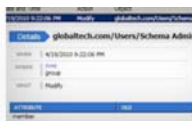


Thu 27 Jan 2011

USB Alert – A free USB stick watcher

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USB Alert is a USB stick

watcher that prevents users from forgetting their USB stick by blocking shutdowns and logoffs as long as a USB stick is connected.

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[Michael Pietroforte](#) is an [MVP](#) with more than 25 years of experience in system administration.



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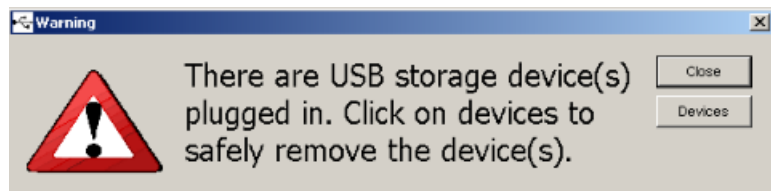
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I wonder if there is a study about the costs involved with forgotten USB sticks in businesses. A user wants to continue work at home or on a business trip, but the required data is on a USB stick in the desktop at the office. Even more problematic are forgotten USB sticks that contain sensitive data.

One solution to this problem is to let users store their data in the cloud. But many feel uncomfortable knowing that only a password prevents hackers around the globe from getting access to their confidential data.



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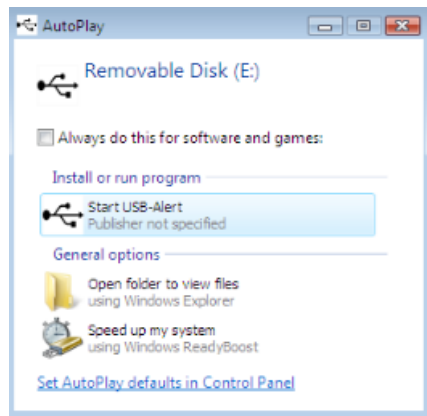
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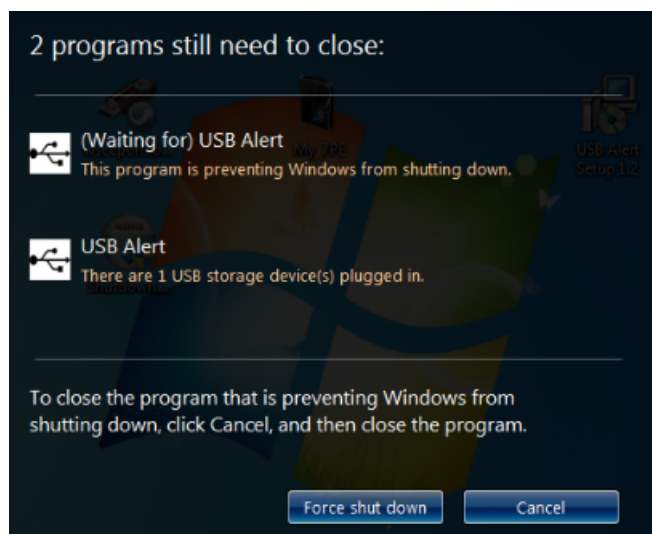
Another way to prevent data loss is to deploy [USB Alert](#) on all your desktops and laptops. This free USB stick watcher raises an alarm whenever the computer is shut down or the user logs off while a USB stick is still connected.

USB Alert comes in two versions: portable and installable. The portable executable and its autorun .inf file have to be copied to the root folder on the USB stick. When the USB stick is inserted, the Windows AutoPlay feature lets you launch USB Alert.

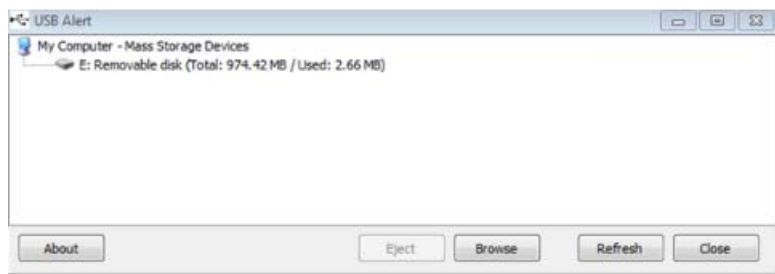
This works fine on Windows XP and Windows Vista. However, for security reasons, autorun from non-optical devices is no longer supported in Windows 7. Thus the only way to make USB Alert work on Windows 7 is to install USB Alert. This will prevent users from leaving their USB stick at the office. Only when they insert their USB stick on other computers are they in danger of forgetting their flash drives. But since the majority of computers still run older Windows versions, it makes sense to copy USB Alert on all USB sticks in your organization and advise users to launch the USB stick watcher when AutoPlay starts.



Note that the behavior of USB Alert is different between Windows XP and Windows Vista/7. On Windows XP, USB Alert will display a warning dialog window whenever you try to log off or shut down the computer with a USB stick still connected. On Windows 7 and Vista, USB Alert will block the AutoEndTasks Windows function (see screenshot).



In any case, the user will then see the USB Alert user interface that allows her to safely eject the USB stick. You can access this program also through the systray.



A few years ago, I discussed a [similar USB watcher](#) tool that is based on a Visual Basic script. This solution also gives you an idea of how you can leverage Group Policy to help forgetful users.

USB Alert

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