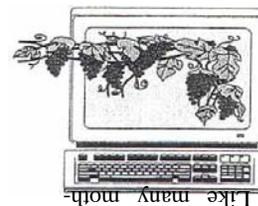


COMPUTER NEWS



Volume 23, No. 6

June, 2006

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The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group has served novice and experienced computer users since 1983. Through its monthly meetings, newsletters, online forum, special interest groups, mentor program and community involvement, it has helped educate people of all ages. The NVPCUG provides opportunities for people to find friends who share common interests and experiences. Through its Computers-to-Schools program, members refurbish used computer equipment for donation to local schools. Since January 2003 the NVPCUG has donated 401 computers and 124 printers.

Voice Over Internet Protocol to Be Discussed at June 21 NVPCUG Meeting

By Susy Ball, Programs Director

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group will meet Wednesday, June 21, 2006, 7:00-9:00 p.m., at the Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa, California.

The main presentation of the evening will be a demonstration by **Susy Ball** of VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol). VoIP is a technology that allows you to make telephone calls using a broadband Internet connection instead of a regular (or analog) phone line. Some services using VoIP may allow you to call only other people using the same service, but others may allow you to call anyone who has a telephone number – including local, long distance, mobile, and international numbers. Also, while some services only work over your computer or a special VoIP phone, other services allow you to use a traditional phone through an adapter. Most people who use VoIP find that they are able to reduce the cost of their telephone calls and get more services like caller ID.



Susy Ball

Preceding the main presentation, **Jerry Brown** will lead the **Random Access** portion of our meeting with an open-floor question-and-answer period, during which you can ask questions about specific computer-related issues and receive helpful information from other meeting attendees. Don't forget that you can also e-mail your questions before coming to the meeting (questions@nvpcug.org). If you have found a novel solution to a computer problem you faced, you might like to share it with the group during this session.

Following this, **Jerry Brown** will lead the **Computer Tutor** session featuring his method for redundantly backing up data files.

Need practical information that will enable you to make better use of your computer? Come to this meeting! Guests are welcome; admission is free.

Summer Is Coming

NVPCUG Special Interest Groups

In SIG meetings you can learn about a subject in greater detail than is feasible at NVPCUG general meetings. SIG meetings are open to everyone. Meeting times and locations occasionally change, so for current meeting information, see our Web site, www.nvpcug.org, or contact the SIG leaders.

Digital Photography SIG

Meets: Monthly, second Wednesday *
7:00 to 8:30 p.m.
Piner's Nursing Home,
Conference Room
1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
Leader: **Susy Ball**
(707) 337-3998
SusyBall@aol.com

Investors SIG

Meets: Monthly, second Monday
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Jerry Brown's home,
23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa
Leader: **Jerry Brown**
(707) 254-9607
bqandjbb@sbcglobal.net

Macintosh SIG

Meets: Monthly, second Thursday
6:30-8:30 p.m.
Napa Senior Activity Center
1500 Jefferson St., Napa
Leader: **Jim Gillespie**
(707) 252-1665
napanerd@pacbell.net

I hope everyone is set to have a good summer. August 12 is the date appointed for our annual summer picnic, and that is always fun. It gives us a chance to meet our fellow User Group members in a relaxing and informal setting. Since this year the picnic will precede our regular August meeting, I will be circulating a signup sheet for those wishing to attend. Look for it at our June meeting.



Dianne Prior

The Board would like to offer a raffle at our monthly meetings as a fund-raiser. Without our annual Used Equipment Sale we need to bring in some revenue to our treasury. However, we need someone to coordinate this. We also need someone who would seek donations to supply the items to be raffled. Please e-mail or phone me if you can help in any way.

If anyone has any problems or questions or suggestions (relating to Group issues, not computer-use questions), feel free to contact me at president@nvpcug.org or phone me at 252-1506.

Peace and Good,

Dianne Prior

* Photography SIG will not meet in June

NVPCUG Calendar

| | | |
|------------|-------|----------------------|
| Wednesdays | | 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. |
| June | 7 | 7:00-9:00 p.m. |
| June | 8 | 6:30-8:30 p.m. |
| June | 9, 10 | 8:30 a.m.- 2:30 p.m. |
| June | 12 | 5:30-7:30 p.m. |
| June | 14 | 7:00-8:30 p.m. |
| June | 21 | 7:00-9:00 p.m. |

Computers-to-Schools work parties. To volunteer, contact Orion Hill, (707) 252-0637.
Board of Directors meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
Macintosh SIG meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa
Annual Computer and Electronics Recycling Event, Napa Junior College South Parking Lot
Investors SIG meeting, Jerry Brown's home, 23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa
Digital Photography SIG meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
General Meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group

Officers for 2006

Board of Directors

| | | | |
|----------------|--------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| President | Dianne Prior | 252-1506* | President@nvpcug.org |
| Vice President | Ron Dack | | VicePresident@nvpcug.org |
| Secretary | Julie Jerome | 224-6620 | Secretary@nvpcug.org |
| Treasurer | Roy Wagner | 253-2721 | Treasurer@nvpcug.org |

