# 7

# Tips and Tricks

Even though the Zune hasn't been out long enough to get really down and dirty with hidden secrets, dark hacks, and conspiracy theories, it has plenty of cool features that aren't mentioned often. This chapter is the forum for that discussion. I'll show you some of the Zune's unique and useful abilities (and how to take advantage of them).

I'll also discuss a few hacks and mods that can alter the way you use your Zune. These hacks are very complicated, so I leave it to the amateur professionals online to walk you through the process. But it's still useful to know where you can find inside information and how-tos for those who like to tinker.

# Forgotten Functions

Several important functions of the Zune are worth noting here, most of which aren't secrets. They're the kinds of things that aren't mentioned in the sparse instructions or even on many Zune-related Web sites.

## Musical talents

Although the Zune is capable of holding thousands of photographs, as well as playing high-quality video material, most people are likely to start out using it as a music device. The Zune's music-management system is intuitive and functional, and a few very cool features make the Zune a most desirable device on which to enjoy your music.
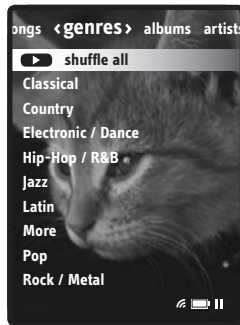
### *Organization*

The Zune and the Zune software libraries organize music in categories, making it easy to find the music you want. Those categories (listed in the Twist at the top of the screen) are:

- Songs

- Genres

- Albums

- Artists

- Playlists

When you are looking for a particular song or artist, or even for a particular style of music, these categories usually are enough. Even so, the Genres menu (**Figure 7.1**) contains nine subcategories, from Classical to Hip-Hop, so you can break your listening down even further.

**Figure 7.1**
The musical genres give you a chance to separate your music out by style.



**Shuffle**

One aspect of digital media players that makes them a big hit is their ability to shuffle thousands of songs, or a few hundred songs, or even ten songs. Whatever your taste, the ability to set the Zune to Shuffle means that you never know for sure what song is going to come up next—which, in a library of a thousand songs, means that you are always going to feel that the music is being presented in a fresh way.

You can set the Zune to shuffle through your entire music collection, within a playlist, within an album, or within a genre. Many people like to create a special playlist with several dozen to several hundred of their favorite songs and then shuffle that playlist. The result is a collection of songs that is 100 percent guaranteed to please you 100 percent of the time. You can't go wrong!
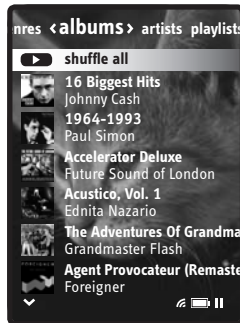
To set up shuffling so that music in any category you are playing shuffles automatically, choose Settings > Music, and set Shuffle to On (**Figure 7.2**). After that, whatever playlist you're listening to is going to shuffle its songs in random order.

**Figure 7.2**
All you need to do is turn on Shuffle in the Music screen.



You probably have already noticed that when you are looking at music in large categories—such as Genres, Songs, or Albums—there's a Shuffle All button at the top of every screen (**Figure 7.3**). Shuffle may not be for everyone, but for many, it's the spice of life.

**Figure 7.3**
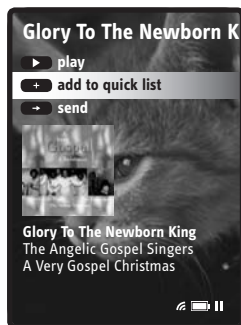You can even shuffle any major category, such as Albums.



## Playlists

Playlists are lists of songs (or other audio files) you group together for one reason or another. Playlists say something about the person who makes them (see Chapter 3, which discusses celebrity playlists), but most important, they allow you to put together just the right blend of music for whatever you want. If you're having a party for people around the age of 40, for example, why not make an '80s playlist for the party? That's just the kind of flexibility that playlists afford you, and making them is well worth your time.
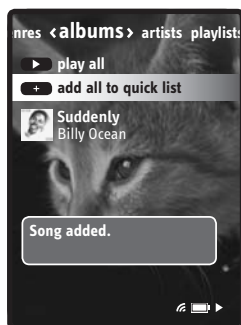
There are two ways to make playlists for the Zune. One method involves the Zune software (as covered in Chapter 3), and the other happens on the Zune player itself.

When you're playing a particularly engrossing song on the Zune, you can add it to the Zune player's onboard playlist, called the quick list. To add a song that you're listening to, simply click the Back button to go back to the song's title page and then click the Add to Quick List button (**Figure 7.4**). The Zune displays a "Song added" message (**Figure 7.5**).

