

Profiles

Every document, icon, and preference setting related to your account resides in a single folder: By default, it's the one bearing your name in the Local Disk (C:)→Users folder. This folder's friendly name is your Personal folder, but to network geeks, it's known as your *user profile*.

The Public Profile

Each account holder has a user profile. But your PC also has a couple of profiles that aren't linked to human beings' accounts.

Have you ever noticed, for example, that not everything you actually see on your Start screen and on your desktop is, in fact, in *your* user profile folder?

Part of the solution to this mystery is the Public profile, which also lurks in the Users folder (Figure 1). As you can probably tell by its name, this folder stores many of the same kinds of settings your profile folder does—except that anything in (C:)→Users→Public→Desktop appears on *everybody's* desktop.

All this is a long-winded way of suggesting another way to make some icon available to everybody with an account on your machine. Drag it into the Desktop folder inside the Public folder. (This folder is ordinarily hidden; it appears only when you un-hide Windows' protected files and folders.)

But if you're wondering where the common Start screen items are, you'll have to look somewhere else. If you're prowling around your hard drive, you'll find them in (C:)\ProgramData\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu. (The ProgramData folder is also ordinarily hidden.)

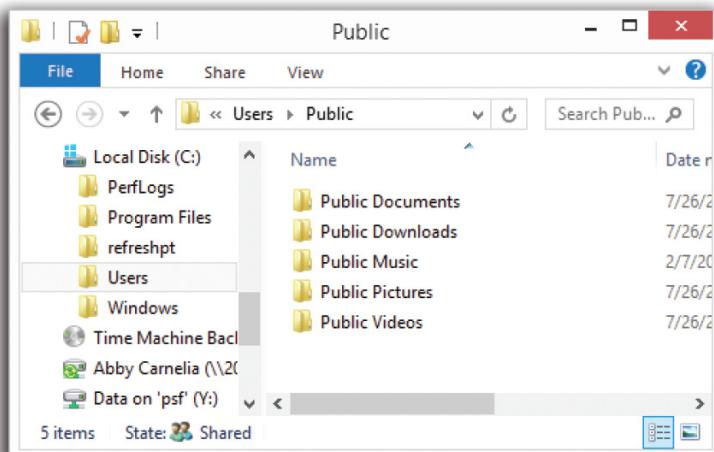


Figure 1: Behind the scenes, Windows maintains another profile folder, whose subfolders closely parallel those in your own. What you see—the contents of the Desktop folder, Documents folder, Favorites list, and so on—is a combination of what's in your own user profile folder and what's in the Public folder.

Whose Software Is It?

These locations also offer a handy solution to the “Whose software is it, anyway?” conundrum, the burning question of whose Start screen and desktop reflect new software you've installed using your own account.

Some software installers ask if you'd like the new program to show up only on your Start screen, or on *everybody's* Start screen. But not every installer is this thoughtful. Some installers automatically deposit their new software into the ProgramData and Public folders, thereby making its Start screen and desktop icons available to everybody when they log on.

On the other hand, some installers may deposit a new software program only into your account (or that of whoever is logged in at the moment). In that case, other account holders won't be able to use the program at all, even if they know it's been installed, because their own Start screens and Desktop folders won't reflect the installation. Worse, some people, not seeing the program's name on their Start screens, might not realize you've already installed it—and may well install it *again*.

One possible solution is to open your Programs folder (into the address bar at the top of an Explorer window, type `C:\Users\username\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs`). Copy the newly installed icon, and then paste it into the “everybody” profile folder (`C:\ProgramData\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs`).

Repeat with the Desktop folder, if you'd like everyone to see a desktop icon for the new program. To open the shared desktop folder, open (C:)\Users\Public\Public Desktop. (You'll have to make the Desktop folder visible first and then make it invisible again afterward.) You've just made that software available and visible to everybody who logs onto the computer.

The Default User Profile

When you create a new account, who decides what the desktop picture will be—and the Start screen configuration, the assortment of desktop icons, and so on?

Well, Microsoft does, of course—but you can change all that. What a newly created account holder sees is only a reflection of the Default user profile. It's yet another folder—this one usually hidden—in your (C:)\Users folder, and it's the common starting point for all profiles.

If you'd like to make some changes to that starting point, turn on “Show hidden files, folders, and drives.” Then open the (C:)\Users\Default folder and make whatever changes you like.