



WINDOWS DEVELOPER POWER TOOLS

Turbocharge Windows Development with 170+ Free Tools

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James Avery & Jim Holmes

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“James Avery and Jim Holmes have done great work in locating and documenting a vast collection of useful tools here, saving you the work of hunting them down one at a time.”

—From the Foreword by Mike Gunderloy, Editor, Larkware.com

This book is an encyclopedic guide to more than 170 free and open source programming tools, components, and frameworks available to help you create, test, and build top-notch Windows software—from Windows Forms and ASP.NET applications to web services. Much more than a simple listing, *Windows Developer Power Tools* also helps you choose the right tools for solving both common and uncommon problems that you face each day.

Inside, you'll find:

- Tools for mastering 23 common Windows and .NET software development tasks
- A mini user's guide for each of the 170 tools covered, many written by the tools' authors
- “Quick pick” lists that help you find and choose the right tool for a particular task
- Links to additional detail online when you wish to delve more deeply into features and functionality
- Information about the online Power Tools book site maintained by the authors to keep you up-to-date on new tools as they appear and to tell you of new releases and features of tools covered in this book

As good as it is, there's more to Windows development than Visual Studio. This one-stop resource will forever change the way you tackle the tasks of planning, developing, testing, and rolling out great software.

“Tools aim to save you time—this book aims to save you even more, by finding those gems that you can't live without.”

—From the Foreword by Scott Hanselman, <http://www.hanselman.com/tools>

James Avery is a Microsoft MVP and ASPInsider. He's written articles for *MSDN Magazine* and *ASPToday*, and is the author of *Visual Studio Hacks* (O'Reilly). Jim Holmes is a Microsoft MVP with nearly 25 years experience in the IT industry. He has written extensively for VisualStudioHacks.com.

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James Avery and Jim Holmes

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Windows Developer Power Tools

by James Avery and Jim Holmes

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Foreword

“We shall not fail or falter; we shall not weaken or tire... Give us the tools and we will finish the job.”

—Sir Winston Churchill (1874–1965)
BBC radio broadcast, Feb. 9, 1941

I love my toolbox. I hate wasted time, wasted keystrokes, wasted potential. I’ve worked as a professional developer using Microsoft operating systems of one kind or another for nearly 15 years. As a developer, I’ve always tried to get the most out of my hardware and software, and as I’ve learned new techniques or discovered faster ways to work, I’ve gathered tools for my ever-growing collection. My toolbox is my collection of not only cool utilities, but also best practices as a user and a developer.

I remember the joy of squeezing another 2K out of upper memory on my 386SX. The tool that made it possible? QEMM from Quarterdeck. Didn’t have enough space on my massive 20 MB drive? Stacker gave it new life, if only for a few days. Then Windows 3.1 came along, and with it new tools like Norton Desktop and PKZIP. Windows 95 opened a world of Power Toys and Kernel Toys and WindowBlinds to manipulate my reality. The advent of Visual Basic 6 brought with it tools garnished with lime-green backgrounds and purple buttons, but tools they were and use them I did.

When the .NET Framework came along, I continued to add to my tool belt with gems from the increasingly prolific .NET open source community. Since 2004, I’ve maintained a pretty long list of tools at <http://www.hanselman.com/tools/> that I revise each year. My list of tools has breadth but is short on depth. This book fills in the gaps so many simple tool lists contain—it gives us deep context, a better understanding of *why* to choose certain tools, and information on how to use those tools effectively.

James and Jim have done a massive amount of work for us, applying their years of development expertise and enthusiasm for great tools into the creation of the book you’re holding. James’s enthusiasm for hacks and tools has even overflowed onto the pages of his web site, <http://www.visualstudiohacks.com>.

Why buy a book filled with lists of tools? Tools aim to save you time, and this book aims to save you even more, by tracking down for you those gems you won't be able to live without. Far from being just a simple list, this compilation is filled with applets and applications along with deep analysis of and commentary on their relevance to your life as a developer. Some of these tools you'll recognize; some you won't. All can be incorporated into your own Windows development process and have been carefully selected to help *you* finish the job.

