Visual Basic/HTML Help Confusion in MSDN
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I had received the following email from a gentleman in Benelux*:

"In the manual pages of Microsoft Visual Basic 6.0 Programmer's Guide, it's written that when you use the application setup wizard, the necessary files will be included in your application to work with HTML Help. It's also written that these files aren't necessary enough to work properly for all users. So, I think it must be possible to use the HTML Help files without Internet Explorer as long as you include the necessary files (.dll, .ocx, ...) What I want to know is what are the minimum number of these files you need to include to work properly. I know it's easier to distribute Internet Explorer with the application but my superiors don't want to force their clients to install Internet Explorer, although most of them already have it installed, I suppose.

Thanks in advance,
Frederik"

Taking a look around the July 1999 MSDN, I found the following in the Visual Basic Concepts section, which could certainly lead to the confusion evident in the above email:

Distributing Help with Your Application
...
Distributing HTML Help

HTML Help is a relatively new technology, hence you can't assume that every user will have the files needed to view HTML Help. The Package and Deployment Wizard will add a dependency for the HTML Help file (.chm) referenced by your application; but it may not add all dependencies for the HTML Help viewer files. You will need to modify your setup to include these files. Consult the documentation for your HTML Help authoring tool for more information on which files are required in a given situation.

At the time of this update in February 2003 I find the above paragragh still exists in the same location in MSDN Online.

This reminds me of Microsoft's earlier work on a file they were going to call hhrun.exe. This is mentioned in the *Official Microsoft HTML Help Authoring Kit* by Steve Wexler (Microsoft Press, ISBN 1-57231-603-9):

Internet Explorer Runtime Setup
At the time of this writing, a freely-distributable setup program that installs the Internet Explorer runtime engine was in development and should be available by the time you are reading this.

You will only need to distribute this setup program if you are not sure if your users will have Internet Explorer installed.

Hhrun.exe never happened and isn't going to, as it is not possible to distribute just the Internet Explorer files necessary to display HTML Help. The only possibility there is to get HTML Help functionality on a given machine in this manner is to use the silent install technique for Internet Explorer 5. This is outlined in fellow MVP Paul O'Rear's paper How to Create a Silent, Minimal Install of Microsoft IE5 for Products using Microsoft HTML Help. Paul had access to the Internet Explorer development team during the writing of this paper, and the technique works well. Implementation is best provided by using an installation utility that allows for scripting, or by creating a small standalone EXE with VC++ or Delphi to carry out the necessary functions that can be called from an installation utility. Tools for these solutions are available from the website where you found this paper. Note that this method installs IE5 on the end user's machine without making it the default browser and without implementing the desktop functionality of IE5.

The following table outlines the minimum requirements to view HTML Help files on a given system. Paul's paper outlines the minimum method necessary to fulfill these requirements:

Product	File	Purpose	Target Folder
Internet Explorer		Supply's the layout engine for HTML Help. The entire browser must be installed on the end-user's system. Version 4.x or later is highly recommended for full HTML Help functionality. Internet Explorer 4 installs hhupd.exe version 1.0, and Internet Explorer 5 installs hhupd.exe version 1.21. Installing the Internet Explorer 5.5 Platform Preview also installs the HTML Help viewer components from hhupd.exe version 1.3, but only if hhctrl.ocx is earlier than the version that shipped with IE 5.00 (4.73.8412).	Default folder is <%progfiles%>\internet explorer
hhupd.exe	Installs the following files:		
	hhctrl.ocx	HTML Help ActiveX control	<%windir%>\system
	itircl.dll	Supports full-text search.	<%windir%>\system
	itss.dll	Handles the its: and ms-its: pluggable protocols along with the hard-wired mk:@MSITStore protocol. It is also used for both compressing and decompressing files -- that's either done automatically via the three protocols	<%windir%>\system

		(decompressing) or via the IStorage interface that itss supports (both compression and decompression).	
	hh.exe	The default HTML Help window	<%windir%>

For a rather complete look at some of the more technical aspects of installing and configuring a system for use with HTML Help, see fellow MVP Robert Chandler's HTML Help Tech Info page.

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