

## Chapter 14

# Working with 3<sup>rd</sup> Party MCE Applications

### *In This Chapter*

- \* Interneting to your MCE PC with WebGuide
- \* Checking for rain with My Weather
- \* Saying 'Nighty night' with the MCE Sleep Timer
- \* Playing Solitaire the MCE way

Anyone can take their Mini '03 Cooper S and soup it up with an engine blower, custom 17" R85 wheel caps, large size air intakes, and a neon lighted underworks @@md to make sure you stand out at night on Rodeo Drive (Wanna try it yourself? Check out [http://www.miniusa.com/erm/mini\\_entrance.jsp](http://www.miniusa.com/erm/mini_entrance.jsp)).

But what do you do if you want to expand your MCE PC beyond its horizons? Microsoft has learned from the TiVo, Xbox, and other industry experiences @@md all situations where an active community of hackers, programmers, and bored smart people looking for challenges, have hacked into their hardware and software to create all sorts of custom extensions those products. So Microsoft has, to some degree, embraced add-ons to the MCE with an active Software Developer's Toolkit (SDK) program. You can download both authorized and unauthorized software that will make your MCE hum like the three MINI 'Coops' in *Charlie's Angels* . Zoom, Zoom, coming through!

For the rest of this chapter, we're going to expose you to some of the ways in which this is accomplished.

### *Buyer Beware*

The pace of development of new software is fast-paced. Really fast-paced. We've seen entirely new downloads made available over the course of a

weekend. As we write, there are dozens of add-ins in development by scores of groups, ranging from college kids trying to pay their way through college (beats selling magazine subscriptions) to large firms who intend to dominate the market for add-on enhancements for Windows XP Media Center Edition. To find out the latest on these programs, check out the downloads page at The Green Button's Web site at <http://www.thegreenbutton.com> where they'll keep you informed of what the latest programs will do for your MCE PC.

<Warning>

We wrote this book during the development of the second major release of MCE, Windows XP MCE 2004. As a result, a lot of the add-ins for MCE 2004 had not been launched yet. The discussion below will discuss the add-ins for the first release, assuming that their development efforts towards MCE 2004 are going to be successful. So some of the functionality and screen shots might be a little different from the first release-supporting programs to their MCE 2004 versions, but we think the most important part is the overall discussion of the programs themselves.

<Tip>

Make sure that you have the latest MCE updates installed on your machine before loading anything. Run Windows Update from your system tray by clicking on the Windows Update icon.

<Warning>

We put almost anything on our PCs because we love to try new stuff. Our IT manager, Ed Ferris, hates us (he really does), because he's always having to figure out what we've done to our machines. "OK, what did you load on there now..." he says. But we've got an Ed, most of you don't. We mention this because most of these programs are NOT supported by Microsoft, even the ones made by Microsoft (sad but true, read below). So you definitely install these *at your own risk*. We'd urge you not to install something that is totally brand new, as you'll likely find annoying bugs and they could really screw up your machine. Programs that have been out a while will be more robust and stable. But if you are not a person who is fairly adept with the vagaries of loading new software onto your machine @@md in other words, if you live and die by Windows Update and that's it @@md then these might not be for you.

<Warning>

When installing new updated versions of these add-in programs, we always recommend @@MD unless the manufacturer tells you not to @@md that you uninstall your prior version first. The majority of customer service inquiries tend to deal with artifacts left over from prior implementations when the new version of the software overwrites the old. Do yourself and the vendor customer service people a favor @@md uninstall first. You can uninstall any of these programs by clicking on the Start button and selecting Control

Panels. Just open the Add or Remove Programs control panel and follow the instructions on your screen.

## *MCE WebGuide*

Perhaps the neatest enhancement on the market as we write is the Show & Tell's MCE WebGuide ([http://www.showtell.com/mce\\_webguide/default.asp](http://www.showtell.com/mce_webguide/default.asp)). The concept is quite simple @@md WebGuide will give you remote access to your MCE from another place, so that you can start recording that TV show you thought you were going to be home for (but you got caught at Grandma's house for dinner).

MCE WebGuide gives you full access to the Media Center program guide. You can:

- \* Schedule/cancel individual and series recordings
- \* Manage your recorded and scheduled programs
- \* Delete previously recorded shows or cancel individual and series recordings
- \* View your recorded shows over your LAN
- \* Perform full keyword search of guide listings

With the Search function, you can search by title only or all fields (title, description, actor/actress, etc). You can then schedule/cancel individual and series recordings.

Figure 14-1: WebGuide main menu @@md accessing MCE over the Internet.