Other Directors: Susy Ball, Orion E. Hill, Jim Gillespie, Bob Kulas, John Moore, Dick Peterson, John Simcoe, James Stirling, Dean Unruh

Appointed Officers

| | | | |
|--|--------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| Computer Equipment Sales Coordinator | (Volunteer Needed) | | |
| Computer Recycling Coordinator | Bill Wheadon | 224-3901 | Recycler@nvpcug.org |
| Computer Tutor Coordinator | Mike Moore | 255-1615 | Tutor@nvpcug.org |
| Computers-to-Schools Program Coordinator | Orion E. Hill | 252-0637 | CTS@nvpcug.org |
| Facility Arrangements Coordinator | John Moore | 252-3478 | Facility@nvpcug.org |
| Greeter Coordinator | Bob Simmerman | 259-6113 | Greeter@nvpcug.org |
| Librarian | Dean Unruh | 226-9164 | Librarian@nvpcug.org |
| Membership Director | Dianne Prior | 252-1506 | Membership@nvpcug.org |
| Mentor Program Coordinator | Dick Peterson | 259-1712 | Mentors@nvpcug.org |
| Newsletter Circulator | Jim Hearn | 224-2540 | |
| Newsletter Editor | James Stirling | 944-1177 | Editor@nvpcug.org |
| Product Review Coord. | Susy Ball | 337-3398 | Reviews@nvpcug.org |
| Product Review Coord. | Marcia Waddell | 252-2060 | Reviews2@nvpcug.org |
| Programs Director | Susy Ball | 337-3998 | Programs@nvpcug.org |
| Publicity Director | John Simcoe | 258-8233 | Publicity@nvpcug.org |
| Random Access Moderator | Jerry Brown | 254-9607 | Questions@nvpcug.org |
| Special Projects Director | Bob Kulas | 255-9241 | Projects@nvpcug.org |
| Webmaster | Ron Dack | | Webmaster@nvpcug.org |

*All telephone numbers are in Area Code 707.

Come to the NVPCUG General Meetings

Held the third Wednesday of each month

7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Napa Senior Activities Center

1500 Jefferson Street,
Napa

NVPCUG Computer News

Computer News (ISS 0897-5744) is published monthly by the Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group, Inc. (NVPCUG), P.O. Box 2866, Napa, CA 94558-0286. Subscriptions: \$30 for one year (12 issues). Editor: **James Stirling**, Editor@nvpcug.org. The material in *Computer News* is intended for noncommercial purposes and may not be reproduced without prior written permission, except that permission for reproducing articles, with authors properly credited, is granted to other computer user groups for their internal, nonprofit use only. The information in this newsletter is believed to be correct. However, the NVPCUG can assume neither responsibility for errors or omissions nor liability for any damages resulting from the use or misuse of any information.

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Editorial—

Adventures in Rebate Land

A couple of months ago I found what seemed to be a real bargain—a 160 Gigabyte SATA drive for only \$29.99 (after rebates) from TigerDirect.. How could they do it! Not only that, but they threw in an antivirus program, *eTrust Internet Security Suite*, from Computer Associates, for free, after rebates. The deal looked good, so I ordered it. The two items arrived in the mail a few days later. Then I discovered that the rebates were not handled by TigerDirect but by an “Onrebate.com” firm in Florida that had many stipulations on claiming a rebate. The invoice from TigerDirect showed the listed price of the two items as \$144** before tax. That left something like \$74 to be recovered in rebates. The Onrebate.com statement, however, recognized only the antivirus suite and a rebate of exactly \$30. They included a stern warning that they would not accept any further appeal on the rebate. In the meantime I tried e-mailing the TigerDirect firm, but received no answer. A month later I got another e-mail from Onrebate.com, this time including the name of the Computer Associates, declaring that I would get no rebate at all because of a discrepancy on the invoice. They gave a telephone number to call if I wished to discuss it, but that number turned out to be invalid. They also included an e-mail address, to which I sent a message to no avail.

I wasted many hours trying to comply with these specifications and in the end had to resign myself to thinking that maybe the big hard drive was worth the total price. The “rebate” promotion was only a marketing ploy. On an Internet chat room I discovered, too late, that other people had had similar disappointing experiences with the same vendor.

From here on I will treat any advertisements from TigerDirect like spam or junk mail, without a further glance. And the same goes for Computer Associates and anyone else who uses the Onrebate.com. Surely there are plenty of reliable competitors with better inducements.

What has been your experience with rebates?

— JS

May 17 General Meeting Notes—

Mike Moore Explains CCleaner

Reported by Orion E. Hill

In the computer tutor session May 17 Mike Moore, Computer Tutor Coordinator, discussed *CCleaner*, a highly rated and easy-to-use free computer maintenance utility. It removes unused files from your system, allowing *Windows* to run faster and freeing up valuable hard disk space. It also cleans traces of your online activities such as your Internet history. But the best part is that it's fast (normally taking less than a second to run) and contains *no* Spyware or Adware!

