

Go launcher apps

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Do you still launch applications by pressing the Windows key and searching for your app? That's a serviceable way to get your apps up and running, but it's pretty limited. If you've never used an app launcher, now's the time to try one: they're faster and more powerful than any built-in search system, and they can do a lot more than just launch apps. Here's why you should be using one (and everything you can do with it). App Launchers Do More Than Launch Apps Nearly every time we write about launcher apps, many people ask why they should use one over Windows Search. Even though app launchers have been around for awhile, few people realize that they can do a lot more than just launch apps. With one, you can open documents, search the web, make calculations, add items to your calendar or to-do list, run custom commands, and lots more—without ever taking your hands off the keyboard. It's way faster than using the mouse, and once you've given it a shot, you'll never be able to go back to doing things the old way again. In this guide, we'll give you a taste of how to use our favorite application launcher, Launchy, to do all of these things with just a few keystrokes. Launchy works on all platforms, but this guide focuses on Windows users—if you're a Mac user, we recommend checking out our beginner's guide to Quicksilver instead (though this post may give you some ideas of how to use Quicksilver effectively). If you're a Windows user and don't like Launchy, check out our recommended alternatives—you should be able to do just about anything we talk about with those launchers as well. Windows has a bevy of great app launchers available, and they can do a heck of a lot more than just. Read more: G/O Media may get a commission The Basics: Opening Programs, Documents, and Folders While Launchy can do a lot of advanced stuff, it's a good idea to get acquainted with the basics first. Let's start with the simple stuff: launching apps, opening folders, and the other things you probably use Windows Search for. How to Launch an App If you've never used an app launcher before, it's a simple program that runs in the background and waits for your instructions. Here's how it works: You bring up the launcher with a quick hotkey (Alt+Space by default). It pops up instantaneously. Start typing the name of the application you want to launch. After a few letters, it'll pop up in the launcher's window. Press Enter, and your app will start up. You can also type in a few letters and wait a second to see a list of apps and documents that match your query. It's that simple, and the whole process takes place in just a second or two. Tweaking Launchy's Settings You can tweak a lot of settings to customize how this basic behavior works, too. Bring up the main Launchy window with Alt+Space, then click on the settings icon to see some of your options. You can hide it when it loses focus, put it on top of other windows, tweak the hotkey you use to bring it up, and more. Launchy uses a database called a catalog to decide what you can and cannot launch with it. By default, it includes all of the programs in your Start menu, but you can add more, too. To do so: Go to Launchy's settings and click on the Catalog tab. Press the plus sign at the bottom to add a new folder to your catalog. Select your new catalog in the left pane, and click the plus sign in the rightmost pane. You should see a new text box pop up in the right-hand pane. This is where you tell Launchy what kind of files to index in that folder. For example, if you want it to launch shortcuts to programs, you'd type *.lnk here. Click "Rescan Catalog" to add your new folder to Launchy's catalog. You can now use it to launch the shortcuts in that folder. Other Things You Can Launch Again, launching apps is the most basic way you can use this. Here are a few examples of other things you might do: Launch portable apps: I keep a number of portable apps in my Dropbox, which Launchy doesn't automatically catalog. So, by creating a new catalog for *.exe files in C:\Users\Whitson\Dropbox\Portable Apps (and checking "Include Executables"), I can launch them with Launchy just as I would regularly installed apps. Open Buried Directories: I have a few folders that I need to access regularly, but are buried deep within my Dropbox. So, I added my main Dropbox folder to Launchy and checked the "Include Directories" box in the right pane. Now, I can fire up Launchy, type a few letters or a word in the folder I want, and access it much quicker than I could clicking through Windows Explorer. Give Your Favorite Apps Short Keywords: Some apps have similar names, which makes launching them with Launchy difficult—you have to type out more than a few letters before it guesses the correct app. You can fix this problem with "App Keywords." Most launchers have this built-in, but with Launchy, you can recreate this feature with catalogs: just create a folder somewhere and stash some shortcuts of your favorite apps in there. Name them with the keywords you want to use, e.g. np for Notepad, mw for Microsoft Word, and so on. After adding that folder to your catalog, you'll be able to launch those apps with whatever combination of letters you choose, which can be faster than typing in its name. Update: Dustin Luck notes that this shouldn't be necessary most of the time—if the keyword contains letters used in the name of the program, Launchy should learn what your keywords mean automatically. Still, it's nice to have this as a backup just in case. Really, you can do almost anything you