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Simple "ntldr is missing" fix with boot floppy, CD-R, or USB flash

Update March 21, 2011: The phone number in the readme.txt file is no longer active. I also updated the home page.

If you got this error on Windows 7 / Vista machine, this page isn't for you, there's an easier fix:

"NeoSmart.net" has a fantastic article on "Recovering the Windows Vista Bootloader from the DVD" and an awesome program called EasyBCD.

For Windows XP (or Windows 2000, or NT4, or Windows 98) users, here's what happened:

When your computer starts, the "BIOS" attempts to find the primary hard drive's active partition to read the first sector for the "Master Boot Record", it uses that info to load the rest of the OS. For Windows NT4/2k/XP the MBR is pointed to the NTLDR (New Technology Loader). If the BIOS looked at the wrong drive or the wrong partition, if the partition wasn't active, if the MBR was damaged, or the MBR didn't list NTLDR in the right place, or the location of NTLDR changed, if the system was not yet fully setup, or if you had a hardware failure in one of the connections (cable, drive, motherboard), or if your hard drive got erased, you'd get the error.

Did you just plug something in? Unplug it

If you recently changed hardware, or a BIOS setting change, change it back. This could be as simple as a floppy disk left in the disk drive, or a usb stick or external hard drive being plugged in. (What if I made new changes that I want to keep?).

Making the boot disk to work around the BIOS, MBR, NTLDR, and boot.ini problems

Step 1. Get a blank floppy/cd-r/usb (whatever is on it will be erased), and put it into a working computer.

Step 2. If you have a working Windows machine download my fix: Floppy fixntldr.exe | CD-R fixntldriso.zip | USB ntldrusb.zip onto a working computer (Backup copies of these files available at http://ntldrismissing.com) (What if I don't want to download a file from a website I don't trust?). (64 bit WinXP Floppy 64ntflop.exe | CD-R 64ntiso.zip | Files 64ntfile.zip)
Do you remember if the broken computers had the Windows installation in "Windows"? If you can't remember just keep going (What if it was not named Windows but WINNT like in NT4 or 2000?) .
(If your backup system is NT4 or Windows 2000: What if my backup system is Mac / Linux or another alt OS?).

Step 3. Make the new boot disk:
*Floppy: Don't put the fixntldr.exe on your floppy drive, but the file on your desktop or anywhere on your C: drive. Run the fixntldr.exe file by double clicking it. Click OK to overwrite the blank floppy disc in the working computer, you should see some screens about writing a new floppy disk. (If you don't like running an exe from me, you can run fixntldr_RawRite.zip and just replace the RawRite.exe file inside with one you trust) (now go to step 4)

*CD-R: This is not a normal file you burn to a CD, it is an "ISO" file, you must first extract the fixntldriso.zip file by right clicking it and choosing "Extract All" then Next>Next>Finish.
Windows 7: Double click fixntldr.iso and follow the prompts.
Windows XP: use "ISO Recorder" from http://isorecorder.alexfeinman.com/isorecorder.htm
Windows 2000: Install Active ISO Burner "IsoBurner-Setup.exe". Then right click the fixntldr.iso file and choose to "Copy image to CD" or "Burn ISO file" and let it burn the cd (now go to step 4)
*USB: Because its so complex, it gets its own page, when done, come back and move to step 4: Screenshots of every step of making the USB disk and boot with it

Step 4. Put the new floppy/cd-r/usb you have just created into the computer that gets the NTLDR is missing error message, turn the broken computer off.

Using the boot disk in the computer with the "NTLDR is missing" error.

Step 5. Power on the broken computer with the floppy/cd-r/usb inside it/plugged into it (if the computer was already on, restart it). Once your computer gets past the BIOS screen your computer should try to access the boot disk and you should see a black screen with white letters (What if I don't see this screen?). that says:

1ST TRY THIS seleccione esto primero
2ND TRY THIS essayez ceci en deuxieme
3RD TRY THIS wahlen Sie diesen Third
4TH TRY THIS selezioni questo fourth
5TH TRY THIS selecione este fifth
6TH TRY THIS seleccione este sexto
7TH TRY THIS essayez ceci en septieme
8TH TRY THIS wahlen Sie dieses achte
9TH TRY THIS selezioni questo nono
10TH TRY THIS selecione este decimo

(I threw in some Spanish / French / German / Italian / Portuguese for international flavor.)

