now create a script in XML and run it with sysprep.

Open **Windows Notepad** text editor (press Win + R, type Notepad, hit Enter). Type the following script, or copy it from here and paste to Notepad (please do not forget to read the notes below code lines 4, 6 and 11 regarding said lines):

1. <?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
2. <unattend xmlns="urn:schemas-microsoft-com:unattend">
3. <settings pass="oobeSystem">
4. <component name="Microsoft-Windows-Shell-Setup" processorArchitecture="amd64" publicKeyToken="31bf3856ad364e35" language="neutral" versionScope="nonSxS" xmlns:wcm="http://schemas.microsoft.com/WMIConfig/2002/State" xmlns:xsi="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance">



Note

(If you are installing Windows x64 (64-bit), value **processorArchitecture** should be **amd64**, also on Intel processors. For x86 (32-bit) it should be **x86**.)

5. <FolderLocations>
6. <ProfilesDirectory>e:\Users</ProfilesDirectory>



Note

In this example the new location of Users would be E:\Users. Change the drive letter according your needs.

7. </FolderLocations>
8. </component>
9. </settings>
10. <cpu:offlineImage cpi:source="wim:F:/sources/install.wim#Windows 8" xmlns:cpi="urn:schemas-microsoft-com:cpi" />



Note

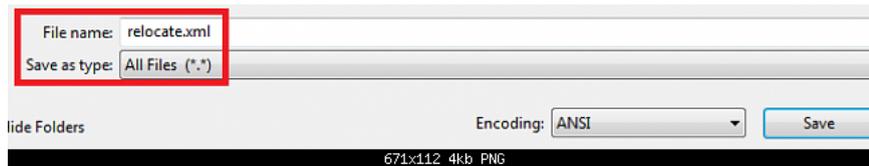
(Change the drive letter in **wim:F:** to that of your CD/DVD drive, USB stick or virtual drive containing your Windows 8 installation media (DVD/ISO). Notice that installation media has to be available to system when running sysprep. Change Windows version accordingly, **Windows 8**, **Windows 8 Pro**, **Windows 8.1** or **Windows 8.1 Pro**.)

11. </unattend>

(Please leave the row numbers out when typing or copying the above code. Answer file generated with **Windows System Image Manager**).

If you are installing Windows 8 PRO x64 from CD/DVD/USB **F:** and relocating Users to **E:** you don't have to change anything, you can use the script as it is.

Select **Save As** from Notepad's **File** menu. Select **Save as type: All Files**. Name the file as you want, add **.xml** extension to the filename. Save the script to the root of any drive:



Alternatively you can download the answer file here: [relocate.rar](#)

2.2. Using System Preparation Tool

2.2.1 Windows 8 & 8 Pro:

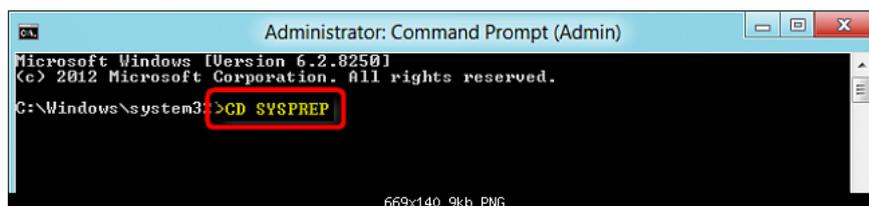
Open the **Start Menu (Win + X)**, select **Command Prompt (Admin)**.

First stop the Windows Media Player Network Sharing Service (WMPNetworkSvc) by giving the following command:

```
Code:
net stop WMPNetworkSvc
```

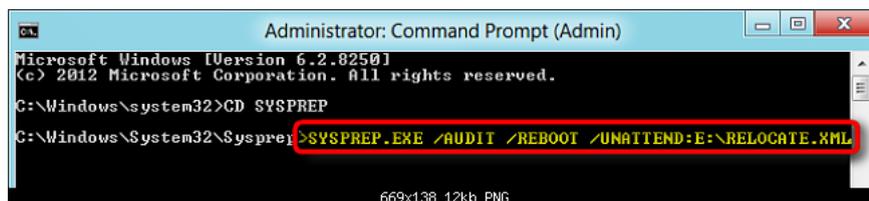
When the service has stopped, type the following to the command prompt and press **Enter** to move to the right folder:

```
Code:
cd c:\Windows\System32\Sysprep
```



Now type the following and press **Enter** (notice the name and path of the script we created above, change it if needed. I saved answer file on E so the path is E:\relocate.xml):

```
Code:
Sysprep.exe /audit /reboot /unattend:E:\relocate.xml
```



Continue from 2.2.3.