I decided to search for more information about the program. I learned that there are available three build releases of the current version 1.29.295. They differ only in toolbar and language options.

The **Standard** build release (1,442 KB) includes an optional Yahoo toolbar and can be configured to display text in any of twenty-nine languages.

The **Basic** build release (558 KB) does not include the Yahoo toolbar but is otherwise identical to the Standard build version.

The **Slim** build release (416 KB) does not include the Yahoo toolbar and is available in English only, but it is otherwise identical to the Standard build version.

Standard releases of *CCleaner* can be downloaded from several Web sites that can be found easily by searching the Internet. Be aware that some of the sites do not have the current version. Basic and Slim releases, however, are available only at the developer's Web site: www.ccleaner.com. On the *CCleaner* main download page, click on "Other builds" (highlighted in blue two-thirds down the page) to display the *CCleaner* Download Builds page, which lists all three of the current releases.

You can disregard the following displayed message: "The following builds are for system admins and advanced users. They are not for distribution or mirroring."

I downloaded and installed the Standard and Slim releases (opting not to install the Yahoo toolbar) separately on two computers for comparison purposes. The releases look identical. I chose to keep only the Slim release.

I join Mike in recommending *CCleaner*.

Swissbit – Victorinox Do It All USB, MP3, Swiss Army Knife

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio & TV Show Host

Iwilsker(at)apcug.net

Hey dads! With Father's Day fast approaching, maybe you should get copies of this article and leave them at strategic places around the house where key members of the family are likely to see them. Dads are often hard to buy gifts for, and all too often end up with that ubiquitous necktie. Instead of the well intended, but often useless, gift that we dads sometimes receive, perhaps a really fun high-tech gift would be more appropriate.

The most intriguing item that I have seen, one that would make a fantastic gift for dad on his special day, is a combination Victorinox Swiss Army Knife, USB flash drive, FM stereo radio, voice recorder, and remote control MP3 player, manufactured and distributed by Swissbit (www.swissbit.com). Named the "S.Beat," this device is true to the multifunction traditions of the classical Swiss army knife, but with a modern twist. Externally, it looks like an aluminum scaled Swiss army knife, complete with the white cross logo, sharp knife blade, spring opening scissors, and nail file. Internally, it contains a removable module with a USB 2.0 high-speed flash drive (available in 1 GB, 2 GB, and 4 GB capacities) that also holds the MP3 player, the FM stereo radio, and the voice recorder, as well as a rechargeable lithium polymer battery. A separate remote control also bears the trademarked Victorinox white cross logo and contains an earphone jack, volume and track controls, and power on and off. The remote control can be worn around the neck with the included lanyard. For international travelers, the lithium polymer battery can be recharged using the included "USB World Charger," which can handle voltages from 110v to 220v and is compatible with the outlets in over 150 countries. The battery, which may take up to 2.5 hours to fully charge, will power the player for about eight hours. The tiny FM radio can be preset to listen to up to 15 stations, and the MP3 player (which also supports WMA and OGG Vorbis formats) has a three-line backlit high-contrast display.

Victorinox and Swissbit have taken the flying traveler into mind with this device, which has earned a "FlySmart" logo. Since the knife and scissors component would be banned on commercial airline

flights, but many travelers would still like to listen to the MP3 player, the player itself can be separated from the knife, maintaining full functionality. The knife portion of the device can then be appropriately placed in the checked luggage and can be reunited with the player at the destination.

This device is simply amazing, fitting all of the components in a standard-sized Swiss army knife about three inches long, half an inch wide, and about three-quarters of an inch thick, and weighing a scant three ounces. The box containing the S.Beat included not only the components mentioned but also a protective cap (covers the USB plug when the player is removed from the knife), an arm strap for outdoor sports activities, a USB extension cable, a USB world charger, an instruction book, and a CD containing the software utilities.

Since this device is just being introduced in this country, after being available in Europe for a while, it is something that dad will find both unique and exclusive. It should be available shortly at any full Victorinox retailer, but it is available now from several online sources. The version with the 1 GB capacity has a retail price of \$189, with some domestic outlets offering a small discount. The larger capacity 2 GB and 4 GB models were recently introduced in Europe and should be available shortly in this country.

Being so new on the market, it has had few published reviews, but they have been universally positive. One says, "Fantastic product! Beautiful metal finish, sturdy and compact. The included headphones are top-notch. Sound quality will blow you away, menu user interface is comprehensive yet simple and intuitive to use/learn. And best of all—it works without some special drivers or software. Just use what you're used to for your audio and data files."

Come to think of it, maybe we should not wait until Father's Day; maybe we should consider this extremely useful gadget not only for dad, but for mom and our new graduates as well. In fact, this would make a great gift for anyone special, including yourself!

Gerry Says — Get Up to Speed

By Gerry Gerstenberg, 1st Vice President, Broward Personal Computer Association, Inc., Florida
www.bpca.org tutor101@earthlink.net

Here are some suggestions to get your computer back up to speed.

Viruses

Check your system for viruses and Trojans; make sure that your antivirus definitions are up to date. Viruses, worms, and Trojan Horses can all create serious system slowdowns.

