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Beyond Simple File Sharing: Using Hidden Shares

By Eric Geier

You've probably figured out how to share and access files and folders among the computers on your home or small-office network, by browsing through My Network Places or Network. However, do you know you can secretly share folders or drives (called creating a hidden or administrative share) so not everyone on the network will see them when browsing through shared resources?

This tutorial will take you step-by-step through setting up and using hidden shares.

Why Use Hidden Shares?

Using hidden shares on your network is useful if you do not want a shared folder or drive on the network to be easily accessible. Hidden shares can add another layer of protection for shared files against unauthorized people connecting to your network. Using hidden shares helps eliminate the chance for people to guess your password (or be logged into an authorized Windows account) and then receive access to the shared resource.

Default Hidden/ Administrative Shares

Windows automatically shares hard drives by default for administrative purposes. They are hidden shares named with the drive letter followed by a dollar sign (e.g., C$) and commented as Default Share. Thus, certain networking and administrator functions and applications can work properly. Not that preventing Windows from creating these hidden or administrative shares by default each time your computer boots up takes a registry change.

You can likely already access the hard drives of your Windows XP machines from other computers on the network, using the UNC path and an Administrators password, as explained near the end of the next section. However, in Windows Vista, you'll be able to access these shares only if your computers are in a Domain instead of a Workgroup. The way around this is to create a hidden share with a different share name.

Creating Hidden Shares in Windows

Creating a hidden share or converting a regular share into a hidden share is also essentially the same across all Windows versions and editions. To make a shared folder or drive hidden, simply add a dollar sign ($) to the end of the Share Name.

The following steps illustrate how to create a hidden share:

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1. In Windows XP, right-click on the folder or drive for which you want to create a hidden share and select Sharing and Security.

   The Folder Properties window will appear.
2. In Windows Vista, right-click on the folder or drive for which you want to create a hidden share and select Properties. Then, on the Folder Properties window, click the Sharing tab and click the Advanced Sharing button.

   If User Account Control is active, enter an administrator's password if required, and click the Continue button. The Advanced Sharing window will then appear.
3. Select the Share This Folder or Share This Folder on the Network radio button or checkbox.

   Tip: If the folder or drive is already been shared, but you want to change it to a hidden share, you must first disable sharing (deselect the Share This Folder option and click OK), and then come right back to enable sharing using these steps.
4. Enter a name for the share, followed by a dollar sign, into the Share Name text box, as the figure illustrates.

5. If you're using Simple File Sharing in Windows XP, check or uncheck the Allow Network User to Change My Files option. Otherwise, when using advanced sharing in XP or Vista, specify the remaining settings: Comments, User Limit, Permissions and Caching.
6. Click the OK button.

   Now the folder or drive will be accessible manually from computers on the network. Of course, depending on which computers you've specified using the Permission settings, they can read/write to the folder.
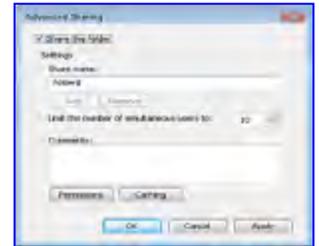
Share Name Text Box
([Click for larger image](#))

Now, when you want to access the hidden share, bring up Internet Explorer or My Computer (or just Computer in Vista), enter the UNC path (\\computername\sharename$) of the share and hit Enter. Depending on the Permissions specified for the hidden share and the Windows account you're currently logged onto, you'll either have to enter a username and password or be given access right away.

Conclusion

What's That Term?

Not sure what a particular networking term means? Check out our searchable glossary.

[   ] [Go!]

You've discovered a file sharing technique that makes sharing folders and drives on your network inconspicuous. To wrap this tutorial up, here are two points and tips to keep in mind.

First, it's important to understand that the presence of hidden shares isn't completely undetectable by people on your network. Some network tools can search for and display the filenames within hidden shares. Hidden shares are, however, concealed from casual users browsing the network in My Network Places in Windows XP or Network in Vista.

Second, hidden shares also can have the same types of permissions imposed on them as regular shares. So you can still require a person to enter the login credentials of an account listed in the permission settings of the hidden share, or be logged into a Windows account with the same username and password, before the files can be opened.

Stay tuned I'll discuss mapping network drives in the next tutorial of this series.
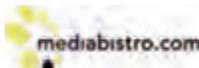
Good luck in your networking endeavors!

Eric Geier is an author of many wireless networking and computing books including Home Networking All-in-One Desk Reference For Dummies (Wiley 2008) and Wi-Fi Hotspots: Setting up Public Wireless Internet Access (Cisco Press 2006).

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Beyond Simple File Sharing: Using Mapped Drives

By Eric Geier

The [previous tutorial in this series](#) demonstrated how to create hidden shares so others on the network are unable to see them. This tutorial continues the discussion on advanced sharing techniques, concentrating on how to make shared resources much more accessible. Learn how to save time and some clicks of the mouse by mapping a drive to a shared folder or drive on the network   which would be called a mapped network drive.

Why Use Mapped Drives?