2.2.2 Windows 8.1 Pro Preview:

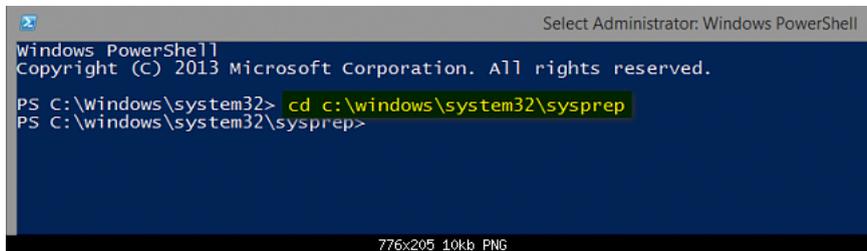
Open the **Start Menu (Win + X)**, select **Windows PowerShell (Admin)**.

First stop the Windows Media Player Network Sharing Service (WMPNetworkSvc) by giving the following command:

```
Code:
net stop WMPNetworkSvc
```

When the service has stopped, type the following to the PowerShell command window and press **Enter** to move to the right folder:

```
Code:
cd c:\Windows\System32\Sysprep
```



```

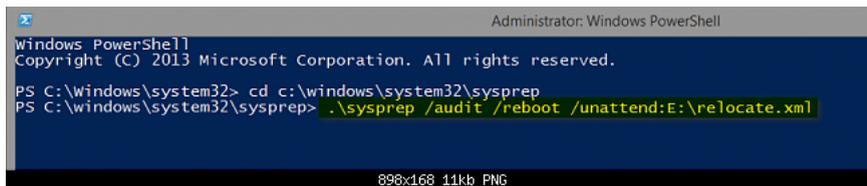
Select Administrator: Windows PowerShell
Windows PowerShell
Copyright (C) 2013 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

PS C:\windows\system32> cd c:\windows\system32\sysprep
PS C:\windows\system32\sysprep>
  
```

Now type the following and press **Enter** (notice the name and path of the script we created above, change it if needed. I saved answer file on E so the path is E:\relocate.xml):

Code:

```
.\sysprep /audit /reboot /unattend:E:\relocate.xml
```



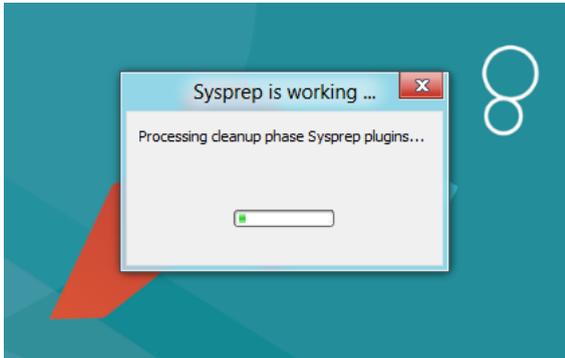
```

Administrator: Windows PowerShell
Windows PowerShell
Copyright (C) 2013 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

PS C:\windows\system32> cd c:\windows\system32\sysprep
PS C:\windows\system32\sysprep> .\sysprep /audit /reboot /unattend:E:\relocate.xml
  
```

2.2.3 Sysprep working on answer file

You should now see **System Preparation Tool** dialog telling it is working on our script:

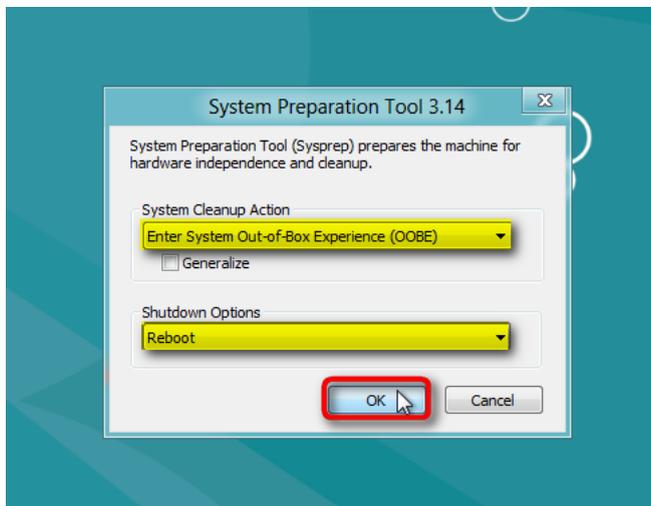


Let it run, don't touch mouse or keyboard now. When System Preparation Tool is ready, Windows must and will reboot. It reboots back to Audit Mode.

