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10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

Fri, May 13 '05 at 10:02AM PDT • Submitted by [smellyhippie](#)



My gripe:

Why does Apple have to shove this tool down the user's throat by not making it, including that insipid menu, optional? Telling Spotlight to Ignore your hard drive won't delete existing indexes or databases. Telling Spotlight to ignore your hard drive won't turn off the now-useless menu.

Disclaimer:

I really have no idea if this is the best or even a good way to do this. I want Spotlight gone. I only have Tiger to keep up to date, and I do not run out of date hardware or software.

So here's what I did...

[robg adds: Just a caution if you're going to try this -- I haven't tested it, and I have no idea what the implications may be on other programs that rely on Spotlight. Mail, for instance, uses Spotlight functionality for searching. I have no idea how this hack will affect Mail and the other Spotlight-enabled programs. Consider yourself warned...]

In the Terminal, do this:

```
$ sudo su
# chmod 0000 /Library/Spotlight
# chmod 0000 /System/Library/Spotlight
# chmod 0000 /System/Library/CoreServices/Search.bundle
# chmod 0000 /System/Library/PreferencePanes/Spotlight.prefPane
# chmod 0000 /System/Library/Services/Spotlight.service
# chmod 0000 /System/Library/Contextual Menu Items/SpotlightCM.plugin
# chmod 0000 /System/Library/StartupItems/Metadata
# chmod 0000 /usr/bin/mdimport
# chmod 0000 /usr/bin/mdcheckschem
# chmod 0000 /usr/bin/mdfind
# chmod 0000 /usr/bin/mdls
# chmod 0000 /usr/bin/mdutil
# chmod 0000 /usr/bin/md
```

After a reboot, open a new Terminal and do `sudo su` to make a root shell, then:

```
# rm -r /.Spotlight-V100
# rm -r /private/var/tmp/mds
# exit
```

Why use `chmod`? This hack can be reversed by repairing permissions.

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10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

By: [MostlyHarmless](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 11:41AM PDT

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- 10.4: Find duplicate files using Spot... [+2]
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- Use an unsupported Epson scanner with...
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- 10.4: Set a photo file's creation dat... [+8]
- Print multiple photos in iPhoto [+5]
- A simple fix for Mighty Mouse right-c... [+5]
- 10.4: Backup, restore, resize, and co...
- Start torrent downloads remotely [+3]
- Copy iTunes tracks between libraries

FYI - Over at MacFixit this morning they mentioned you can turn off Spotlight by editing /etc/hostconfig to change "SPOTLIGHT=-YES-" to "SPOTLIGHT=-NO-".

- [Not Quite Everything](#) - By: [Blacktiger](#) on Sat, May 14 '05 at 5:53AM PDT
 - [Not Quite Everything](#) - By: [barrysharp](#) on Sat, May 14 '05 at 10:32PM PDT

A better way

By: [jjcgg](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 12:10PM PDT

As the previous poster said, first modify /etc/hostconfig to read:

```
SPOTLIGHT=-NO-
```

Then to get rid of the existing index, run these two commands from Terminal:

```
mdutil -i off /
mdutil -E /
```

The first command disables indexing on the boot volume, and the second erases the existing template. You can then use Activity Monitor to kill any `mds` or `mdimport` processes or else just reboot. Futzing with permissions will probably break OS updates that try to update files in the zeroed-out directories and of course won't survive a repair-permissions run.

If you later change your mind and decide you want Spotlight after all, it's easy to reactivate. Set

```
SPOTLIGHT=-YES-
```

in /etc/hostconfig, run in Terminal:

```
mdutil -i on /
```

and reboot.

- [Right](#) - By: [mholve](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 6:31PM PDT
- [what happens](#) - By: [timcrawf](#) on Sat, May 14 '05 at 2:17PM PDT
 - [what happens](#) - By: [bluehz](#) on Mon, May 16 '05 at 7:44AM PDT
 - [Finder searching with Spotlight](#) - By: [scbarton](#) on Thu, Sep 8 '05 at 8:12AM PDT
 - [Finder searching with Spotlight](#) - By: [macjonte](#) on Wed, Jan 4 '06 at 3:47AM PST
- [A better way](#) - By: [mirv42](#) on Tue, May 24 '05 at 1:50PM PDT

10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

By: [Makosuke](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 2:22PM PDT

Actually, at least with the drives I've tried it on, adding a drive to the "Privacy" list in Spotlight's preference pane does indeed immediately delete the index file for the drive. It's going to leave an invisible folder, but only to tell itself not to index it.