want with this. If you ever find you have a set of apps, documents, folders, or other items that are tedious to access, add them into Launchy as a catalog and you'll be able to fire them up in less than a second, without ever removing your hands from the keyboard. Perform More Advanced Tasks with Plugins Okay, so app launchers can launch programs. That's cool, but not mind-blowing. Here's where things get interesting: you can install multiple plugins for specific tasks unrelated to app launching. Launchy comes with a number of plugins, but you can also download others from Launchy's web site and its plugin forum. Some plugins just add certain options to your Launchy index, while others require you to type the name of the plugin, press Tab, then type in your query. Here are a few examples of cool plugins: Controly (built-in) provides access to Control Panel apps from Launchy. Killly kills processes right from Launchy, without the need to press Ctrl+Alt+Esc and wait for the Task Manager. Usage: killly notepad.exe Mathy Resurrected is an advanced calculator. You can type in simple operations like 2+2 or more complicated things like sqrt(16)^3. You can tweak a lot of its usage in the plugin's settings. PuTTY. If you use PuTTY to SSH into your other computers or home servers, this plugin will let you access saved sessions with a few keystrokes. Usage: By default, you can type putty or ssh and the name of your saved PuTTY session, e.g. putty myserver. You can tweak its usage in the plugin's settings. Runner lets you run any command from Launchy, as opposed to opening up Run or the Command Prompt. Usage: cmd ipconfig to run ipconfig. You can add other terminals and options from the plugin's settings. System Power adds shut down, reboot, log off, and other power-related commands to Launchy. You can tweak what words it uses for each command, shut down on a timer, shut down other machines, and more by tweaking the plugin's settings. Weby launches your favorite web sites and can search them. It comes with a number of built-in sites. Usage: Just type the name of the site and press Enter. If you're searching, type the name of the site, press tab, and enter your search terms. For example, you can use it to search Google by typing Google hackintosh, or search YouTube with youtube nyan cat. Some of the built-in sites may be outdated, though, so you'll have to add them yourself (for example, see how to search Lifehacker via Google). See the next section for instructions on how to do a lot more with Weby, too. Create Your Own Tasks to Do Nearly Anything If you're willing to do a bit more work, you can use Launchy to perform just about any task. Here are a few examples of what I've added: Use Weby to Integrate Launchy with Any Webapp If you want to do something a bit more specific than just visit a web site, you can do so with the Weby plugin and some clever URL tricks. For example, if you want to get directions with Google Maps, you can use the following URL as a Weby "search" to do so: my+home+address with your actual home address. Give this search a keyword (like "Nav") and you'll be able to get directions by typing something like nav 123 Main Street into Launchy. You can use this same trick to add an event to your calendar, send an email, update Twitter, add a new note to Evernote, and lots more. See our guide to clever URL commands for more ideas. We use a lot of great webapps, but it takes a few clicks to perform even a simple task, like... Read more Use Shortcuts to Integrate Launchy with Other Programs If you have a favorite app that doesn't have a plugin for Launchy, chances are you can still perform some handy tasks using simple Windows shortcuts. Many apps have command line switches you can use to perform more specific tasks. For example, if you want to open an Incognito Window with Launchy, just create an incognito shortcut using these instructions, name it something like "New Incognito Window," and place it into a folder in Launchy's catalog. Now you can browse privately with just a few keystrokes. Google Chrome's Incognito mode is great for doing a little under-the-radar browsing on your... Read more You can also follow this same process for searching your Windows system with Everything, creating Outlook tasks, notes, contacts, and appointments, and even changing Windows power plans. If you have an app you want to integrate, just see if it has any command line switches and you're on your way to some pretty sweet stuff. Windows only: Make Everything, the already lightning-fast NTFS search tool, even faster by... Read more Use Batch Files to Do Anything You Can Code If you have some scripting skills, you can do nearly anything your heart desires with a few well-placed batch files. Just add your .bat file to a folder of your choosing, add that folder to Launchy's Catalog, and make sure Launchy's set to search for *.bat files in that folder. We've shared a number of useful batch scripts before, including: You can do any of these with Launchy by adding their scripts to a cataloged directory. In the end, the world is your oyster. Anything you can dream up, you can probably figure out a way to get it done with a few keystrokes using an app launcher. If all you want to do is launch apps, then you're probably fine sticking with boring ol' Windows Search or Spotlight. You'd be missing out on a lot of time-saving shortcuts, though, so if you haven't used Launchy before—or never took advantage of everything it could do—we highly recommend giving it a shot. You'll be surprised how much easier it'll make your life.

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