

DASHBOARD VERSION 1.0
11/8/2004

INTRODUCTION

Back when the first 32-bit version of Windows arrived, Windows 95, I saw the need to be able to launch a large number of applications, programs and utilities with a few mouse clicks. The solution provided by Microsoft was to sprinkle icons on the desktop, and by first clicking to the desktop and then hunting around for the icon of interest, the user could manage their computer.

Way back in 1995, Starfish Software, headed up by Phillippe Kahn, came out with Dashboard for Windows95. This little product was packed with features, the its main purpose was to allow the user to group their most frequently used and favorite applications was a tabbed array of launch icons. This was just the ticket for organizing all my applications and quickly being able to start them up with a minimum of mouse activity.

Starfish eventually disappeared, and worse, their product didn't run on more advanced operating systems. But I was hooked on the ease and simplicity of Dashboard and just couldn't abandon it. What does a programmer do in the situation like that? Why, roll their own, of course.

Enter Software Science Dashboard. Like the old Starfish product, Dashboard is best described as the key to driving Windows! This is the high powered, convenient utility that speeds up all your work with Windows. Dashboard gives you convenient push-button control over everything you do in Windows. Dashboard is an onscreen set of buttons and icons for working with Windows quickly. You can launch programs from Dashboard with just the click of a button. No more fiddling around on the desktop or trying to jam all your favorite applications on the task tray. From now on, you have Dashboard.

Here is screen snapshot of Dashboard personalized for the work I do:



Each tab allows me to store upto 16 applications, displayed as icons. Click on the tab, you'll see your icons. Click on the icon, and the application launches.

Of course, you get to customize and configure Dashboard anyway you like--your own groups (tabs) and your own items within those groups. In the order you like and with the icon you prefer.

The section titled "Configuration" shows you how easy it is to set up Dashboard to be your own personal assistant.

INSTALLING DASHBOARD

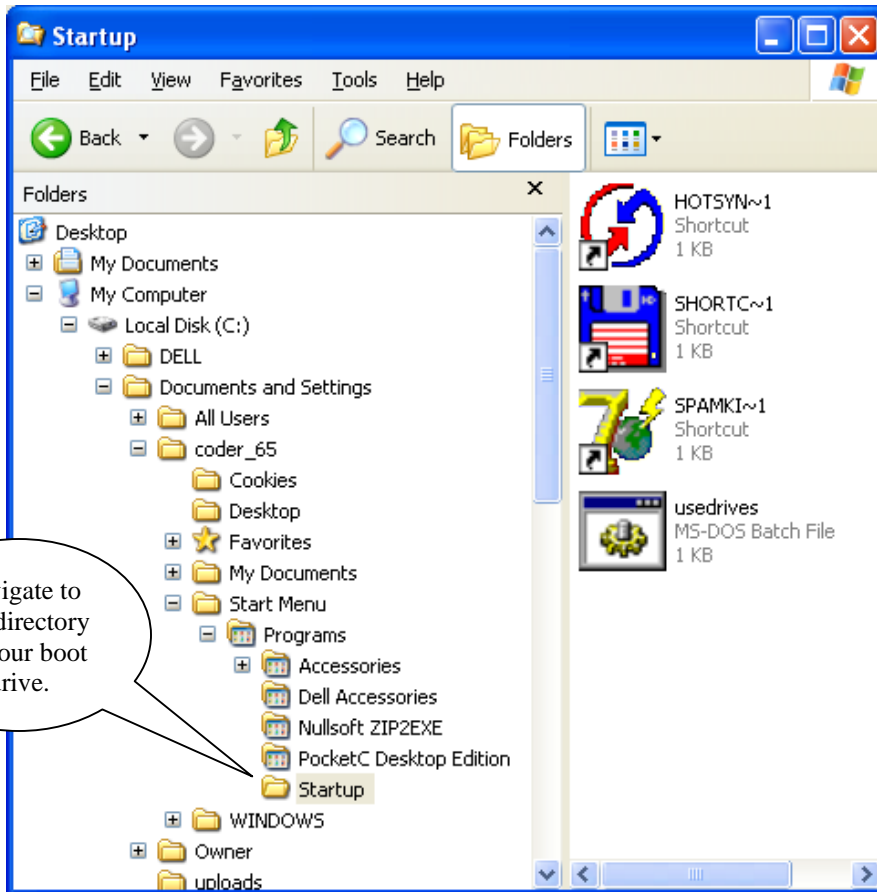
When you purchase Dashboard from our website,