### *<Remember>*

To view your recorded shows over your home network, you must share your Recorded TV folder over the network, and have enough bandwidth to "stream" the files, usually at least 6-8 Mbps. An 802.11b Wi-Fi network will probably not cut it, but the faster 802.11a and 802.11g versions should do the job (check out Chapter 15 for more information).

The company is also considering a PocketPC version that would allow wireless web guide access to schedule/cancel individual and series recordings. It would be super cool if you could use Windows Media Encoder (WME) to stream shows to the PocketPC anywhere in your home. Unfortunately, WME does not yet support DVR-MS files.

### *<Tip>*

## Whoa, my IP address changed!

To access your home network from the Internet, say from work, you'll need to know your IP address. Many cable modem and DSL services do not provide you with a permanent IP address for your home on the Internet @ @md so your address is constantly changing, which makes it tough to get into your home net from away....sort of like trying to call someone and their telephone number keeps changing @ @md how annoying.

To deal with this issue, you might consider getting a service that helps manage this situation for you; these services give you a static IP address on their system, and they put software on your home network to track when the IP address changes, and they just translate between the two addresses. A couple such services are DynIP Software (<http://www.dynip.com/>) and Dynamic DNS Services (<http://www.dyndns.org>). With one of these services (many are free for home users), you can have an address like dummies.dynip.com that you can *always* use, regardless of what your current IP address is.

Outside of making it possible to access your WebGuide capability, you may need such an IP translation service if you want to:

- \* set up a home webcam
- \* talk over the Internet with voice conferencing software
- \* access corporate VPN networks for working from home
- \* establish a personal Web or FTP server (the home computer, not the ISP, being the server)
- \* build servers for multi-player network games or chat
- \* run a personal mail server
- \* connect to friends in peer-to-peer networking configurations

The lack of a stable address, like you have in the telephone world, is being caused by a shortage of Internet IP addresses. No one expected the Internet to grow this fast. As the world's Internet providers move to the next generation of IP addressing, called *IPv6*, everyone (and everything attached to the Internet) can have an address of their own, and services like this probably won't be required anymore. That's going to happen over the next 10 years.

Getting WebGuide onto your MCE PC does require a few tricky steps, so read on closely. MCE WebGuide needs to be installed on your Media Center machine and will use *Windows XP Internet Information Services (IIS)* as a web server. Windows XP Professional, which underlies XP MCE, includes IIS, which makes it possible for you to host your own Web site on the Internet or your intranet. You can find out more about IIS at the Microsoft IIS site at: <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/pro/evaluation/overviews/iis.asp>.

<XP>

Before you can use IIS, you must install it separately after you have installed Windows XP Professional on your computer. If your PC came with IIS installed, the manufacturer likely did this for you. You can find out if IIS is already installed on your machine by going to **Start > Control Panel > Add/Remove Programs** and click on the Add/Remove windows programs

button. In the Windows Components Wizard select "Internet Information Services (IIS)" and click on the "Details" button. You should see that everything EXCEPT "Front Page 2000 Server Extensions" is checked. Unless you expect to be using Front Page to create web pages and manage a local web site, it's better to leave that feature off of your system.

If IIS is not installed on your PC, then to add IIS, insert your XP CD (the one that came with your MCE PC) into the CD drive and check off all of the item you are missing from above. You will need to restart your computer once it's complete and it's a good idea to run the Windows Update program to patch your system after you install new components (Windows Update only looks for patches to programs you already have installed @amd so there could be upgrades out there that your MCE PC has not been asking for). You also have to have installed Microsoft's .NET 1.1 (or later) platform. You can find out if you have this installed on your PC by going to **Start > Control Panel > Add/Remove Programs**. You will see it in the list of installed applications if you have it. To download .NET 1.1, use the Windows Update program and select it from the Windows XP sub options under Pick updates to install. (Or you can run this command from your **Start > Run** menu:

```
\Windows\Microsoft.NET\Framework\v1.0.3705\aspnet_regiis.exe -I
```

With these pre-installation steps complete, you can now download the program at [http://www.showtell.com/mce\\_webguide/download.asp](http://www.showtell.com/mce_webguide/download.asp). The installation package for WebGuide will walk you through the installation process.

WebGuide is a web application, so you open it as a normal Web page (using Internet Explorer), with your machine as a web-server. Once you type in the URL (e.g., [www.xyz.com/webguide](http://www.xyz.com/webguide)), one of two things happens: you go straight into the system, or you encounter a login page if a password is set up in the configuration file for WebGuide.