This file is set up to automatically select the "1ST TRY THIS" choice after 30 seconds. Try it first, if it was the wrong selection, you will likely get one of these four errors:

Error 1. Windows could not start because file "system32hal.dll was missing or corrupt

Error 2. Windows could not start because of a computer disk hardware configuration problem. Could not read from the selected boot disk. Check boot path and disk hardware. Please check the Windows documentation about hardware disk configuration and your hardware reference manuals for additional information.

Error 3. I/O Error accessing boot sector file multi(0)disk(0)fdisk(0)BOOTSECT.DOS

Error 4. Immediate reboot

I suggest going through all 10 options until you find one that works, if none work, you can try pressing F8 at the "1st Try This" selection screen, it will give you a prompt where you can select Safe Mode, and then try the "1st Try This" option again. Safe Mode is a special "minimal" version of Windows that doesn't load certain parts of the operating system that might have caused the problem. (What if none of the options worked?) .

Step 6. Use windows to fix the boot files on the hard drive. And *Please Donate* by clicking the Donate button below

If you got back into Windows, stop whatever you are doing and backup your most important information from this computer.

Now that you are done backing up the most important info, try to change back whatever you were last doing and boot normally, it that doesn't work, put the floppy back into the broken computer and double click the fixntldr.bat file on the floppy drive, if it asks you to overwrite a file, just type in y for yes (the file copies boot.ini, ntldr, ntdetect.com from the floppy to the C: drive and removes the read only attributes). That process take a few minutes, then remove the floppy and reboot.

If you are using the cd or usb solution, copy the boot.ini, ntldr, and ntdetect.com files to My Computer > Local Disk C: > and overwite whatever files might be there, then right click each file, choose properties, uncheck the Read Only attribute, and click OK.

If you get back into Windows again, you can change that "1st Try This" menu by going into Start > Control Panel > PerformanceAndMaintenance/System > Advanced tab > Startup and Recovery section, Settings button > System Startup; then change the "Default Operating System:" to the selection that worked for you, and change the box that says "Time to display list of operating systems" to however many seconds you want (usually 1 second). Click OK twice. (screenshots)

If you copy the file over and boot up and get a "NTLDR is compressed" error message, be sure to uncheck "compress contents to save space" on the hard drive.

(What if the bootdisk worked, but I can't get into Windows without it?) .

(What if I want to do further research?) . (Can I read other peoples questions and your answers? Sure: http://m-ntldrismissing.blogspot.com/)

It worked! Please help me back.

All done? Hi, I'm Miles Comer (on twitter as @ntldrismissing)and I developed this "solution" back in 2002 when I had to fix my relatives computer without me standing over their shoulder. If I fixed it for you, might I humbly suggest you use a credit card or PayPal to donate for $5 or whatever amount you choose.

PayPal email address: milescomer@gmail.com
If you don't have a credit card or pay pal account, you can mail a check to me, just send an email to milescomer@gmail.com and I'll let you know my mailing address.

If you want to say "thanks, it worked for me", just add a comment to this blog post "Sing your praises here".

I added this button because I am sometimes told that the other Donate button doesn't show up.

If you don't already have a free "Dropbox" account. If you sign up with this link: http://db.tt/D5BQcbf I get additional space to store stuff. Dropbox is a program that creates a folder called "My Dropbox" and anything you put in that folder gets backed up to their website, and if you have more than one computer, or like an iPhone /

iPad, Android, or Blackberry, it will sync the folder to all the devices. So if your computer dies on you again, these "most important documents on dropbox" will be available on the other computers, or on the website.

The free Dropbox account is 2 gigs. I personally paid $100 to get 50 gigs for a year. And when I say "I paid" I mean "Your donations paid", so thanks again :-)

Oh and one more thing about Dropbox, is my Mom has her own free 2 gig dropbox account, I can make a new folder called "Miles and Mom's shared files" and then share it with her dropbox account, if she accepts, whenever I want to send her a file, I just put it in the "My Dropbox Miles and Mom's shared files" folder, and moments later, it appears on her computer. It's great for sharing all those pictures directly from my digital camera, and I don't have to upload them to a website first.

So again, if you don't have it, you should, free 2 gig Dropbox account, and put your most important 2 gigs of files there.