I use AVG from <http://www.Grisoft.com>. It is free, as is Avast at <http://www.Avast.com>. *Run only one virus checker at a time.*

Spyware/malware

Second, check your system for spyware and malware. This can be done by using a spyware detector like Ad-Aware, found at <http://www.Lavasoft.com> and/or *Spybot Search and Destroy*, found at <http://spbot.com>.

Keep them up to date. I also use Microsoft *Antispyware*. It can be downloaded from Microsoft.com.

Improve online security

Install and configure a firewall. Turn off unnecessary networking software. Download and install *Windows* updates on a regular basis. Secure your Web browser by using such options as setting its “security zones.”

Remove system clutter

Delete any unneeded icons from the *Windows* desktop and Start menu tree. Each icon requires a little time to process when the system is booting up, and each one eats a bit of system memory. It seems like every bit of software you install these days wants to claim its space on your desktop, whether you need the program or not. Right click on Start, then Properties, then the Start Menu Tab.

Clean Out Fonts

Fonts are wonderful, but unused fonts are a drag on system performance. *Windows* loads all your fonts at bootup, just to keep them handy; but the more fonts you have, the more resources *Windows* consumes in keeping track of them. You probably have dozens of fonts you won't ever need. Periodically go into Windows Fonts folder – Start, then Run, and type in (C:\Windows\Fonts) and remove any unused Fonts. Select each font (hold down SHIFT or CTRL while clicking to select

contiguous or noncontiguous groups, respectively) and choose Delete from the File menu. Double-click a font to view a sample.

Do a disk cleanup

This will remove some of the junk that is cluttering up the temporary file folder. Click on Start then All Programs then Accessories then System tools and finally Disk Cleanup. Follow the instructions. This process will take a few minutes.

Uninstall any software you will never use

Examples are the AOL and other ISP installations preloaded at the factory, and any other preinstalled software. Access the Control Panel, select Add/Remove Programs (Add/Remove Programs in *Win98* and *WinMe*), and systematically remove anything that isn't absolutely necessary. You need to decide what is necessary to you. Reboot after each uninstall for the best results.

Run MSCONFIG

Go to Start then Run. Type in msconfig and click on the startup tab. Then uncheck any program you do not want to start when the computer starts. These programs take time to run when the system starts up, and they take up precious system memory. This will keep the icons from appearing in the Windows Navigation Tray on the right side of the task bar.

Defragment the hard drive

A full hard drive isn't your only potential problem. Even with plenty of free space on a drive, the file system can become so fragmented that *Windows* can't efficiently access and store data. The OS stores information on a hard drive in sectors. When there aren't enough contiguous sectors available, *Windows* stores parts of files in different places on the disk and then keeps track of them all in a file allocation table. Removing files and applications further scatters sectors on the disk. Thus, over time, fragmentation occurs as more and more files are split up and stored in more and more places. And, because the system has to search more places to find files and work harder to put them together, fragmentation is a major drag on system performance. Run *Windows Disk Defragmenter* tool to rearrange files in the most optimal way.

You may have to reboot and defrag several times to get the hard drive defragmented and the files compacted completely. From the Start menu, open Programs, Accessories, and then System Tools.

Open the Disk Defragmenter utility. In *WinXP*, let the utility analyze each drive to assess its level of frag-

mentation and determine whether it's worth defragging.

Do you have any running processes that don't need to be running?

Check this by doing Ctrl, Alt, Delete, choose Process tab, make sure that everything that is running is necessary. You can also try this to see what is pre-loading: Start > Run, type in "msconfig" (without the quotes) Click the Boot.ini tab and then select the /SOS switch. Now instead of seeing that black and white progress bar, you will now see in real time what files are being loaded. This can give you a clue as to where it is hanging up.

Keep it simple

WinXP's default set of animations and transitions is pleasing to the eye. But it doesn't do your PC any favors, especially if your hardware is a couple years old. All that sliding, fading, and shadowing takes a toll on memory and processing power. But *WinXP* animations aren't an all-or-nothing proposition. You can customize which effects to use or let Windows handle the decisions. Access your System Properties from the Control Panel (or by right-clicking My Computer and selecting Properties). Select Advanced then select Settings under Performance. Select Adjust for best performance. All entries will be unchecked. You can then selectively check any animations and transitions that you would like to keep. Click apply and OK.

Windows's Disk Cleanup utility will help you free up hard drive space, giving *Windows* and other applications more room to work.

Navigate to the Advanced tab and select the Settings button in the Performance category. Prioritize performance, appearance, or let *Windows* choose a middle route. Alternately, choose the Custom option and enable or disable specific visual effects by checking or unchecking their respective entries.

File System

Organize and maintain your files to keep your PC running smoothly. Here are some tips for the specific areas.