2.3. Exiting Audit Mode

To continue Windows installation we have to exit Audit Mode and reboot. After reboot you'll land back on Metro interface. Click **Desktop** to enter classic Windows desktop, click **OK** on System Preparation Tool dialog to boot normally in **Oobe** i.e. normal mode.

Before clicking **OK**, check that **System Cleanup Action** is set to **Oobe**, and **Shutdown Options** set to **Reboot**:



3. Finalizing installation

Finalize Windows installation.

If you did this from an existing Windows installation, you will notice that for your Windows this is as if it were the first time Windows was booted i.e you are back on **OOBE** boot, inserting product key and personalizing Windows. It also means that you have to enter so called initial user. In this case Windows does not accept any of the users created earlier, whether local or Microsoft accounts; instead you need to create a new user.

An example from this PC I am using now: I had already created two users and installed software when I decided to do sysprep to relocate Users. I had a local account for me and an Microsoft account using my email address. After finalizing sysprep, I needed to create a third user **Test** because system does not let me to use either **Kari (local account)** or **Kari (Microsoft account)** usernames because those accounts already existed on this PC.

So I created user **Test (local)**, then from Welcome screen logged in as Kari (Microsoft account) and simply deleted the new **Test** account which I had just created. An extra step, small annoyance but there's nothing to do to avoid it.

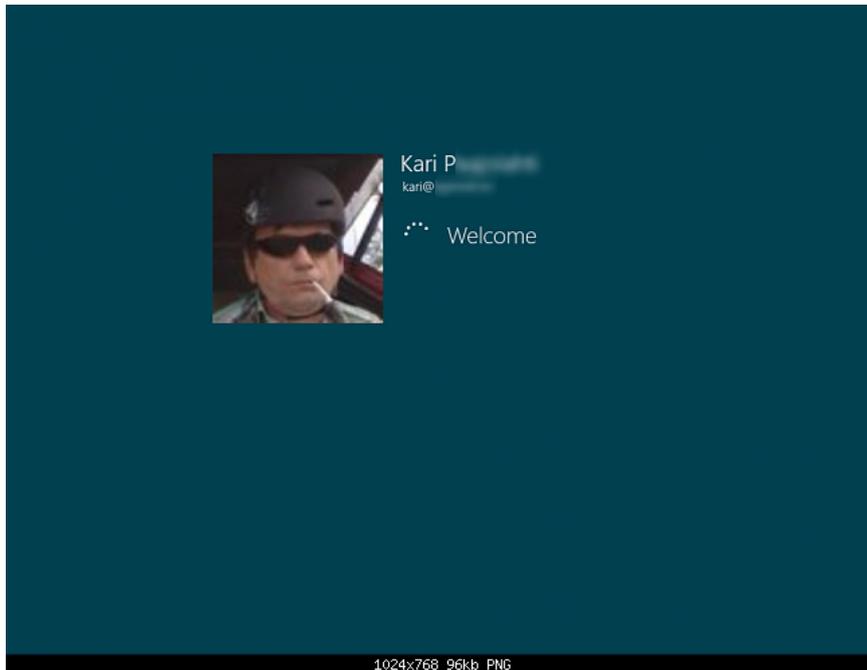
When Windows finally boots first time to Start Screen you will see that **Users** folder is now located on the new drive or partition with all its subfolders.

When you check your system drive (C:) still contains Users folder. The old, original **Users** on C: can contain some Windows Store information that may not be moved, so let the old **Users** folder stay on C:. It will no longer grow, all new user data will be stored on a new location, but it is essential it remains on C:. You can hide it if you want, you are never again going to need it.

Notice that **Users** folder is not created on or moved to new location when you return to **Audit Mode** after running **sysprep**. Relocation will first happen when you exit Audit Mode and boot to **OOBE** (Welcome) mode to continue installation. If done on an existing system the first OOBE boot after sysprepping can take quite a long time, depending on how big those folders are that sysprep is physically moving to new location.

Remember also that when you create a new user profile the user folders are not created before the new user logs in first time.

That's it, folks! Welcome to the Windows 8:





Now create a system image and you wont have to ever again remember jumplists and links everytime you restore the system to earlier point or system image. User account folders are now permanently moved to another drive, all new user profiles are automatically created on this new location and your system drive won't be full so soon.

Thanks for reading.