**Figure 7.4**
Clicking the Add to Quick List button adds the current song to the Zune's built-in playlist.

**Figure 7.5**
When you've added a song, you get confirmation.

The quick-list feature gives you the power to form your own playlist on the fly, putting together a bunch of songs quickly without connecting to your PC. After you sync the Zune back with the Zune software, you can turn the quick list into a regular playlist.
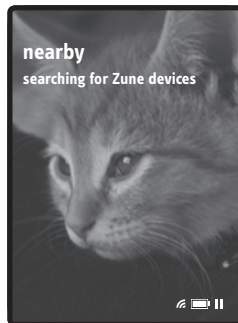
**tip**

**If you want to add an entire album or an artist's whole oeuvre to the quick list, click the Add All to Quick List button instead. This feature puts the whole kit and caboodle in the quick list, but it's handy if you want to dump several albums into the Zune's built-in playlist quickly.**

### Sending/receiving

As I mentioned in Chapter 5, you can send songs to nearby Zune users who are within Wi-Fi range of your unit. To do this, just click the Send button below the Add to Quick List button in the song's title screen. The Zune starts searching for nearby users (**Figure 7.6**). When you get the Nearby list, select the person you want to send to (via the control pad) and press the OK button. The Zune sends the song to the chosen user.

**Figure 7.6**
When you click Send, the Zune looks for nearby Zune users to send the song to.



nearby
searching for Zune devices

Conversely, if another Zune user wants to send you a song, you get a notification. Specifically, you are asked, "[Zune person] is trying to send you a song, do you want to accept it?" Press the control-pad buttons to select Yes and then press the OK button. The song is transferred to your Zune's inbox.

## Blocking Out

If a particular Zune user is bothering you by attempting to send you music you don't want, you can block that user in the Community menu. I want to believe this won't happen often, but for the odd time when the situation arises, it's a nice feature to have.

To block a user, go to the Community area and choose Nearby from the Twist at the top of the screen. The next screen shows you all nearby Zune users. Select the person you want to block, click Block User, and then press the OK button.

### Podcasts

Amazingly, the first version of the Zune doesn't have built-in podcasting capabilities. Even though major podcasting functions aren't available yet, you can still play podcasts on the Zune; you just have to go out and get them yourself, and then load them on the player.

## Videos

When it comes to video content, note that the Zune can convert video resolution it doesn't work with to something that it can handle. If you have a movie with a resolution of, say, 640 x 400 pixels, the Zune

can convert it to 320 x 240 so that it can play properly on its screen.

Another key aspect of video playback is that most videos play horizontally on the Zune, making it like a miniature widescreen TV set (**Figure 7.7**).

**Figure 7.7**
The Zune often plays video horizontally.
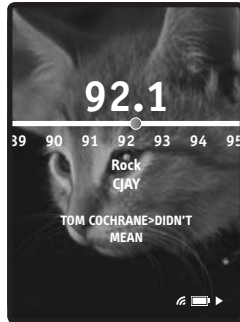


## Radio

The radio feature is exceedingly simple to use. Just choose Radio from the main menu and then use the left and right control-pad buttons to find the station you want. If you want the Zune to find a station for you, press the OK button and choose the Seek option (**Figure 7.8**).

**Figure 7.8**
If you turn Seek on, the Zune finds the stations for you.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the Zune features the Radio Data System (RDS), which shows you not only the station you are listening to but also the genre of music and the song's name (**Figure 7.9**)—a cool feature, to say the least.

**Figure 7.9**
RDS gives you information about the station, its genre, and the song you're listening to.



## Presets

Presets work just like the presets in your car radio, which is to say that a particular station becomes "married" to a button so that you can move from one station to another without scanning the entire FM band to find what you're looking for. If you are interested in placing a station in the presets list, tune to the station you want, press the OK button, and choose Add [station] to Presets.

If you want to listen to a preset station, go to the radio tuner by choosing Radio from the main menu and then press the OK button. The Zune displays your list of presets. Use the control-pad buttons to move to the station you want, and then press the OK button to select it.

**tip**

**The Zune doesn't come with any built-in presets (how could it?), so if you want to set the presets for your area quickly, navigate through the FM band in the tuner and press OK to add the stations you want to the presets list.**

There is no limit to how many presets you can set on the Zune, but if you have too many, the list can become unwieldy. Fortunately, while you scroll through the list, it wraps back to the top (or bottom) so that you can continue searching in a loop rather than going back and forth from top to bottom.
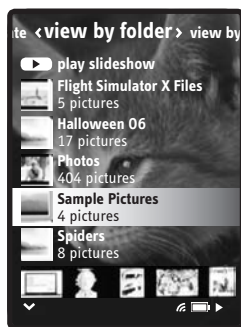
## Radio Reception

You may notice that radio reception on the Zune is nonexistent if you just pick it up and try to tune in a station. If you can't get any stations, check to see whether the headphones are plugged in. On the Zune, the headphones are the only antenna; their presence or absence makes a huge difference in the quality of the FM signals that reach the device.