—Scott Hanselman

<http://www.computerzen.com> (my blog)

<http://www.hanselman.com/tools/> (the tools list)

The Scottish essayist Carlyle famously defined man as the tool-using animal. Somewhere in the deep past, our monkey ancestors started banging together stones and bones and brought forth hand axes, and the idea caught on. These days, the urge to build tools seems to run particularly strong among software developers. Give a developer a choice between writing some code and writing a general-purpose code generator to write the code for him, and you'll find him staying up late cranking out a wonderfully complex framework that will make life easier down the road.

Microsoft long ago recognized this bit of monkey behavior among some of their customers and started figuring out ways to take advantage of it. You can trace a pattern through Windows, Office, and Visual Studio of documenting APIs, providing sample code, and implementing extensibility points, with the end result being that it has become easier and easier for external developers to layer their own tools on top of Microsoft's offerings. If you're faced with a repetitive task in Windows, you can automate it (the new PowerShell command processor brings new levels of flexibility to this arena). If you're solving business productivity problems, you can inject your own code into Microsoft Office in a variety of ways. If you're a developer writing tools for developers, you can tap the dozens of extensibility points and thousands of APIs in .NET and Visual Studio to create almost any tool imaginable.

This last ecosystem has been one of the most fertile in the Microsoft universe, and it's the one that the authors of the book that you hold in your hands have chosen to explore. Several factors come together to explain the explosion of Windows developer power tools in the last few years: the incredible richness of the .NET Framework, the sheer volume of the available documentation, and the rise of the Internet as a home for developer-to-developer interaction have all contributed to a rich environment for tool-building. But there's another factor, too: developers are inclined to scratch their own itches.

Developers see the problems in their mainline development tools—whether from Microsoft, IBM, Borland, or another major player—every day. When they think about building tools of their own to respond to problems, what’s more natural than to solve their own problems first? It’s this natural urge, together with the desire to share (and perhaps to show off), that gives us the rich variety of tools showcased in the present volume. If you’re only using shrinkwrapped tools from major vendors, no matter how good they are, you’re missing out on an amazing collection of useful code.

Not every developer will need every tool in this book, of course. There’s the ever-present danger of getting so loaded down by your toolbox that you can barely move. But if there are rough edges in your process, places where you feel vaguely unhappy and inefficient, the chances are pretty good that someone else has had the same problem before you. The solution may be just a few pages away. James Avery and Jim Holmes have done great work in locating and documenting a vast collection of useful tools here, saving you the work of hunting them down one at a time. The half-dozen that make their way into your daily process will more than repay the time that it takes you to read their work.

—Mike Gunderloy
Editor, Larkware.com

Credits

About the Authors

James Avery is an accomplished author and .NET architect. In addition to having coauthored this book, James is the author of *Visual Studio Hacks* (O'Reilly) as well as books for Microsoft Press and Wrox. He has also contributed articles to *MSDN Magazine*, *Dr. Dobb's Journal*, and *ASP Today*.

After working for a number of large corporations and consulting companies, James left his last job to go out on his own and formed his own company, Infozerk, Inc. (<http://www.infozerk.com>). James also started and is the current president of the Cincinnati .NET User Group, and he cofounded the Cincinnati-Dayton Code Camp (whose name is still in dispute).

James lives in Cincinnati, OH with his wonderful wife Tammy and their four cats. When he is not working on his laptop, you can find him fiddling with his digital cameras, reading, or playing Xbox 360.

James is a frequent blogger, and you can find his blog at <http://www.dotavery.com/blog/>. James can also be contacted by email at javery@infozerk.com.

Jim Holmes, a Microsoft MVP for C#, spent 11 years running radar systems in flight on E-3 AWACS aircraft and has nearly 25 years of experience in the IT industry, including network management, systems analysis, and software development in Perl, Java, C++, and .NET. Jim has also worked as a retail wine sales clerk, so he can help you decide what wine you should drink with the pizza you're eating as you're working overtime to meet your software delivery deadline. Currently, Jim is a principal consultant for NuSoft Solutions (<http://www.NuSoftSolutions.com>).