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A free way to help me would be to link back to my webpage. Either from your own web page, or if you belong to any discussion forum that has to do with computers, or has a lounge section, why not let everyone know I helped you out by making a post and in that post, link back to my webpage? Use this address in case I change something in the future:

http://ntldrismissing.com/

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The original "Basic Glossary of Grammar" is still available at http://www.basic-glossariess.com

What if I made new changes that I want to keep?

Adding a new hard drive or a new drive array often causes your computer to miss the NTLDR, to fix it you'll want to specify in the BIOS which device to boot from first, and you'll want it on your IDE0 channel and as the master

(first on the chain) with jumpers set to Master, and then use fdisk to make sure that the first partition is a primary partition (and set as active), and that none of the other drives or partitions are set to active. Try setting the BIOS to it's defaults or clearing the CMOS memory. If you made changes as drastic as a new motherboard you may want to run a repair install as described here:

Repair Install

http://www.techspot.com/vb/topic8356.html

Come back if you still get the error after that. Go back

What if I don't want to download a file from a website I don't trust?

If you want to make a floppy yourself, format it using a Windows NT/2000/XP computer (it can't be Windows 95/98/ME) and then get a copy of 3 files from a working Windows NT/2000/XP computer: NTLDR, ntdetect.com, and boot.ini come off the root of the C: drive. Either put those on the floppy and boot up with it, or somehow copy those to the C: drive of the broken computer.

If you can't get access to those files, but still don't want to run an executable from a website off the internet, download and expand onto the floppy this zip file: fixntldr.zip.

What's in fixntldr.zip?

Two program files copied from a Windows XP installation named "ntldr" and "ntdetect.com" these assist in booting your existing installation.

And a text file named "boot.ini" that is what you use to make the selection of which partition and disk you are trying to boot from. The contents of boot.ini are as follows:

[Boot Loader]
timeout=30
Default=multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(0)partition(1)Windows

[Operating Systems]
multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(0)partition(1)Windows="1ST TRY THIS seleccione esto primero" /fastdetect
multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(1)partition(1)Windows="2ND TRY THIS essayez ceci en deuxieme" /fastdetect
multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(0)partition(2)Windows="3RD TRY THIS wahlen Sie diesen Third" /fastdetect
multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(1)partition(2)Windows="4TH TRY THIS selezioni questo fourth" /fastdetect
multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(0)partition(3)Windows="5TH TRY THIS selecione este fifth" /fastdetect
multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(1)partition(3)Windows="6TH TRY THIS seleccione este sexto" /fastdetect
multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(0)partition(4)Windows="7TH TRY THIS essayez ceci en septieme" /fastdetect
multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(1)partition(4)Windows="8TH TRY THIS wahlen Sie dieses achte" /fastdetect
C:="9TH TRY THIS selezioni questo nono"
D:="10TH TRY THIS selecione este decimo"

winxp.ini has "Winxp" instead of Windows, and Winnt.ini has "Winnt" instead of Windows.

I threw in some Spanish / French / German / Italian / Portuguese for international flavor.

The contents of fixntldr.bat file is:

```
%systemdrive%
cd

rename boot.ini boot.ini.bak
rename ntldr ntldr.bak
rename ntdetect.com ntdetect.com.bak

copy a:oot.ini boot.ini /-Y
copy a: tldr ntldr /-Y
copy a: tdetect.com ntdetect.com /-Y

attrib boot.ini -h -r -s -a
attrib ntldr -h -r -s -a
attrib ntdetect.com -h -r -s -a
```

(It is renaming the files on C:, copying the files from A:, then removing the hidden, read only, system, and archive attributes. My sincere thanks to Jorge Toscano for providing the code for the bat file and the Portuguese translation)

How to make a bootable CD http://nightowl.radified.com/bootcd/bootcdintro.html Go Back

What if my backup system is Linux or another alt OS?

Floppy: (fixntldr-winnt if you are using Windows 2000 or Windows NT4) FIXNTLDR ISO image for Windows NT4 and Windows 2000 (ntldrusb-winnt for Windows NT4 or 2000 or upgrades from)

I made the disk an executable to make it easier to make a floppy. Of course that only works for Microsoft OS's. If you back up system is Linux or any other alternative operating system, then use xpnt4lix.zip / xpnt4lix.rar for Windows XP installs or 2knt4lix.zip / 2knt4lix.rar for Windows 2000 or NT4 installs, you will need to uncompress those files). (These are previous versions in case those img files don't work for you: fixntldrimg.zip or fixntldrimg.rar). You'll need a program like rawrite.exe (which works in DOS if you can get there from a Win98 boot disk) but for your OS. Read RedHat talk about making a floppy from an image (and I have it on good word that the command in linux is "dd if=filename.img of=/dev/fd0" or do a search on Google. You may also be able to do that linux command line in a Mac. But if you have an easy way to make a boot floppy on a Mac I don't know about, please let me know milescomer@gmail.com , or just send it along using one of the forms. If you give me a solution. I'll give you $10 from the pay pal account on this site.