I say this not because I like Spotlight that much (good idea, still too funky and I miss the simplicity of the old Finder filename search), but because one of my partitions was incessantly indexing every time I downloaded something with Thoth (apparently it interpreted the temp files as text that needed indexing, leading to a ridiculous amount of scanning), even when I told it to ignore that folder, so I eventually just added the whole drive. At which point, I suddenly had 500MB more free space, leading me to believe that indeed, the index is deleted.

- [Thoth sends mds out of control](#) - By: [dogen](#) on Wed, May 25 '05 at 2:06PM PDT

What if you repair permissions?

By: [juz10mac](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 3:13PM PDT

Won't repairing permissions inadvertently re-enable spotlight?

10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

By: [profit](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 4:27PM PDT

Man. I totally agree with this sentiment. Apple has long been too heavy handed with their enforced new 'features'. I can't stand the 'whoosh' Dashboard thing that comes up every time I accidentally miss the eject key on my powerbook. And what's with Safari going out and fetching information on the web without my explicit permission? Doesn't that bastard Jobs know that I only want my computer to do things when I ask? And who decided I need to accept the feature bloat and processor load of advanced digital codecs? I like my quicktime the way it was. Slow and Sorenson.

I'm also very worried about the security implications of the new APIs. With Core Data and Core Image making it possible for more people to write 'quality' apps more quickly, who knows what kind of spyware will be developed all with shiny new images to trojan it onto my computer. And with Automator, even brain damaged monkeys can write malware to erase files on my computer and composite my pictures of my kids onto gay porn.

- [10.4: Reduce launch times for AppleSc...](#)
- [Auto-sync clock when booted into Wind...](#)

LINKS last 2 weeks
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- [Applescript and GraphicConverter](#)
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- [Safari can't connect to secure pages](#)
- [Get Track Info From iTunes Music store](#)
- [Mighty Mouse Scrolling background windows](#)
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The Editor's Corner...

Here are some of my (robg) other projects...

- [The Robservatory](#)
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- [Inside iWork](#)
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System 10.4

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- [Feature: Get in Sync: BlackBerry](#)

The macosxhints Poll

What one piece of Apple hardware do you most hope to see introduced at Macworld Expo?

- Dual quad-core CPU (8x) Mac
- Gaming console
- Keyboard with iPod dock
- LCD display: 17" widescreen
- LCD display: some other size
- Mac Tablet with docking station
- An iPod with the full Beatles catalog
- Some sort of phone device
- True video iPod
- Ultra small and light MacBook Pro
- Something else entirely (comment!)

3,769 votes | 40 comments

All of this clearly shows apple's arrogance in providing features any reasonable person wouldn't want. They even flaunt their "we're right, you're wrong" attitude by providing a [list](#) of *some* of the things they are doing to us.

And there's no way to avoid any of these new 'features'.

Bastards

- [10.4: Completely disable Spotlight](#) - By: [sjmills](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 5:13PM PDT
- [10.4: Completely disable Spotlight](#) - By: [necrosis](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 5:34PM PDT
- [Jinkies...](#) - By: [mholve](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 6:33PM PDT
- [10.4: Completely disable Spotlight](#) - By: [metafeather](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 7:10PM PDT
 - [10.4: Completely disable Spotlight](#) - By: [profit](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 11:38PM PDT
 - [Good one...](#) - By: [mholve](#) on Sat, May 14 '05 at 9:18PM PDT
- [10.4: Completely disable Spotlight](#) - By: [Cartoonasaurus](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 10:17PM PDT
- [10.4: Completely disable Spotlight](#) - By: [okto](#) on Fri, May 20 '05 at 9:53PM PDT

10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

By: [Fjl](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 4:28PM PDT

My own gripe with Spotlight is that it shows *my* files when invoked from another user account. And I saw no way of telling it to index my files for me only. (The reverse is feasible, just ask each user to configure Spotlight to ignore every other user's files - not really good).

Maybe I'm mistaken and overlooked something?