Jim is the founder of the Dayton .NET Developers Group and cofounder of the Dayton-Cincinnati Code Camp, the proper name for the conference he created with James Avery. He writes regular columns for VisualStudioHacks.com, including the *Ask the Pros* series, where industry leaders talk about how they get the most out of

Visual Studio. Jim is a frequent poster at his blog, FrazzledDad (<http://frazzleddad.com>), where he talks about trying to work from home while taking care of two small children, rose gardening, cooking, and doing software development.

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Peter Boey is a software engineer with years of experience working for international companies like Nike and Philips. In 1999, Peter founded Blacksun Software, which creates tools and utilities for the Microsoft Windows platform. These tools were primarily created for Blacksun's own needs but quickly became very popular on the Internet.

Simone Busoli is enrolled in the Computer Science Engineering program at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy. He likes working on web applications and especially on all aspects of code reusability. This interest has led him to become involved in the development of open source projects, with a focus on ASP.NET web control libraries.

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Marc Clifton is the creator of MyXaml, an open source declarative XML instantiation engine. He is an industry consultant working primarily with companies interested in utilizing declarative programming concepts to add flexibility to n-tier architectures on web, CE, and desktop platforms. His other major open source project is the Advanced Unit Test framework. He operates his own web site, <http://www.marclifton.com>, where you will find many of his articles.

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Michael Dobler started his career as a Civil Engineer but became attracted to the IT sector in 1995. He has programmed in various VB versions and exotic 4GL languages, always focusing on pure business applications. Currently, he is working as Software Development Manager for a large-scale CRM/BI solutions company. In 2004, Michael won the Code Hero award from <http://www.windowsforms.net> with his XPCCommonControls. You can find the controls and more information at his personal web site, <http://www.steeptvalley.net>.

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Grant Drake (a.k.a. “kiwidude”) is a developer from New Zealand who has been writing software for over 20 years. For the last six, he has resided in London, consulting to the corporate and banking industries as a senior developer specializing in Microsoft technologies. A development automation and tool junkie himself, his recent contribution back to the .NET community is NCoverExplorer. If dragged away from his keyboard, he spends his spare time inline slalom skating, snowboarding, and wondering when to leave for a better climate. He can be reached at grant@kiwidude.com.

Michael Dvoishes is the Technical and General Manager of Trivium Technologies. He began his career in programming during the late 1980s and received his M.S. degree in 1993. After working for several high technology startups, Michael started his own business, specializing in providing services to such companies. Currently, Michael spends his working time managing the day-to-day life of the company, keeping up to date with the latest technology advancements, and even doing some coding.

Dan Fernandez is Lead Product Manager for Visual Studio Express in the developer division at Microsoft. He has been with Microsoft since 2001 and has worked in multiple roles, including as the C# Product Manager and as a Developer Evangelist in the Mid-Atlantic district. Prior to joining Microsoft, Dan worked as a developer at several consulting firms, including IBM Global Services, specializing in web-based and mobile application development.

Jay Flowers is the creator of CI Factory.

Sara Ford is the Program Manager for the Power Toys for Visual Studio. Previously, she was a Software Design Engineer in Test for the Visual Studio Core team, where she drove the effort to make the Visual Studio 2005 product accessible to developers who are vision-impaired. Sara graduated from Mississippi State University with B.S. degrees in computer science and mathematics. Her blog can be found at <http://blogs.msdn.com/saraford/>.

Justin Greenwood has been a software developer for an Indianapolis-based consulting firm for the past six years. Like many others who love the field, he also enjoys working on side projects that pique his interest. In early 2004, he teamed up with coworker Mike Griffin to write the MyGeneration code generator. Since then, Justin, Mike, and a couple of close friends have supported the MyGeneration project and spawned several related projects, such as the dOODads, EntitySpaces, and Easy-Objects persistence frameworks.

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