

Multiple Monitors

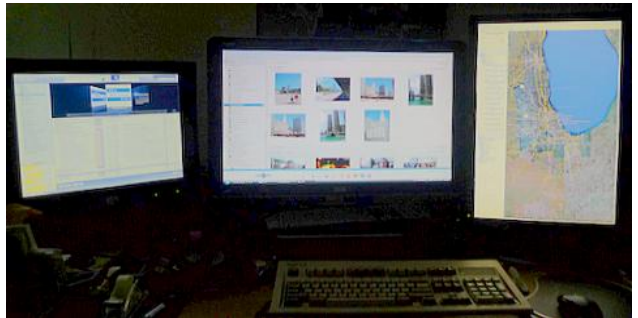
Volume 5, Number 7

Why would I want to have multiple monitors hooked up to a computer? Isn't one enough?

People have been happily working with single monitor configurations for decades, so there's no question that one screen can get the job done.

However, a second or third monitor can make it significantly easier to run multiple programs or work with a few documents at once.

Some people also find that a second monitor dedicated to a specific function, such as email, stock reports or weather maps puts frequently accessed information close at hand.



Multiple monitors allow you to work with iTunes (left), Picasa (middle) and Google Earth (right) at once.

Can my computer handle multiple monitors?

Multiple monitor support is dependent on your desktop computer's graphics card. Compatible graphics cards have two rectangular monitor connections — see the next section for more details on types). If your computer only has a single monitor output,



Even inexpensive graphics cards frequently offer two monitor connections. This graphics card supports two monitors, offering a DVI (white) and a VGA (blue) connector.

it's generally a simple matter to add a new graphics card which will give you two additional connections. Your existing monitor connection plus the two additional ones gives you the option of having a three monitor arrangement down the road if desired.

I'm confused by all of the different monitor connectors. How do I keep them straight?

The variety of monitor connections does get a little confusing. Here's the scoop:

- **HDMI:** A digital connection that provides a great picture. As a bonus, this type of cable can also transmit digital sound, though this probably won't benefit you in a typical multi-monitor setup.
- **DVI:** This digital connection has the same pristine picture quality as HDMI, but can't transmit audio.
- **VGA:** Provides a very good quality analog picture signal.

Don't be overly concerned if your graphics card lacks the correct connection type. Adapters which convert between these different types of connections are readily available for less than \$20 each. They even come in the box with some video cards.

What's the total cost of adding a second monitor to your computer?

If you're lucky, you may already have an extra LCD monitor laying around from a retired PC. If not, consider upgrading your current monitor and relegating the old display to secondary duty. You can find 19" or 20" flat panel LCD monitors on sale every day of the week for less than \$150.

If your current computer doesn't have dual-monitor support, you'll also need to factor in the cost of a video card with two outputs (\$50 to \$100). The bottom line? You can often more than double your screen real estate for \$250 or less.



HDMI



DVI



VGA



This inexpensive adapter allows you to use a VGA monitor with a graphics card's DVI connection

Will multiple monitors work on a notebook computer?

In many cases, you can add a secondary monitor to complement your computer's built-in screen. Look for a VGA connection on the side or back of your laptop to see if it has this capability. Note: adding a third monitor to a notebook computer is difficult, costly and probably not worth it.

I've noticed that some people have secondary monitors rotated to a portrait orientation. Why do they do that?

There are a couple of good reasons to have one of your monitors

in a portrait orientation. You can surf the web with much less scrolling and view an entire page of a word processing document at 100% magnification.



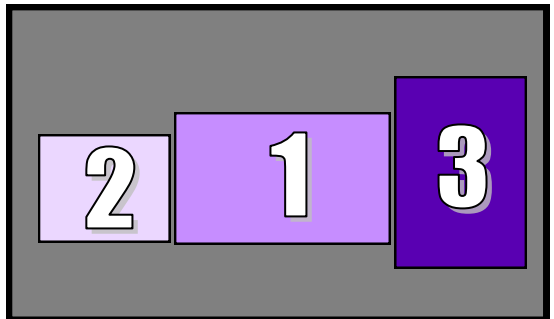
This laptop PC has a VGA connection for an external monitor.

How do I tell my computer that I've added a monitor?

In most cases, you can simply plug the new monitor in, and it will be recognized by the operating system. A control panel (sometimes called *Displays* or *Display Settings*) in your operating system will allow you to make adjustments. For example, you can change their relative placement on a virtual desktop to match their physical layout.

My monitor's stand isn't very adjustable. How do I position it in line with my current monitor?

If you're lucky, your monitor is compatible with VESA monitor mounting standards. If it is VESA compatible, you can buy an aftermarket monitor support which will allow you to position your display exactly where you want it. You can even buy monitor mounts which hold two or three screens.



Your computer's displays control panel will give you the chance to arrange your monitors on a virtual desktop.

One popular online store for monitor mounts is Ergomart (ergomart.com/product_lists/monitor_arms_mounts.htm). There is an impressive variety of choices, but some of the more elaborate options cost more than the monitors they are designed to support. A sturdy VESA-compatible metal stand will probably outlive your monitor, allowing you to reuse the stand with your next screen.



SAA4228 LED Arm: features superior wire management

- SAA4228 extra long reach LED monitor arm handles 5 to 17.5 pounds
- Our SAA4228 LED arm delivers extended reach up to 44 inches
- Works with 75mm and 100mm **VESA** compatible LCD monitors

SAA2321 LCD Arm: handles monitors weighing up to 23 pounds

- Easily adjusts for LCD monitors weighing from 2 to 23 pounds
- Reaches forward up to 23 inches from the back of the mount
- Standard mounting kit allows clamp & through-desk mounting
- Suitable solution for many sit to stand users
- Unique design combines with easy usability

FSB700 Monitor Arm: ease of use with sit to stand comfort

- Excellent for lighter LED monitors
- This flat panel arm provides sit to stand comfort for many users
- Slim LCD arm combines European style & reasonable adjustability
- Head rotates into portrait position by simply grasping and turning
- FSB700 provides close to 16 inches of typical sit-stand adjustment

FSB888 LED Arm: set your screen to landscape or portrait mode

A few of the monitor stands available at Ergomart.com (pictured) and other retailers.

Conclusion

If you're used to working on a single-monitor setup, especially if it is 17" or smaller, the extra screen space offered by adding a monitor or two is incredibly liberating. If you're really lucky, you may already have an extra monitor in your basement which you can bring out of retirement to get you extra screen space for a pittance.

If you have questions, comments or suggestions, you can visit me at the Reference Desk, contact me via email (moetting@hinsdalelibrary.info), or call me at 630-986-1976 ext. 225.

An archive of Tech Talk issues can be found at:
www.hinsdalelibrary.info/reference-resources/technology-at-the-library/tech-talk/.

Mike Oetting, Reference Librarian
9/21/2009



20 East Maple St.
Hinsdale IL 60521
630-986-1976
www.hinsdalelibrary.info
reference@hinsdalelibrary.info