Make room

A full hard drive will bog down your system on all fronts. For one, as the drive fills up, *Windows* has to search more and more data to fulfill each request. More importantly, though, a full disk hinders the OS's ability to move files around temporarily and to manage virtual memory. First, empty the Recycle bin. You can easily lose hundreds of megabytes to files just sit-

ting around waiting to be fully deleted. Then, run Microsoft's Disk Cleanup utility. From the Start menu, you will need to go to Programs, Accessories, and System Tools. Open Disk Cleanup, select the drive, and click OK. The utility will analyze the system and offer suggestions. Check each box and click OK. Next, uninstall unused applications. From *Windows'* Control Panel, select Add/ Remove Programs. Remove any programs you don't use, especially applications preinstalled by the manufacturer. Finally, archive infrequently used data to removable storage.

Remove temporary files

Disk Cleanup doesn't get rid of everything. Free up even more space by manually searching for and deleting temporary files. Most applications use temporary files to store session-specific information, back up active files, and (in theory) delete them when you close the program. But sometimes, for a variety of reasons, temporary files aren't deleted. So they sit, taking up valuable disk space, and not doing anything remotely useful. Open *Windows'* Search tool (called Find in Win98) from the Start menu. Find all files beginning with a tilde (~) (search for "~*.*)") and all files with a .TMP file extension (search for "*.tmp"). Remove any that aren't immediately associated with an open file or application.

Perform regular maintenance

Don't make Disk Cleanup, temporary file removal, Disk Defragmenter, and antivirus scanning one-time activities. Without proper maintenance, system speed will continue to degrade needlessly. Schedule these activities using built-in tools (as with most antivirus programs) or using *Windows'* Task Scheduler. From the Start menu, navigate to Programs, Accessories, and System Tools. Open Scheduled Tasks. Double-click Add Scheduled Task to launch the Scheduled Task Wizard. Choose an application you want to run (Disk Cleaner, for example), set the schedule, and enter the login information of a user with permissions to run the program.

A Little Goes A Long Way

The secret to optimal PC performance is recognizing that every little improvement helps. By implementing a variety of techniques, including those we just described, you'll slowly but surely see system performance improve and maintain itself at a peak level.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.

Friendly Online Librarians Never Say Shhh!

By Gabriel Goldberg, APCUG Advisor; Columnist, AARP Computer & Technology Website, www.aarp.org

Libraries have improved since baby boomers attended grade school. Research assistance once only available in person or by telephone is blossoming into diverse online "ask a librarian" services, handling questions ranging from general curiosity and homework-related to business research.

Growing up, I was lucky to live just a few blocks from a great neighborhood library. I fondly remember the children's librarian encouraging my love of reading and books. The library was rebuilt while I was in elementary school; I was recently shocked that the "new" library was undergoing renovation and improvement. Then I realized that what seems like yesterday was five decades ago!

The good news for us all – near libraries or not – is that libraries have greatly improved in that 50 years. Research assistance once only available in person or by telephone is blossoming into diverse online "ask a librarian" services. These handle all sorts of questions: general curiosity, homework-related, business research, etc. Just don't expect medical or legal advice.

E-mail assistance has been available for some time. Librarians sometimes like it because they can answer questions as they have time, and it avoids people waiting on line or holding on the phone. But it can be slow if a question must be clarified – that's important, since people often don't ask what they really want answered! And online interaction lacks face-to-face intimacy, voice tone, body language, which all help communication.

In addition to accepting e-mail, libraries use Web forms for submitting queries, take questions via instant messaging, and offer interactive Web chats. Highly interactive instant messaging and Web chats allow quick conversations, often providing answers within a few minutes. Newer technologies such as VoIP (voice over IP, Internet telephony) and MS (cell phone text messaging) may soon increase research availability.

Library policies vary regarding answering non-resident questions; some specialized queries (local history, obituaries, newspaper clippings, etc.) must be handled by a library near the area of interest. That brings genealogy questions from far away as people research their ancestors.

Most queries are handled at no cost, though some searches incur charges. A library card usually isn't

needed. Some libraries currently mail printed research results; e-mailing images will provide faster service and reduce costs.

Behind-the-scenes technology helps librarians manage queries, ensuring that all questions are answered and eliminating duplicate responses. Shortcuts fill in frequently-used answers.

The same sorts of questions are asked online as are posed by phone or in person, with the addition of sensitive areas such as sexual issues. Queries often deal with homework – math, science-fair challenges, etc. – and country reports. Librarians enjoy the occasional obscure gem, such as being asked about "modeling the economic infrastructure of railroads in Great Britain".

The geek expression "24x7" means that something is available all day, every day. Since people expect this full-time access to e-mail, the Web, shopping, banking, and other online services, they're enthusiastic about being able to ask questions whenever they occur.

But it's hard for libraries to provide this never-anticipated level of service, especially when off-hours demand may be limited. So they support each other locally/nationally/internationally by sharing round-the-clock assistance chores. Questions are entered locally and routed to on-duty librarians – who sometimes work from home in pajamas, answering off-hours long-distance queries.

Even librarians sometimes need help – so their worldwide Stumpers mailing list lets them share baffling questions.

Librarians and the public are learning together to use electronic tools. New technologies facilitate supporting diverse clienteles by – for example – facilitating non-English services.