#### <Technical>

WebGuide sort of hides their configuration settings, expecting that not many people will really want to change them. Once installed, you can change your settings by going to your "\inetpub\wwwroot\webguide" folder and opening "web.config" in Notepad. The settings listed at the top are the only ones configurable. They are:

- \* password: This is your password to get into the application. By default, it is blank; leave it blank to disable the password capability.
- \* session\_timeout: This is the number of minutes the system will let you remain idle before require you to log in again. This is set to 90 minutes by default.
- \* recorded\_tv\_share: This is the folder to where your recorded TV shows are shared to. The default folder is located in your All Users folder.

- \* `guide_rows`: This is the number of rows to show in the guide at a time; the default is seven rows.
- \* `guide_move_minutes`: This is the number of minutes to incrementally shift the screen in the guide when scrolling (60 by default).
- \* `list_rows`: This is the number of rows to show in the other list pages at a time (seven by default).
- \* `use_smart_nav`: This is a feature of ASP.NET which improves performance. The default is set to On; turn it Off if you have display problems.

Note that for the most part, you probably don't even need to go to this configuration file, but we mention it here for completeness.

When WebGuide launches, you'll see a Main Menu screen as seen in Figure 14-1. The options in the main menu @@@md Guide, Recorded TV, and Search @@@md operate much like under the MCE My TV menu (on purpose of course). With these, you can check out your programming guide, your recorded TV shows, and search for shows in your programming guide. We won't go into these buttons in detail because it operates just like My TV @@@md check Chapter 8 for a refresher if you need it. (Figure 14-2 shows you the on-screen program guide for WebGuide.)

Figure 14-2: Your on-screen program guide for WebGuide.

**<Tip>**

When looking around the program guide, you'll see there are two little icons at the base of the guide @@@md a clock and a calendar page. These will show you a 24-hour hyperlinked hour listing, so you can jump to 7pm, for instance, and a hyperlinked calendar, so you can skip ahead to, say, Friday of next week. This makes navigating a lot easier than using the arrow buttons on your remote.

If you want to watch some recorded TV, you just click on the file name @@@md just like in the MCE interface @@@md and the file is played from the network location. Windows XP Media Player will play the file from the hard drive of your MCE PC on your network as if it were a local file on your the machine you're using. Note: It is not possible to stream a DVR-MS file over the internet in its current form, however. Shucks.

We think everyone with an MCE PC will want WebGuide. It extends the usefulness of your XP MCE PC from your living room to anywhere in the world. Talk about flexible!

## *My Weather*

Some things just make sense. Having today's weather outlook on your screen when you turn on the TV in the morning is one of those. We've become fans of our customized [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com) pages, especially their hour-by-hour forecasts (so Danny can see if his outdoor movie is going to be rained out).

But navigating to that site with the MCE PC keyboard and MCE-driven TV display just does not work. The text is too small and you have to leave the MCE interface to go to Internet Explorer, and, well, it's just too much work and the results are poor. Yech all over.

Along comes *My Weather* and we're happy again. *My Weather* is a program that runs outside of the MCE interface but is integrated into the main menu as, you guessed it, **My Weather**. You click on that menu item, and an XP program will launch.

### <XP>

While this program has many of the same attributes of the MCE user interface @@md blue background, green buttons, and controllability by the remote control @@md it is an XP program outside of MCE. So you'll experience a slight pause when launching this initially.

### <Tip>

We suggest you put this program in your Windows XP Startup Programs This will automatically launch this when you turn on your PC. This way, it will always be instantaneously available when you click on My Weather in your MCE interface. In Windows XP, putting something in your Startup folder is very easy task, thanks to the drag and drop capabilities of the Desktop. If you have an icon in your Start Menu that points to My Weather, all you need to is select it with a single mouse click from the menu. Hold down the button and don't let it go (if you do you will activate the program). As long as you're holding down the mouse button, you can drag the icon off of the menu and slide it down to a folder under All Programs called "Startup". Any program put in the Startup folder will automatically start as soon as you log onto your machine.

The main page displays the weather for your day for your area. (See Figure 14-3) You can use the right and left arrow to move forward and back though several days worth of meteorological prognostications. Just click on the green Exit button when done; you'll be returned to the main Media Center menu.

Figure 14-3: My Weather, in my MCE.

Simple. Works. Useful. We like.

To install My Weather, go to [www.nacontap.com](http://www.nacontap.com). Installation is painless and a setup wizard walks you through the process.