- [permissions](#) - By: [saint.duo](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 5:59PM PDT
 - [Correct...](#) - By: [mholve](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 6:35PM PDT

10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

By: [XJO](#) on Fri, May 13 '05 at 9:54PM PDT

So getting rid of spotlight saves space and stuff, but it does kill searching in Mail.app. I tested it. I would much prefer more options to control it than what Apple provides, as opposed to killing it.

10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

By: [burntout](#) on Sat, May 14 '05 at 9:23AM PDT

Whinge, whinge, whinge!
If you don't like it, don't use it, and certainly don't hack up your system using this ridiculously heavy-handed method.

- [10.4: Completely disable Spotlight](#) - By: [SM](#) on Sat, Jul 2 '05 at 8:47AM PDT
 - [search replacement](#) - By: [sjk](#) on Sat, Jul 2 '05 at 9:48PM PDT

10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

By: [barrysharp](#) on Sat, May 14 '05 at 10:29PM PDT

Absolutely agree with this/these statement. You're right-on.

Regards... Barry Sharp

- [10.4: Completely disable Spotlight](#) - By: [barrysharp](#) on Sat, May 14 '05 at 10:31PM PDT

Spotlight's Privacy Tab in Preferences

By: [deepkid](#) on Sun, May 15 '05 at 11:45PM PDT

As I mentioned on here when Tiger first came out, I can't believe that Apple shipped Spotlight with such loose security in the privacy tab in preferences. Consider that if content you wish to be excluded from its search is highly-sensitive, it's just sitting there in the open for anyone else using the machine to see. Spotlight's privacy tab should be password protected at the very least.

- [Spotlight's Privacy Tab in Preferences](#) - By: [cfooster](#) on Tue, May 17 '05 at 10:36AM PDT

Replacement 'find'

By: [cfooster](#) on Tue, May 17 '05 at 10:42AM PDT

If you want to disable Spotlight until Apple fixes some of its drawbacks, but still need to search for files like you used to, you may want to check out [Locator](#) (a gui for the unix 'locate' command).

10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

By: [arg](#) on Mon, May 30 '05 at 2:34PM PDT

While I agree with the original poster's sentiments -- Spotlight should be an option not a requirement, especially considering how problematic it is for some users -- I think the posted method for disabling Spotlight is pretty drastic and potentially harmful. And, as stated, a simple permissions repair will probably revert the Spotlight behavior, so it may not even be particularly effective. I, too, however, am bothered by Spotlight and really wanted to return old-style find-by-name searches. Hey, don't scream at me. It is and should be a personal preference, and Apple has made it not so.

I've done some research and testing, and for those of us who are interested, I think I've found a pretty good compromise that disables Spotlight metadata searching but still allows for find-by-name searches, even from the Spotlight pull-down. If anyone is still following this thread and is interested, I have posted the details here:

<http://systemsboy.blogspot.com/2005/05/getting-back-to-search-basics.html>

Hopefully someone will find this as useful as I have.

- [10.4: Completely disable Spotlight](#) - By: [osxpounder](#) on Tue, May 31 '05 at 11:20PM PDT
- [10.4: Completely disable Spotlight](#) - By: [DonaemouS](#) on Fri, Jun 24 '05 at 5:40AM PDT

10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

By: [Zo-1](#) on Sun, Jul 3 '05 at 4:43AM PDT

I know you guys like to live by the terminal (die by the terminal) but there's [Spotless](#) to disable and enable Spotlight on the fly, and [Disable Tiger Features](#) for those sick of Spotlight and Dashboard . . .and they're both free . . .

- [10.4: Completely disable Spotlight](#) - By: [Quantum0726](#) on Mon, Jul 11 '05 at 1:12AM PDT

10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

By: [anoved](#) on Mon, Jul 11 '05 at 12:17AM PDT

I really miss the Panther Finder search interface. I don't mind Spotlight, per se, but I never need to search for applications or frequently-accessed documents - I keep my machine nice and organized anyway, so it's not a challenge to find these things. When I do need to search for something, it is typically a very old file or an obscure one hidden among many similar ones in a known directory tree. I have found myself frustrated on more than one such occasion since *grading to Tiger, because the dynamic search interface starts processing my query before I've even finished composing it. And as I said, typically when I search it is for one of many similar files; this means that once I configure my search options and start typing in the actual search text, I get intermittent beach-ball and lots of wasted processor time as the Finder's results list eagerly starts suggesting hundreds - often thousands - of unwanted files. If the interface would simply wait until I had finished typing (just a few letters), all that churning and rearranging of results could be skipped and a concise list of 6 to 12 matches could be displayed directly. I know this because I have performed the same kind of task many times in Panther, with the traditional search interface, and it worked great.