Here are a few tips regarding online queries: provide your name/e-mail/phone for answering and clarification; use plain text (not formatted) for easy reading; don't nag, allow time for an answer – but follow up in a week or so. Finally, contact the correct library

A library in Plymouth, Michigan has received queries about Plymouths in Massachusetts and England!

Using online library services is easy once you have an Internet connection. Some libraries favor PCs with *Windows* and the *Internet Explorer* Web browser, but *Linux* and *Macintosh* systems are increasingly supported. There's generally no software download or install. Browser pop-up blockers or firewalls sometimes get in the way, but they're easily customized.

Start by finding your library's Web site. For example, I locate my library by submitting "fairfax county" library to Google [www.google.com]. Or I could click from my county government Web site to the library pages. Or Googling library questions yields many library sites offering answers. Then look for links like Ask-A-Librarian! or "Homework Help!". Links and services will vary; when I click Ask-A-Librarian, I can choose between chatting, e-mailing, or (of course) actually visiting a library.

In researching this article I challenged my library with two questions. I was delighted that they quickly named the obscure British TV show whose name I couldn't remember (The Duchess of Duke Street) and found a science-fiction book containing a short story I wanted to reread.

No matter how they evolve, whether as buildings or online, libraries' core mission is everlasting: providing timely information in a customer-friendly format.

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The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.

Getting Rid of Startup Items

Daily Tip from *Smart Computing*

The major problem with getting rid of startup items is that they can be in four different places on your PC.

The easiest place to find and remove startup applications is in Windows' Startup folder. From the Start menu, select Programs (All Programs, in Windows XP) and find the Startup folder. Delete anything that doesn't absolutely need to run automatically all the time. Firewall and antivirus applications are two of the very few types of programs that should always be running on your PC. Not all vendors are up front enough to place their applications in the Startup folder, however.

Use Windows' System Configuration Utility to remove hidden startup applications. From the Run prompt (in the Start menu) type `msconfig` and click OK. Select the Startup tab to check out what other apps are launching at bootup. Uncheck anything non-essential. Many processes and programs have cryptic or obscure names. It may be difficult to tell which program is which, when you're trying to remove them. (MSN Messenger, for instance, appears as "msmsgs.") Remove programs from the startup list with caution. When in doubt, search the Web to find out what a particular process is supposed to do.

If the offending program isn't in there, try going into My Computer, double-clicking your hard drive,

then choosing Documents and Settings, All Users, Start menu, Programs, and Startup.

If you still haven't found the program, it's time to check your Registry. Open the Registry Editor by going to the Start menu, choosing Run, typing `regedit` and pressing ENTER. (*NOTE: Use caution whenever you edit your Registry. Some tips involve editing the Registry, a critical file in your OS. Always back up your system before making any Registry changes. Registry errors may render your computer unusable, so tips involving Registry changes are for more advanced users.*) Now click the little plus sign (+) next to `HKEY_CURRENT_USER`. Scroll down and click Software, then Microsoft, then Windows, then CurrentVersion, then Run. Scroll through the panel on the right. One line should show the file name of the offending program. Scroll back to the left, click the beginning of the line and press Delete.

Still looking? There's one more place to check. Go up to `HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE`, then choose Software, Microsoft, Windows, CurrentVersion, and Run. That's the last place a startup program might be hiding. Finally, close the Registry Editor and restart your computer. The program will no longer run at startup.

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RSS Explained

By Phil Shapiro, member of the Capital PC User Group, Virginia Macintosh Users Group, Washington Apple Pi, Young Hackers and Scholars Libre Users Group

RSS - really simple syndication – is a laborsaving tool that allows people to tune in to information sources that interest them. The information source could be a blog, a podcast, a videocast or any Web site that includes RSS feeds.

The value of RSS accrues when you subscribe to multiple RSS feeds. You can then monitor multiple information streams with a minimum of effort.

There are many different software tools for subscribing to RSS feeds. One of the most popular is a Web site named Bloglines. Some Web browsers, like *Safari 2.x* and *Firefox*, let you subscribe to RSS feeds. *Firefox* lets you do so using something called *Live Bookmarks*, as well as a *Firefox* extension named *Sage*.

RSS's primary value is that it brings information to you without your having to visit multiple Web sites. In a knowledge economy, anything that streamlines the flow of information from producer to consumer gives benefit to both of them. You tune in to the information you want, and tune out what you don't want.

Examples of How RSS Simplifies Peoples' Lives

I asked some technology consultants to explain how RSS brings value to peoples' lives. Curtis Brown at *MissionMovers.org*, in Seattle, is a strong believer in RSS. He explains, "RSS has invaded every part of our life, but we just don't know it. RSS is an information-delivery method that gives added convenience to both senders and receivers of it."

As an example, RSS feeds can be used by a non-profit organization to distribute different kinds of information to different people. One RSS feed could be the organization's calendar of events or classes. Another could be a call for volunteers. A third feed might be information for funders. The more feeds an organization offers, the more narrowly tailored is the information delivered to people served by that organization or supporting it.