## *Media Center Solitaire?*

Microsoft has a page within its Microsoft Windows XP Media Center Edition microsite (<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/mediacenter/downloads/powertoys.asp>) where it lists what it calls “*PowerToys*” @ @md these are programs that Microsoft’s developers work on, often for fun, after a product has been released to manufacturing (in other words, they do this after they’ve finished the product and begun selling it).

For Version 1.0 of MCE, only one PowerToy was listed, *Solitaire* (we noted they did not call it My Solitaire, because that probably was redundant!) You are probably familiar with the Solitaire game that comes with Windows XP @ @md if not, you can access it by going to **Start > Programs > Accessories > Games**. This MCE PowerToy version enables you to play *Solitaire* on your Media Center PC from anywhere in the room using your remote control. By the time this prints, an updated version for MCE 2004 should be available.

Downloading and installing any Microsoft PowerToy is easy:

1. To start the download, click on the PowerToy link on the right side of the PowerToy page (<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/mediacenter/downloads/powertoys.asp>)
2. Do one of the following steps:
  - a. To begin the installation immediately, click **Open** or **Run this program from its current location**.
  - b. To copy the download to your computer for installation at a later time, click **Save** or **Save this program to disk**.
3. After you've installed the PowerToy, go to the folder associated with the PowerToy (usually located at C:\Program Files\PowerToy) and view the ReadMe.htm file for more information on how to use the PowerToy.

We expect that Microsoft will add more PowerToys to this page as time goes on. But be forewarned, in this instance, these PowerToys are no different than many other third-party add-ins. Quoting from Microsoft’s site: “**Note:** We've taken great care to ensure that PowerToys operate as they should, but they are not part of Windows XP Media Center Edition and are not supported by Microsoft. For this reason, Microsoft Technical Support is unable to answer questions about PowerToys. These PowerToys are for Windows XP Media Center Edition only.” Nuf said.

## *Other Programs*

There are other programs floating around the market today. Here are some that may apply to MCE 2004:

\* **MCE Sleep Timer**

(<http://www.naontap.com/MyMCE/MCESleepTimerSoftware.cfm>): This Software will add a Sleep Timer (just like the one on your clock radio) to Windows XP Media Center Edition. The software will not put your computer to sleep, it will only close MCE after the period of time specified. With MCE closed, your computer will be able to go into standby after the time specified in your power management options. Any recordings will continue to record after MCE closes. (See Figure 14-4)

Figure 14-4: Rockabye MCE.... The XP MCE Sleep Timer!

\* **Record TV Button**

(<http://www.naontap.com/MyMCE/MCERecordedTVButton.cfm>): This Software will add a button to your MCE start page that will take you directly to Recorded TV (instead of having to go to My TV and then navigate to your recorded programs).

<Tip>

Another one of our favorite MCE programs is Sonic's *PrimeTime*. PrimeTime lets you organize all of your recorded TV programs on your MCE PC and copy them to a DVD @amd all without leaving the Media Center interface. The coolest thing about PrimeTime is that the DVDs you create can be used on any DVD player you might run into. Check out Chapter 8 for more information about PrimeTime.

## *Reverting back to stability*

OK, so you loaded some software on your machine and now you regret it @amd something got messed up. What can you do? Well that's one of the great things about Windows XP @amd you can revert back to a prior point in time and reconfigure your PC with those older (but working) settings and programs using a program called *System Restore*. In other words, you can get rid of any traces of a problem program. Now, this is not perfect, because you get rid of anything else you've added or changed since that previous time (called a *restore point*), so this is a little drastic, but at least it's a backup.

<XP>

To revert back, here's what you do:

<Warning>

Before you begin, close any open programs and save any open documents. You might lose unsaved data if you don't.

1. Click the **Start** button, then select **All Programs**→**Accessories**→**System Tools** and then click on **System Restore**. The **System Restore** window (welcoming you to **System Restore**) will open.
2. Click *Restore my computer to an earlier time* and then click **Next**. The window will change (it's now labeled *Select a Restore Point* ) and show a calendar as shown in Figure 14-5.

Figure 14-5: Select a Restore Point here.

3. In the left pane of this calendar, click on a recent date (before you began experiencing your difficulties), and then click on one of the Restore Points in the right pane.
4. Click **Next** and the window will change and ask you to Confirm Restore Point Selection. Make sure that what you selected in step 3 is listed here and then click **Next**.
5. Your computer will perform the restore and restart itself. When the reboot is completed, you'll see a **Restoration Complete** window pop up @@@ click **OK** to close this window.

After you've done a restoration, it's always a good idea to run Windows Update again , in case there were any critical Windows updates that you deleted during the restore process.