

The NowPlaying ScreenSaver

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What is it?

The NowPlaying ScreenSaver is a standard Microsoft Windows screensaver that can recognize media players currently running, and retrieve images from various internet search engines to automatically create a context aware slideshow while your audio application plays music in the background.

What does it work with?

Right now, the NowPlayingScreenSaver only works with the AlbumPlayer Digital Jukebox and JRiver Media Center.

<http://www.albumplayer.com/>

<http://www.jriver.com/>

Eventually, I plan on adding support for more media players.

What about some of those “Images” you can find on internet search engines?

Yeah, some pretty raunchy stuff can turn up on image searches, and you might not want certain images scrolling across the screen when the extended family is sitting down for Thanksgiving Dinner. So this application always uses “Safe Search” turned on.

What Engines are Searched?

Right now, Bing, Yahoo, and Flickr. Google’s API and licensing was too restrictive for this particular app.

How do I Install it?

Just copy the NowPlayingScreenSaver.scr file (SCR files are really just renamed EXE files) into your \Windows\System32 folder.

You'll need to be sure that the .net Framework 4.0 is installed. If you don't have it, you can download it at:

<http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/netframework/aa569263>

Once that's done, you should be able to right click on the desktop, and choose customize (or whatever is necessary to get to the screen savers dialog in your version of Windows).

The NowPlayingScreenSaver should automatically be listed in the list of screensavers to choose from.

How come the preview just shows a static image?

Just because. Ahem. Well, that particular feature just didn't make it onto the radar screen for the first round of features.

What are the options?

You can bring up the options screen from the normal Screen Saver Windows dialog, by pressing on the Settings button.

Settings for the NowPlayingScreenSaver include:

Speed

Choose a base speed, in seconds for frame pans and fades. A speed of 10 means 10 seconds between fades from one image to the next.

Variance

This will introduce a variable amount of "randomness" to the speed, from 0 to about 300% of the set speed, depending on the setting of this option.

Dimming

How much the images will be "faded" from normal. 100% means no dimming, 0% means you won't be able to see the image, as it would be totally transparent (completely dimmed out).

FrameRate

The normal framerate is 60fps. This is fine for most modern PCs, but if you're using older hardware, you may need to adjust the framerate down. Usually 15-50 fps is enough to get good image animations and not swamp the PC, but you'll have to adjust it for your hardware.

Default Image Search

When a music track is playing and the query for images comes up empty (or if the screensaver starts and there is nothing playing), the NowPlayingScreenSaver will instead use this query to find some images to display. So, in the event there are no images found for that super hot disco mp3 your ripped from an 8 track, you can show images of “Roller Rinks” instead.

If this option is left blank, there are about 21 random images built into the screensaver that will display instead.

Directory for Default Images

If you’d prefer to display images from your local harddrive (maybe a collection of photos, or whatever), point this option to that folder.

Include Subdirectories

If you decide to use the “Directory for Default Images” option above, check this option to also search for images in all subfolders of this given folder. Note, however, that the search is exhaustive, so it’s best to point it at a folder that doesn’t have TOO many subfolders with lots of images in them.

Use only Local Images

In some cases, you may want to ONLY display images from your local system (ie never search the internet for images to display in the context of the currently playing track).

Screen Definitions

The default setting here will put a different screensaver on each attached monitor, completely filling the screens.

However, if, for VERY specific purposes, you need to have the animated screensaver areas take up smaller bits of a screen (or put 2 or more screen saver areas on a single monitor), you can do that here. Just click NEW to create a new area, assign it to a monitor, and then adjust the bounds of the area via the Top, Left, Width and Height properties.

In my case, I had a very tiny 2” monitor, only part of which was actually visible. I didn’t want to animate the entire screen on that monitor, because it would have just wasted CPU cycles and made things run slower, so I defined the area on Monitor2 to be much smaller than the entire screen.

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