Here are some other examples. A used-car dealer can have an RSS feed that details newly arrived used cars. A public library can have an RSS feed of newly purchased books. A police department can have separate RSS feeds for different neighborhoods, giving up-to-date information on

safety concerns in each neighborhood.

Curtis Brown explains that information received in an RSS feed can be filtered by keyword and colored in text, so you have control over it. You decide the ways in which that stream of information is going to serve your needs.

Curtis explains that RSS feeds become immensely useful when people work collaboratively in a wiki. (A wiki is a Web page that different people can edit.) Changes to the Web page can be monitored via an RSS feed. This allows anyone participating in the wiki to have a clear idea of who is adding the most value to the wiki. RSS allows for better monitoring and gives added transparency to the collaborative process.

Curtis goes on to explain that there are two kinds of RSS feeds – static feeds and dynamic feeds. A static feed might be sports scores or the feed from a single blog. A dynamic feed is a stream of information where there is searching going on to pull out specific pieces of information to add to the stream. It's also possible to combine several RSS feeds into a single new feed. One Web site that lets you do that is *rssmix.com*. Why would you want to do that? Suppose you live in a metropolitan area with many different library systems spanning several counties. Each library system provides an RSS feed of events happening within its locale. If you'd like to keep track of events in all the counties, *rssmix.com* would let you combine their RSS feeds.

Another RSS enthusiast, Bruce Roy, in Sydney, Australia explains: "I have found the SS facility in *The Next Generation of Genealogy Sitebuilding* (TNG) very useful for the family tree site. It enables people interested in following the family tree to get information about changes to the tree without having to check the Web site's 'What's New?' or wade through the data."

One other advantage of RSS is that it lets you tune out mainstream media and tune in to alternative media and personal media. If you find the CBS Evening News a touch thin in how it covers the news, with RSS you have an alternative source of news where news stories don't need to be squeezed into 45-second slots.

Another RSS enthusiast, Winthrop Morgan, in

the Washington D.C. area, had this to add: "I highly recommend you consider including *Join Together Online* as a great Win-Win-Win model. *Join Together Online* (JTO) (<http://www.join-together.org>) has long been a pioneer in using the Internet to support people working on substance abuse and gun violence issues. Every month, one million JTO Web pages are viewed by over 350,000 people.

"JTO uses RSS feeds not only to help their Web presence spread, but also to provide vital data to support state, municipal, and nonprofit drug treatment and prevention program managers and their audiences. While these programs' Web masters might have a modest Web presence, they lack the wherewithal to continuously produce new content, or even gather and republish it. Without new content, their audiences lack a reason to come back to their Web site. The JTO RSS service enormously increases both the return-visit value of these sites and the presence of authoritative information in this highly charged information space. To keep the RSS feeds fresh and riveting, JTO employs a small editorial staff who aggregate both online and offline news on substance abuse funding, policies, and more from authoritative sources. They edit this news down to its essential content, and then republish it via RSS, as well as to users of their site and subscribers to their e-mail news services."

RSS Relieves Cluttered E-mail Inboxes

If you have traditionally received a lot of your information via e-mail, RSS can provide some relief to your inbox. Would you like to follow a particular e-mail list, but can't stomach subscribing to one more such list? If that list is on *Yahoogroups*, you can follow the list via its RSS feed. An excellent free tool for reading RSS feeds is *Bloglines*. (<http://www.bloglines.com>)

RSS feeds are almost always spam-free. The provider of an RSS feed doesn't want you to unsubscribe from the feed, so it treats you with respect.

Ben Sheldon, in Lowell, Massachusetts, passes along this RSS tip: "Google still only offers e-mail news alerts, but this utility lets you create an RSS feed out of any *Google News* search term [<http://www.justinpfister.com/gnewsfeed.cfm>]. I aggregate my name, my projects (*DigitalBicycle*, *ServiceSpeak*), and my street and city so that if some-

thing happens I should know about, I will get it."

I'll pass along a few small tips of my own. I use RSS, *Bloglines* and my *Digg.com* account to keep track of what Digg stories my friends are digging (i.e. voting for). I just copy the RSS feed from the bottom left of <http://digg.com/users/pshapiro/friends> and then paste it into Add Feed in Bloglines.

Between Katie Couric and the 50 friends I have on Digg, which do you think provides the richer quality of information to me? Just for kicks I subscribe to the Associated Press RSS feed, so I'm in the loop with whatever Katie knows.

I also use the free service at *Squeet.com* to send me an e-mail whenever one of my friends submits a story to *Digg.com*, so they don't have to let me know about their submissions. That e-mail alert capability might well come to Digg sometime.

I use RSS to keep alerted to new items of interest that are posted to *Del.icio.us*. For example, if anyone submits an item to *Del.icio.us* with the tag *digitalstorytelling*, I find out about that really easily in my *Bloglines* account. That puts me in touch with anyone doing digital storytelling without my having to subscribe to more e-mail lists. I like that.