<https://www.ssiserver.com/tzsecure/cgi-bin/itransact0.asp>

the product is downloaded to you as a compressed zip file. Save this zip file anywhere you like (for instance, c:\dashboard). Then just unzip the file, which will contain a single executable: dash.exe. There is no setup program to run, and nothing touches your registry.

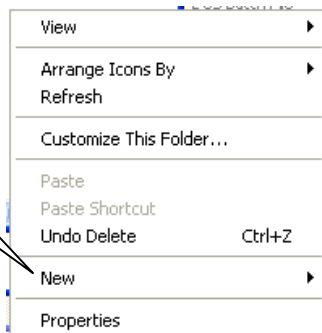
Dashboard is most useful when it starts automatically when you boot your computer. Therefore you will want to put a shortcut link to your copy of dash.exe in your startup directory.

For example, in Windows XP, you would start your copy of Explorer (right click on Start, the double click on Explore) and navigate to the StartUp directory, as shown here:

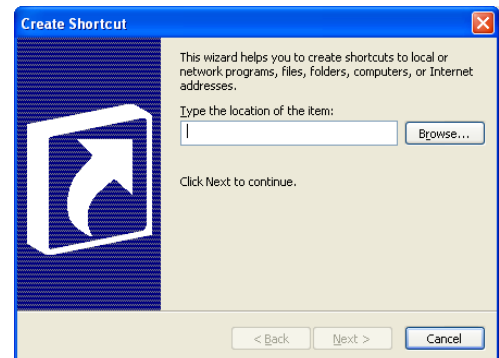


In the right hand side panel you will see the list of shortcuts that get called when Windows boots up.

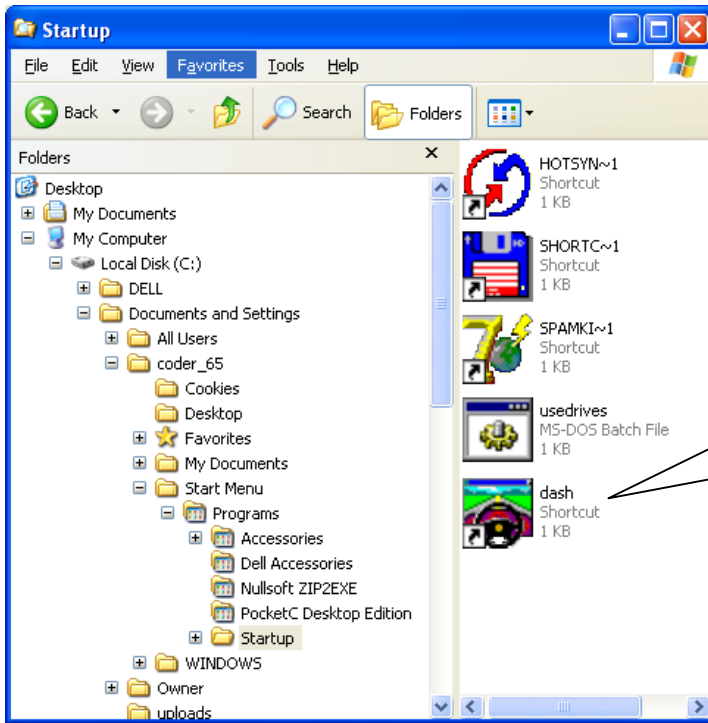
Now let's add a shortcut to your copy of Dashboard. Right click on the right panel, to get



Click on New, and then on Shortcut. Windows will then give you this dialog shown on the right. Type in the full path to your copy of dash.exe, or use the browse button to navigate to your copy. Then click on "Next>".