If none of these options work for you, check out the What if I don't want to download a file from a website I don't trust? section to try and find a way you can create the disk yourself with your current configuration, then drop me a line to let me know how you did it. Go Back.

What if it was not named Windows but WINNT like in NT4 or 2000?

For a floppy: Instead of just the fixntldr.exe, use the fixntldr-winnt.exe file if your system is NT4, or 2000, or was upgraded from a previous installation of NT4 or 2000.

For a CD-RW: fixntldriso4w2k.zip

For a USB drive: ntldrusb-winnt.zip Screenshots of every step of making the USB disk and boot with it

If you named your windows directory something like "shinyhappypeople" then open the boot.ini file and change any mention of "windows" to "shinyhappypeople" like so:

multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(0)partition(1)shinyhappypeople="1ST TRY THIS"

Save changes, and put the disk back in and continue on trying the 10 choices. Go Back

What if I don't see this screen?

If you do not see the screen come up with the different selections and immediately goes back to the "NTLDR is missing, press any key to restart" error, then you will need to change the "boot order" in your systems BIOS to first select the Floppy Drive (sometimes called "Removable Media Drive") before it tries to boot to the Hard Disk (sometimes called "Fixed Disk" drive). If you are using the cd or usb solutions, move those before hard drive.

To get to the BIOS, when the computer first starts try pressing the CTRL or ESC or END or DELETE or F1-12 keys to get it to stop trying to load windows and instead go to a screen that allows you to make configuration changes to your machine. Once there, try looking for a "Boot Order" screen that will list your floppy, cd-rom, and hard drives with a number, (typically 1-3), look for instructions on the screen on how to make changes, and move your floppy to 1 and CD-ROM to 2, find a way to exit and be sure to save your changes. Go Back

What if none of the options worked?

If using the boot disk to create a new MBR and NTLDR did not help, or copying the files to the root of the C: drive and you remove the disk and still get the message when you boot up, your options for a solution diverge into different areas. Then we know that the programs are fine, and the 3 startup files are fine, but perhaps the MBR is incorrect. Correcting the MBR takes a few different directions, choose any of the following sections:

Installation CD Option

Performing a "Repair" installation of windows. Get an installation CD: (the full version of the Windows XP CD, the upgrade version is non-bootable). Start your computer with your XP (or 2000) CD (in your BIOS "Boot Sequence" the CD-Rom will need to be accessed before the hard drive, and a dialog will appear that says "Press any key to boot from CD..." and you need to press a key on the keyboard to have it begin booting from the CD)

See screenshot of the repair install in action:
http://www.techspot.com/vb/topic8356.html

Recovery Console Option

You can choose to repair a windows installation from the recovery console. Once you are logged in to your recovery console, select the number that represent your C: drive more than likely it will be 1. It will ask for your admin password, enter it you have one or just hit enter if you don't know it. Follow the recovery console instructions from here:

http://www.5starsupport.com/faq/booting.htm#7-9

Also the bootcfg command can be used from the recovery console as a possible solution. The extent of the

command is to lengthy to go into here, but feel free to google it:

http://www.google.com/search?q=bootcfg

Then try using the floppy again. Go Back.

Hardware Problems

If neither of those options worked, try checking your hardware, replace cables, try different power cable, ensure jumpers are on properly, ensure that the drive you want to boot from is on the Primary IDE connection (IDE 0) and is set as the first device on the IDE cable (Master). At best your data is still intact, so you can put the drive in another computer and back it up. You can most likely save your data, but if your okay with losing it, fdisk to erase all your partitions, recreate one as primary, set it to active, and format it, run sys c: and see if you can't reboot to at least a C: prompt.

You also may be having hard drive failure problems, here's a handy thread to check for those problems:
http://www.techspot.com/vb/showthread.php?s=&threadid=7602

Still nothing?