Mapping network drives certainly saves time and energy in the long run when it comes to shared folders or drives on the network accessed regularly. It pays to make them more accessible in My Computer (or just Computer in Vista) and in dialog boxes where you select files.

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» Seven Tips for Safely Sharing Your Access Point

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When you map a network drive, you are essentially creating a shortcut to a certain shared folder or drive, masked as a drive. You assign the mapped network drive a drive letter, anything from A to Z that's not already assigned to other drives (such as A, C, D or E) on the computer.

Figure 1 is an example of how a mapped network drive (assigned with the drive letter X) looks in Computer and in the Open dialog box of Microsoft Word.
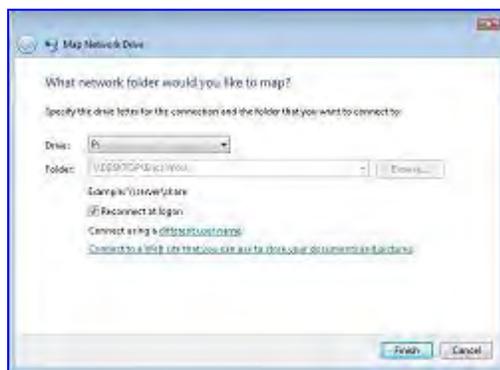

**Figure 1
Mapped Network Drive**
([Click for larger image](#))

This shows how much more accessible shared resources can be when using mapped network drives. Instead of having to double-click Network to bring up the Network window and double-click DESKTOP>My Folder>My Sub Folder, all I have to do is double-click Computer and double-click on the mapped network drive icon. This saves me two double-clicks every time I access the My Sub Folder, giving me a bit more time to do something much more productive.

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Mapping Drives in Windows

You have several ways to go about creating a mapped network drive, which are the same in all versions and editions of Windows (2000, XP and Vista). The following steps sequence the method of right-clicking on the shared folder or drive you want to map as a drive:

- Browse your network using My Network Places (in XP) or Network (in Vista) and find the shared folder or drive you want to map as a drive. If the computers aren't showing up or you wish to create a mapped network drive of a hidden share on your network, you can create a mapped network drive manually by opening My Computer (or Computer in Vista), click Tools, and select Map Network Drive. Then enter the UNC path (\\computername \sharename) of the share into the Folder field and skip to Step 3.
- Right-click on the shared folder or drive and click Map Network Drive. The Map Network Drive window box will appear, as Figure 2 demonstrates.
- Assign a drive letter for the mapped network drive from the Drive drop-down menu list.
- Keep the Reconnect at Logon checkbox selected, if you want the mapped network drive to remain active after you reboot your computer, which is probably what you want to do.
- If the Windows account username and password you're currently logged into doesn't match exactly with an account that has permission to access or edit the shared folder or drive, click the Different User Name link. Then, in the Connect As dialog box enter a username and password of a Windows account set up in the sharing permissions of the shared folder or drive, and click OK.
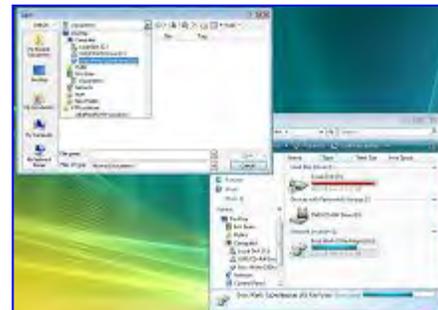- Click Finish.

Now you can access the shared folder or drive from most windows or dialog boxes that show your drives, folders and files, as shown earlier in Figure 1.

Figure 2
Map Network Drive Window Box
(Click for larger image)

What's That Term?

Not sure what a particular networking term means? Check out our searchable glossary.

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Tip 1: To change the default name of the mapped network (sharename on 'computername') drive, right-click the drive icon in My Computer or Computer, select Rename, type something, and then hit the Enter key.

Tip2 : To remove a mapped network drive from your computer, open My Computer or Computer, right-click the drive icon, and select Disconnect.

Conclusion

You've discovered another file sharing technique to make your networking experience easier. To wrap this tutorial up, here are several things to keep in mind:

- If you regularly use multiple computers on the network, think about mapping the same shared folders or drives on all the computers.
- Use the same drive letters for each folder or drive you map a drive for among all your computers.
- If the computer hosting the folder or drive that's mapped as a drive is shut down or off the network, your computer may take some time to respond that the connection is unavailable. Give it a minute, and the window or dialog should start responding. Also expect to experience a bit longer boot time when entering Windows if the host computer is offline.
- It can be frustrating if the underlying share structure of your network is changed (when mapped network drives become unavailable) and you must go to each computer to remove the mapped network drive and add a new one pointing to the correct share. This is more of a problem for larger networks.
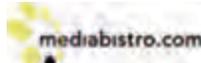
Eric Geier is an author of many wireless networking and computing books including Home Networking All-in-One Desk Reference For Dummies (Wiley 2008) and Wi-Fi Hotspots: Setting up Public Wireless Internet Access (Cisco Press 2006).

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