## Pictures

Pictures are another cool part of the Zune's makeup (**Figure 7.10**). You can store a huge number of photographs on your Zune for use on the device itself, to send to other Zune users, or to connect to a television or monitor somewhere to show off a slideshow. I suppose that it won't be long before single Zune users carry around photos of themselves (perhaps even some in seductive poses) to send to Zune users they find particularly attractive. Ultimately, an entire message could be sent via a photo and a song.
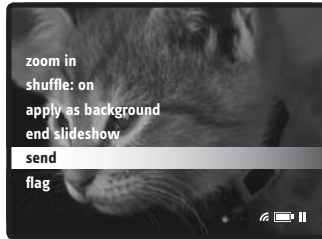
**Figure 7.10**
You can group pictures in several ways.



### Send a shot

If you want to send a particular picture to another Zune user, simply open the picture, press the OK button, and choose Send from the menu that appears (**Figure 7.11**). When you do this, the Zune searches for nearby Zune users to whom you can send the picture.

**Figure 7.11**
You can send any picture to a nearby Zune user.



If you're interested in sending an entire folder of pictures to another user, select the folder in question, press OK, and choose Send from the main screen. (The Send command appears at the top of the screen when you're viewing pictures at folder level.)

### *Zoom, zoom, zoom*

If you want to take a closer look at a picture, select it and press the OK button. Then, from the menu, choose Zoom In (**FIGURE 7.12**). The Zune zooms in on your picture by 50 percent. You can use the control-pad buttons to move around the picture and view it in this close-up mode.

**Figure 7.12**
You can zoom in on any picture on the Zune.

### Slideshows

Another cool feature of the Zune is the slideshow feature. You can play any music you want behind a slideshow. To do this, follow these steps:
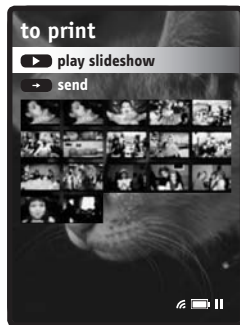
1. Start the music you want to use.

2. Press the Back button repeatedly until you reach the main menu.

3. Choose Pictures from the main menu.

4. Select the pictures you want to use.

   You can do this by selecting either a specific date or a specific picture folder with the control-pad and OK buttons. If you want to use all your pictures, just click Play Slideshow at the top of the Pictures screen.

5. Click the Play Slideshow button at the top of the screen to start the slideshow (**Figure 7.13**).

   The music keeps playing during the entire process.

**Figure 7.13**
Click Play Slideshow to get things going.

**tip**

**When the Zune is connected to a television (via an A/V cable), you can show friends and family impromptu slideshows on a bigger screen. It's a great little entertainment medium.**

The Zune shows each picture for a preset amount of time and then fades out and into another picture from the folder. To change the amount of time between pictures, choose Settings > Pictures. You can set intervals ranging from 3 to 30 seconds (**Figure 7.14**).
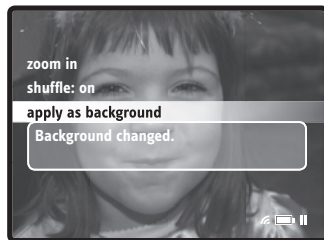
**Figure 7.14**
Set the transition time in the Pictures area of the Settings menu.

## *Background action*

Finally, you can take any picture from the Zune's hard drive and use it as the background screen image. To do this, find a picture you like, press the OK button, and choose Apply As Background from the menu (**Figure 7.15**).

**Figure 7.15**
Any picture
can become
the Zune's
background
image.



# Hacks

Hacking a device such as the Zune is treacherous territory. As soon as you start fiddling with registry information and altering the software (or hardware) that came with your Zune, you probably are voiding your warranty and forfeiting the right to complain if something goes terribly wrong.

Tinkering with your Zune is not for the faint of heart and should be done only if you are willing to live with lost data (songs, videos, photos) and a dead player if the hack doesn't work.

That said, many features that the Zune designers decided not to include in their player are available in other players. Not surprisingly, there are those who want those features, such as being able to turn the Zune into a portable hard drive so that it can be used to ferry files from one PC to another or perhaps to be used as a backup drive for the Zune user.

(If you want to turn your Zune into a portable hard drive, by the way, follow this link on Zuneboards—http://zuneboards.com/OFFICIAL-Use-your-Zune-as-an-External-HD-AND-ADD-FILES-t-695.html—to see the rather lengthy instructions.)

**Figure 7.16**
Zuneboards' discussion of how to use your Zune as a portable hard drive.



What else could possibly be done with hacks and mods to the Zune?

Check out the appendix for Web sites that contain information about other mods and hacks.