If your still looking for help, of all the other online write ups, I found this the most helpful (be sure to first select what you were doing that got you into the NTLDR situation):
http://www.computerhope.com/issues/ch000465.htm
and
http://www.short-media.com/articles/repair_windows_xp

It's possible the hard drive itself has failed, and if that's the case, I heard one of the people on the MaximumPC podcast recommend this company for data recovery: http://www.quetek.com/ If reading stuff online feels like you are going in circles and you need some serious help, you can email me (milescomer@gmail.com) and I'll post your question and answer to my blog (anonymously of course).

. Go Back

What if the bootdisk worked, but I can't get into Windows without it?
Stop - Backup your important files - Then proceed

Try setting BIOS to default, reseating IDE cables, double checking all of your settings basically. Sometimes the NTLDR file will be sitting right in your Recycle Bin and you can just restore it.

Inside Windows Option

Once back into Windows, right click on the My Computer option, choose the Manage option. The Computer Management window will open, click on "Disk Management" on the left pane. One of the disks it lists, and one of the drives on it, will need to be marked as active. It will be which drive letter you have placed the 3 boot files into (this will likely be the C: drive on Disk 0). Right click on that drive letter and select "Mark Partition as Active", you may first have to convert the partition to a Primary partition before you can mark it as active. Close and reboot.

Mark Partition as Active with diskpart from Jim the Bean

If that doesn't work, go into "My Computer", right-click each hard drive, select "Properties", switch to the "Tools" tab, click the "Check Now" button, check both options then click "Start"; if you selected the system partition it will require it to be rebooted and done outside of Windows. When you reboot you will see a message about "Disk checking will begin in 7 seconds", let it do this and don't skip it. It may take awhile and will boot back into Windows when it's done.

If that doesn't immediately work, and you have more hard drives than just C:, try placing the 3 boot files into other drives like D:, E:, F:, etc. Reboot each time to check if that was the one that fixed it, and when you find the correct one, mark it as active. (step-by-step).

Win9x Boot Disk Option

Get a Win9x floppy and boot with it and when you get your A: prompt type:
fdisk
and make sure that the correct partition and hard drive are labeled "active" (usually the first hard drive with the first partition).

If you had a Win 9x install on this machine you may need to also run the command: sys c: (or d, e, or f for the installation).

Recovery Console Option

Go into the recovery console by booting up with a Windows XP cd and go through the options till you get to the recovery console, you will need the admin password for this option (if you do not know it, just hit enter, that will work if it is blank). Then issue the command: fixboot

Boot Drive Only

One of the visitors commented on the blog that if the hard drive is not marked as active, disconnect every hard drive but the boot drive, and get it to boot, then add the additional drive. His post is here http://m-ntldrismissing.blogspot.com/2008/02/got-back-in-ran-bat-file-but-now-in.html?showComment=1222949520000#c1047342531695498573 .

New Hard Drive Option

Purchase a new hard drive, remove the old one, install the new one as master, install your OS, install the old one as slave (remember to change jumpers), copy all the data off the old hard drive, burn CD's or DVD's of the most important stuff, perform a low-level format of the old drive, make a partition on it and use it as backup storage drive or just another place to store your stuff. Go Back

What if I want to do further research?

If you want to do your own research on this topic, here are some links:
Windows XP Resource Kits: Initial Startup Phasee
NTLDR is missing when you install or upgrade Windows XP over 95/98/ME
You receive an "NTLDR is missing" error message when you start your computer
How to Troubleshoot NTLDR is missing in W2k
How To Create a Boot Disk for an NTFS or FAT Partition in Windows
The computer does not start after you change the active partition by using the Disk Management tool

Error message when you start your computer with a non-system disk
Windows 2000 Disk Concepts and Troubleshooting
Windows XP Resource Kits: Replacing the Boot Sector
Windows XP Resource Kits: Using Recovery Console to recover from startup problems
How to create a bootable disk for an NTFS or FAT partition
How to recover from a corrupted registry that prevents Windows XP from starting
How to perform an in-place upgrade (reinstallation) of Windows XP
Cloning OS partition using Ghost 2003
NTLDR is Compressed - HP Support Solution
How to fix Windows XP in 8 commands

Recovery Console Bootcfg Command

Ultimate Boot CD

Or try a search on Google for NTLDR

Web tinyempire.com

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See more of Tiny Empire's ShortNotes to fix your problems.

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http://tinyempire.com/notes/ntldrismissing.htm