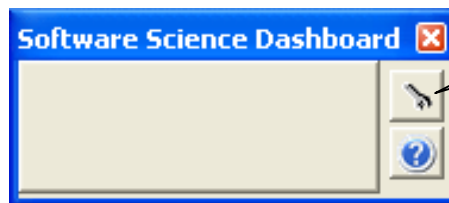
Windows will ask for name, defaulting to “dash.” Just click on “Finish.”
When you get back to Explorer, the new Dashboard shortcut will appear in the right panel:



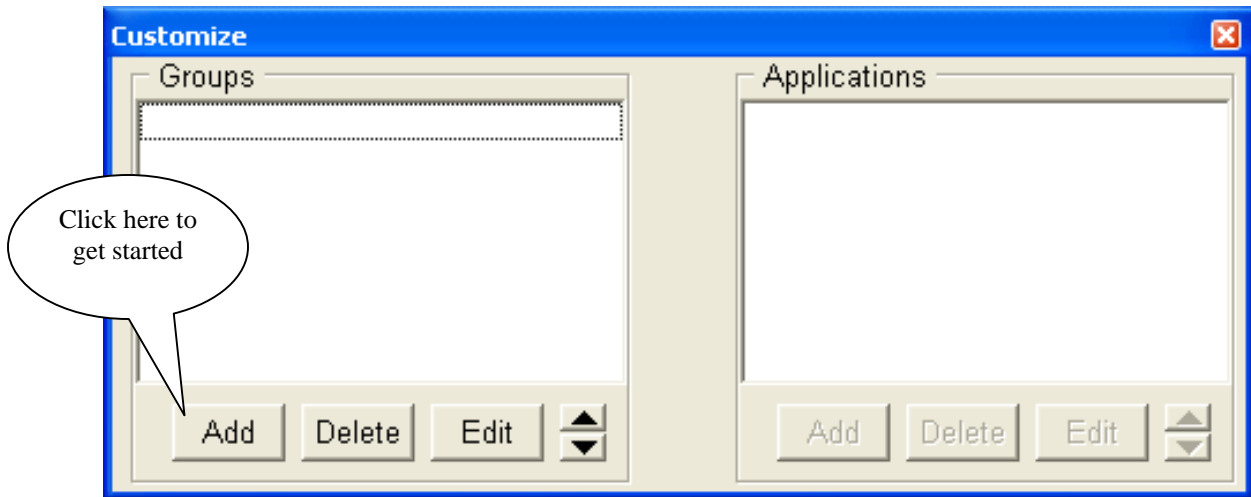
Now Dashboard will be running and available to you each time you boot up. If you like, double click on the shortcut icon now to start Dashboard, so we can next customize it the way you want for your operation.

CONFIGURATION

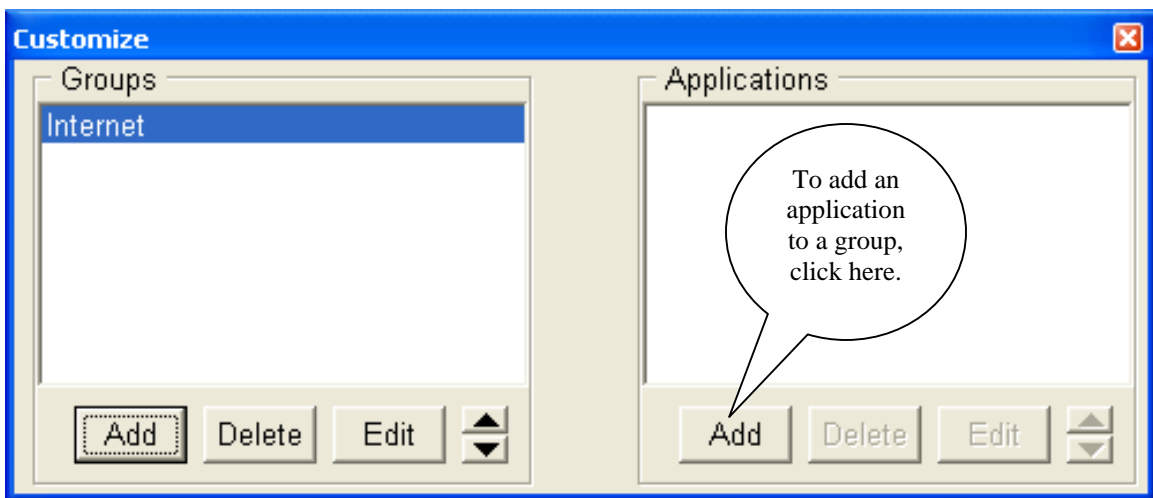
The configuration interface to maintain your groups and items is easy to learn and use. When you run Dashboard for the first time, this is what you will see:



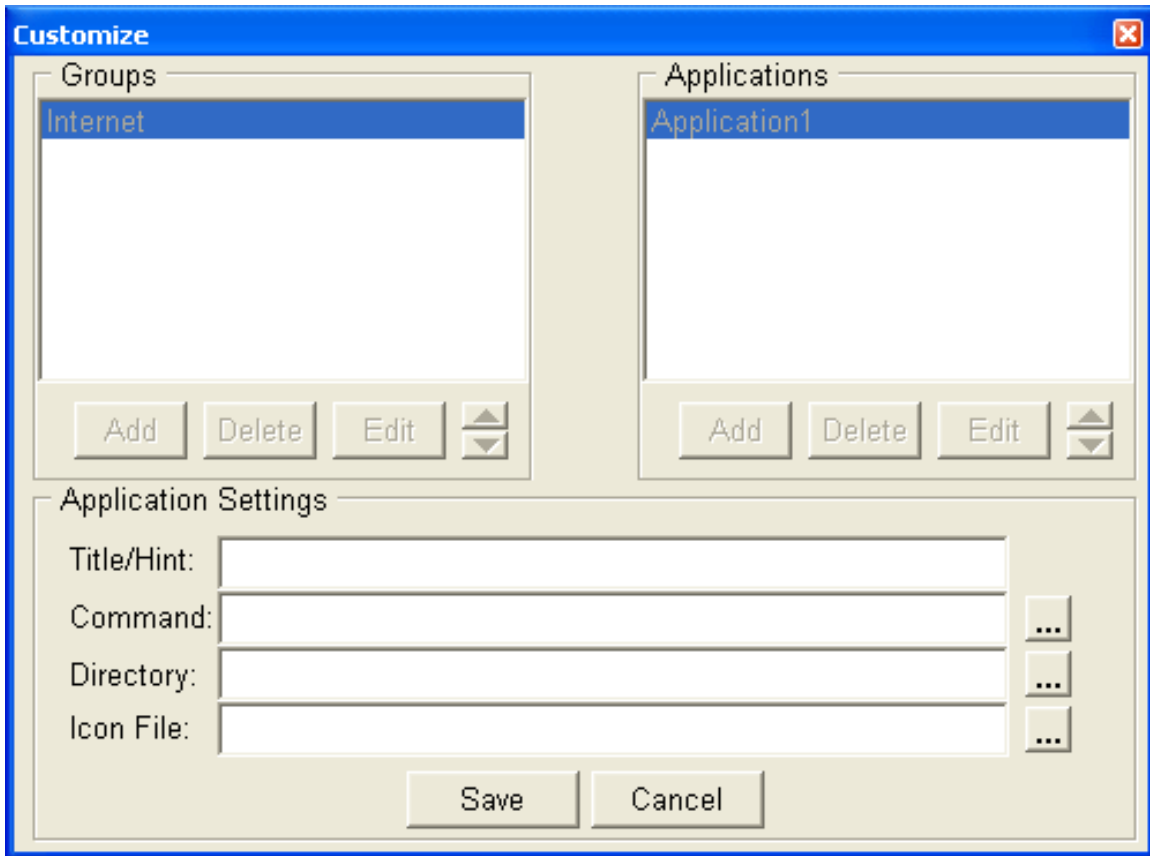
Not too exciting, so let's start personalizing. The first step is to click on the Tool icon. Dashboard will then display its configuration screen:



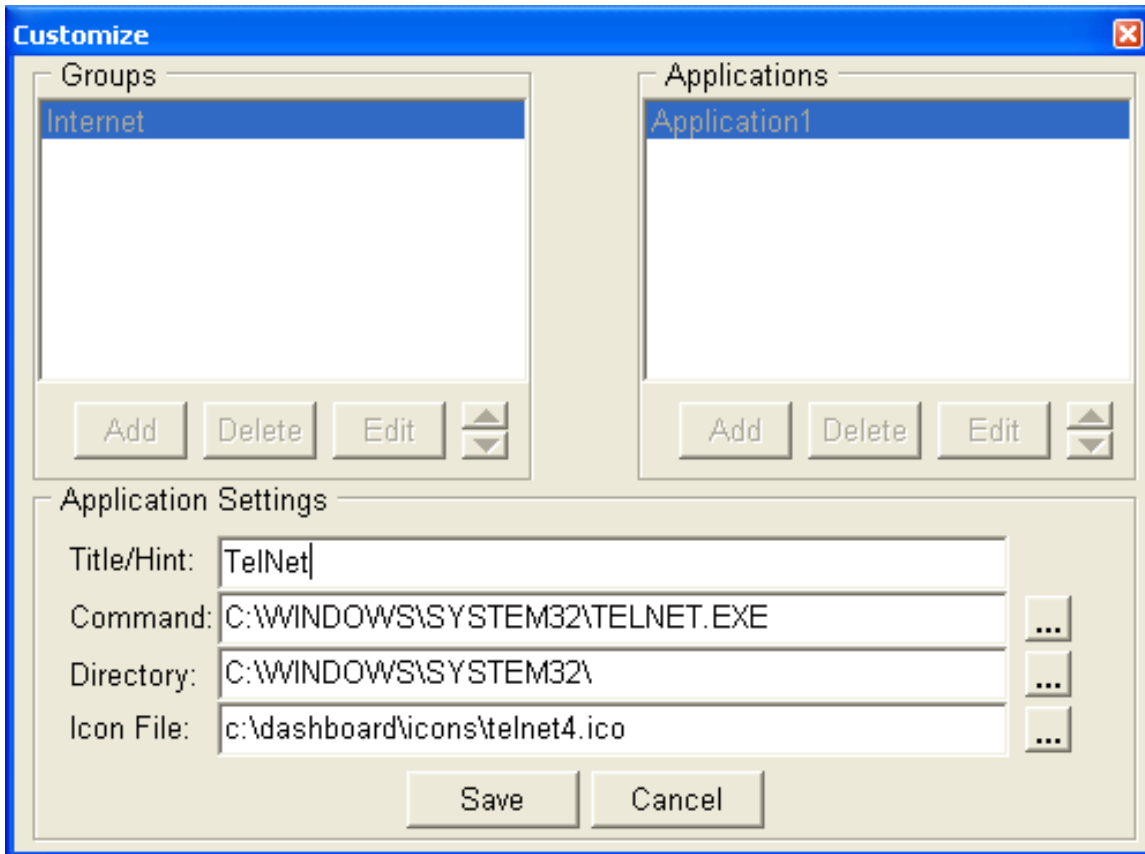
The next step is to think of the way you want to group your applications. For example, suppose we want to group all of your internet applications. You will want an "Internet" tab in Dashboard. To do this, click on the Add button and type in "Internet" and click on the Ok button. You will now have an Internet group, as shown below:



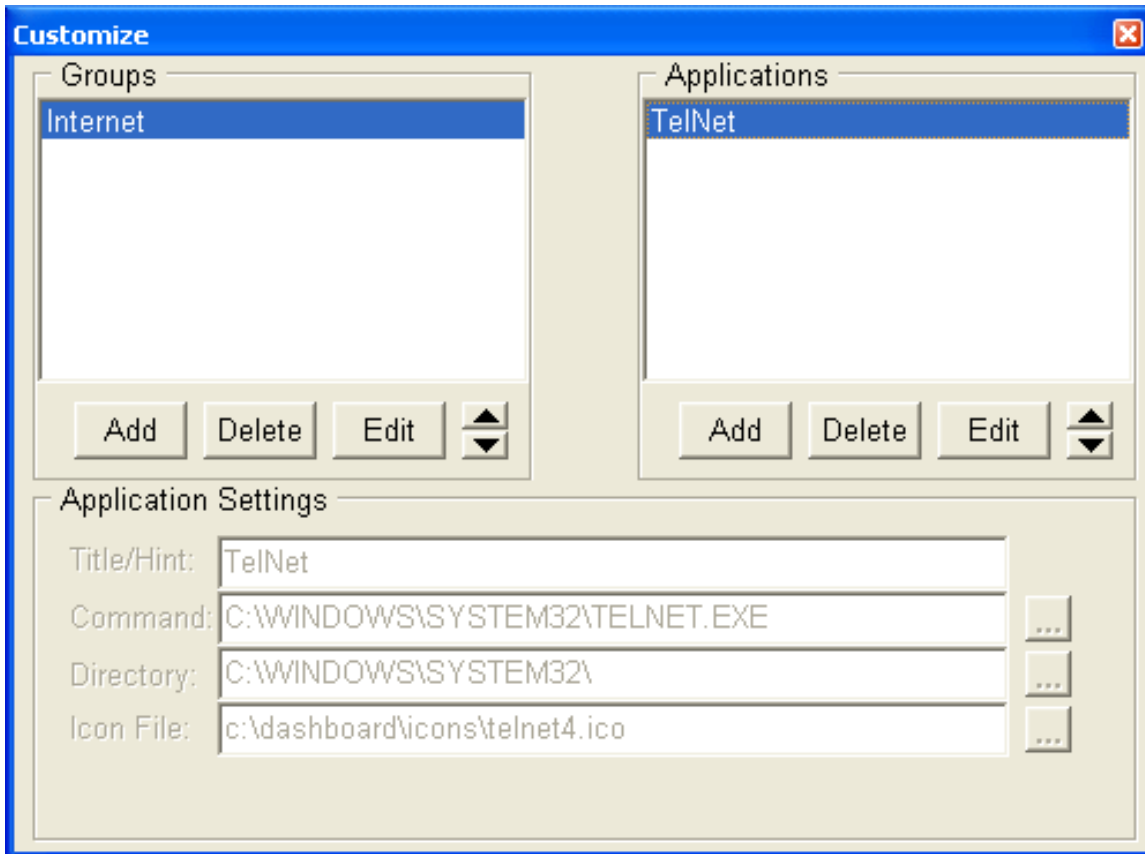
You can continue to add groups, or we can start to add applications to our group. To do that, click on the "Add" button under "Applications." You will see this dialog:



The 4 edit controls at the bottom of the screen allow you to specify what you want to run when the Dashboard button is clicked. You can start with any of the edit fields, but I usually like to specify the Command, that is, the executable I want to run. By clicking on the “...” button for Command, you can simply navigate to the program you want to add to your group. For instance, in the example below, I navigated to Telnet:



In this example, I used the browse button (“...”) for command to point to my copy of Telnet.exe in my windows\system32 directory. The moment I did that, the command, directory, and icon file fields were automatically filled in. Notice that the icon field show an icon file that is placed in your dashboard icon directory. What happens is that when you point to a file or icon, Dashboard immediately extracts that icon and makes its own private copy of the icon file and puts it in its icon directory. All that was left for me to do was to type in the Title of the application, which can be anything I choose, and click on the Save button. After, that things look like this:



As you can see, we now have an application (TelNet) belonging to the Internet group. All you have to do now is to continue to add similar applications to this group, and make more groups with more items until you have organized things the way they seem natural to you.

At any time if you want to change the order of appearance of a group or item, you can use the up and down arrow buttons at the bottom of each list.

When you are done with configuration, just close the window. Dashboard will then store this information in its configuration file, and will repaint itself with all the groups (as tabs) and items (as icons in each tab). In my case, here is what my Dashboard looks like, as I have configured it for my own taste:



USING DASHBOARD

To get to a desired item, click on the tab at the bottom of the Dashboard window. For instance, suppose I want to launch Microsoft Publisher. To my way of thinking, this is a multimedia application, so I know that I put an icon for it in the Multimedia group. If I click on the Multimedia tab, I will find these choices of programs:



I see the Publisher icon, so I am ready to click on it, and Publisher is launched. If I ever forget what my icons refer to, by rolling the mouse over the icon, the title of the application is displayed. By right clicking over the icon, the full path to the application is displayed.