Written and published on 02nd of March 2012

Edited and updated on 6th of February 2013

Edited, answer file's validity checked on 14th of April 2013

Added instructions for Windows 8.1 Pro preview on 29th of June 2013

Kari

Related Tutorials

- [How to Customize Default User Profile in Audit Mode](#)
- [How to Change the Default Location of User Folders in Windows 7 and Windows 8](#)
- [How to Restore the Default Location of User Folders in Windows 7 and Windows 8](#)

Quote

03 Mar 2012

#1



Banned

**I like what I see there Kari.
Thank you!**

Join Date : Aug 2009
Posts : [476](#)
WCP / Win.7 Ultimate
64-bit SP1.

My System Specs ▾

Quote

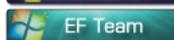
03 Mar 2012

#2



Kari

Old geek, new tricks



Join Date : Jul 2009
A Finnish immigrant in
Leipzig, Germany
Posts : [697](#)
Windows 7 x64
Ultimate

Thanks Jan 😊

Kari

Thread Starter



My System Specs

Quote

03 Mar 2012

#3



vrosa

EF - Fringe Division

Pro User

VIP Member

Join Date : Jan 2011

Belo Horizonte

Posts : 3,779

Windows 8.1 Pro x64



I liked it too, but liked even more that **Laphroaid 25 years** bottle ...lol...

My System Specs

Quote

03 Mar 2012

#4



A Guy

Righteous Dude



Gold Member

Pro User

VIP Member

Join Date : Jun 2010

Bay Area

Posts : 15,421

Windows 7 Home Premium x64



Looking good Kari

A Guy

My System Specs

Quote

03 Mar 2012

#5

iseeu

VIP Member

Member

VIP Member

Join Date : Aug 2009

Posts : 307

...

Very well done, Kari. Thorough and complete.



My System Specs

Quote

04 Mar 2012

#6

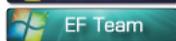
Thank you, geeks.

Kari



Kari

Old geek, new tricks



Join Date : Jul 2009

A Finnish immigrant in Leipzig, Germany

Posts : 697

Windows 7 x64 Ultimate

Thread Starter



My System Specs ▾

Quote

04 Mar 2012

#7

gt1434a

Junior Member

Join Date : Mar 2012

Posts : 5

Windows 8

A question

Originally Posted by **Kari**

Thank you, geeks.

Kari

Kari,

I am in the process to put your directions in practice but, while typing the script, I realize that there are a couple of line (#6 and #7) which contain a reference to a disk F:. Considering the header (FolderLocations) shouldn't those be replaced with E: which is where, in your example, you are relocating the files? F: was for the location of the Windows installation disk.

To make sure, if my original windows installation is on C:, I want to move my user folders to D:, and my windows installation is on E:, how should I modify the script?

Thanks!
Alex

My System Specs ▾

Quote

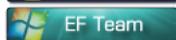
04 Mar 2012

#8



Kari

Old geek, new tricks



Join Date : Jul 2009

A Finnish immigrant in Leipzig, Germany

Posts : 697

Windows 7 x64 Ultimate

Thread Starter



Hi Alex, welcome to the Eight Forums.

Of course you are right! That was a typo, fixed now.

It's like this:

- Answer file (script), row 6 value of **ProfilesDirectory** = new location of **Users**. Delete the row from script if only relocating ProgramData
- Answer file (script), row 7 value of **ProgramData** = new location of **ProgramData**. Delete the row from script if only relocating Users
- Answer file (script), row 11 value of **Source** = location of **image.wim** (DVD, USB or ISO containing Windows 8 installation files)

Thanks for pointing that out.

Kari

My System Specs ▾

Quote

04 Mar 2012

#9

gt1434a

Junior Member

Join Date : Mar 2012

Posts : 5

Windows 8

Thank *you*! This is an awesome way to handle it. Wouldn't be surprise if this is going to be a permanent addon to the final version.

I am looking forward to be an active contributor!

Best,
Alex

Originally Posted by **Kari**

Hi Alex, welcome to the Eight Forums.

Of course you are right! That was a typo, fixed now.

It's like this:

- Answer file (script), row 6 value of **ProfilesDirectory** = new location of **Users**. Delete the row from script if only relocating ProgramData
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- Answer file (script), row 11 value of **Source** = location of **image.wim** (DVD, USB or ISO containing Windows 8 installation files)

Thanks for pointing that out.

Kari

My System Specs ▾

Quote

User Profiles - Relocate to another Partition or Disk

« [Log On User Account Automatically at Windows 8 Startup](#) | [Run "Auto Suggest" History - Delete in Windows](#) »

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