My point is that sometimes, waiting to see what the user has to say is a Good Thing; ever meet someone who was so eager to please or prove themselves that they incessantly interrupt you with their attempts to anticipate and finish your sentences for you? They are not helpful, bless their souls, and neither is auto-searching, sometimes (I recognize the cool-factor and real utility of dynamic interfaces and examples like Google Suggest, but I simply assert that there are some cases in which it is faster, simpler, and simply more accurate to begin with the complete query).

Apple seems to have a thing with fiddling with searching. System 7.5 had a nice search utility; then they introduced Sherlock, which was fine, but no one I knew was really begging for it, nor did they come to depend on it. Likewise, I thought previous iterations of OS X had a fine search capability, and then Spotlight was introduced. Is it the case that many people do not use folders to organize their files? I'd never really thought of that, but I suppose it could explain the perpetual promise of better searching.

10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

By: [peet1](#) on Tue, Sep 13 '05 at 4:55AM PDT

Just a note to everyone here who says that Spotlight's a great thing and I should just shove it because I don't 'have' to upgrade. I'm a Sys Admin in higher ed. I've been given a mandate to keep all computers on the same OS for a functionality/usability standpoint. As Apple only allows the current OS to run on their shipping machines, I am forced to run 10.4.

I like much of 10.4 many of the 200 reasons Apple touts are compelling enough to upgrade for on their own. Can you say ACL's!

However when Spotlight enabled clients log into my server (mount their Network homedirectory) they HOSE my network right around 13 clients brings my xServe to it's knees. If 4 or 5 of those clients initiate Spotlight searches, the Server times out and 'disconnects' all connected users. Who then get to enjoy the BeachBall swirl.

Spotlight is an indefensible feature. Yes it is a step in the right direction, but it us too utterly

immature of a feature to force on users. I'm faced with the choice of disabling Spoghtlight entirely or not indexing any volumes ... killing all quality find by content searching in Mail and other apps.

Quit telling people to go buy Windows just because they speak up about valid problems in Mac OS. You sound like the psycho right-wing nutz who say I'm un-American because I don't believe in the policies of the Bush administration. Please take a moment to realize that Apple is not perfect, Mac OS is not perfect, Steve Jobs is not perfect and Spotlight sure as hell is NOT PERFECT (or even all that good).

- [10.4: Completely disable Spotlight](#) - By: [StevenRiggins](#) on Mon, Sep 19 '05 at 6:02PM PDT

10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

By: [obiwan2u](#) on Wed, Sep 28 '05 at 5:58AM PDT

Reasons why I don't like Spotlight:

- In the System Preferences->Spotlight->Search Results screen, it says "Only selected categories will appear in Spotlight search results". Does that mean that files under those categories will still be searched? Yes, I can search the internet to figure this out, but it's poor GUI design.
- In the System Preferences->Spotlight->Search Results screen, there's no way to figure out which "Documents" it's referring to (is it the Documents directory which is the default for the webserver?)
- In the search results, it doesn't obviously show where the found things are. If you search for something common, you'll get many many search results lines which look identical. Very poorly designed.
- There's no way to temporarily disable Spotlight.

Also, if I disable Spotlight can I still search for things using Finder->File->Find ?

Ben in DC
PublicMailbox at benslade dot.com
(append 030516 to the subj to bypass spam filters)
"It's the mark of an educated mind to be moved by statistic"

10.4: Completely disable Spotlight

By: [dbolli](#) on Sat, Sep 2 '06 at 12:41AM PDT

Hi All,

A better solution (IMHO) if mdimport is crashing is to examine the crashdump to ascertain which .mdimporter is causing the crash.

Then from Terminal:

```
mdimport -L
cd <dir-of-mdimporter>
mv <thing.mdimporter> <thing.tmp>
mdimport -p /
```

to check that mdimport no longer crashes (for boot volume in this example)

Hope this helps.

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