Phil Shapiro is a former president of Virginia Macintosh Users Group and worked as the Washington DC Regional Coordinator for Community Technology Centers' Network, an international network of more than 1,000 organizations bringing technology and technology training to underserved communities.

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This article -- with associated links-- can be found on the Web at <http://rssexplained.blogspot.com>

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.

Tech News

By Sue Crane, Editor, Big Bear Computer Club, California

Cosmeo is bringing Discovery's online encyclopedia into homes via its Web site. The site resembles the screen of a handheld game device and features video clips and interactive games. Content providers, including Scholastic Corporation and the Public Broadcasting Service, are customized to meet the curriculum standards of different states. The service is available for \$9.95/month.

Microsoft announced that it has delayed the mainstream launch of **Vista** until next year. Steve Sinofsky, the head of the *Office* unit, has been tapped to lead *Windows* development. Following its push back of *Windows Vista*, Microsoft confirms the *Office 2007* release will move to next year as well. It's been reported on a number of blog sites that Microsoft will release *Windows Vista* with 8 different versions, but no pricing information is available yet.

Microsoft is also building in a tool, **Windows Performance Rating**, that will rate a PC, based on how well it is running and on how much it can take advantage of *Vista*'s capabilities to help average consumers easily understand their *Windows Vista* PC's overall performance. As for systems slowing down over time, that's another issue that Microsoft is trying to tackle. Meanwhile, *Vista* is being designed to shut the door on spyware. It will introduce important changes at the heart of the operating system, as well as to *Internet Explorer*, and include *Windows Defender*, an anti-spyware tool.

An error in McAfee's virus definition file released mid-March caused consumer and enterprise antivirus products to flag *Microsoft Excel*, *Adobe-UpdateManager* and other applications on users PCs as a virus called "W95/CTX". Files were deleted or quarantined, depending on the user's settings.

When Microsoft first talked about **Windows Live** in November, most of the "Live" products were MSN services that had been rebranded. Since

then Microsoft has added more than a dozen new products under the *Windows Live* umbrella. MSN executive David Cole explains, "Microsoft's goal is to continuously update and launch products". Over the next 3-6 months, Microsoft expects to ship more *Windows Live* technology into the marketplace than during their entire 10-year OS history. Microsoft's new ad-serving engine, *AdCenter*, is at the heart of *Windows Live*. *AdCenter* draws on user demographic information to help drive more targeted marketing. Microsoft has even talked about using advertising as a way to pay for traditional desktop software. Meanwhile, the list of *Windows Live* services continues expanding to include all the basic portal services.

Take a look at the **Ice Weasels**, **Space Cookies** and **Cheesy Poofs**, high-school teams competing for top merit in the 15th annual robotics contest sponsored by FIRST (For the Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology). With about \$10,000 worth of donated hardware and software, high-school students are given six weeks to assemble a functioning robot that can move around a court and shoot Nerf basketballs for points. Part of the challenge is for teens to find and work with mentors who are experts in technology and science. Once registered, the teams are given three boxes of hardware and software and a programming language called *Easy C* that allows them to write a program for the robot's onboard computer. Also included is Autodesk's *3D Max Studio* animation software so they can create a 30-second animation. The game itself is roughly two minutes long, with robots that are 2 feet wide by 4 feet high. For the first 10 seconds, the robots must make as many baskets as possible; the robot with the most points from the first 10 seconds then gets to play offense. Winning bots will go on to compete at Atlanta's Georgia Dome at the international finals.

Neurofeedback, a form of conditioning that rewards people for producing specific brain waves, taps youths' fascination with animation and electronics to sweeten frightening medical treatments.

While this form of treatment has been around for decades, incorporating video games marks a new frontier that makes use of young people's fascination with animation and electronics to sweeten often frightening, lengthy and tedious medical treatments. Video games are being used, for instance, to help sick children manage pain and anxiety during hospital stays. A young leukemia patient inspired "Ben's Game," which let him fight the cancer cells invading his body. A private island called Brigadoon in Linden Lab's "Second Life" virtual world is open only to people with Asperger's syndrome and autism. West Virginia's public schools are battling obesity by making "Dance Dance Revolution"--a step-to-the-beat video game--part of their curriculum, while Nintendo has made a splash with its new "Brain Age" mind-exercising game. CyberLearning's *Smart BrainGames* system targets symptoms arising from brain injuries, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities. Priced at \$584, the system is built on NASA technology that used video games and neurofeedback to

train pilots. Traditional treatments, such as prescribing the stimulant Ritalin, behavioral therapy and education, are often covered by health insurance, while neurofeedback usually is not. Despite such hurdles, some medical practitioners are advocating the new approach.

Kyle MacDonald is on the verge of successfully completing a project that sounds absurd: Trading--with the help of a blog--a single red paper clip for a house. Since embarking on his house hunt last year, MacDonald has traded with people from across Canada and the United States and is now sitting on a year's free rent for an apartment in Phoenix. MacDonald is confident he's going to succeed, and he hopes it can happen by the July 12 anniversary of the project's launch. His goal is getting tantalizingly close. The project has allowed him to initiate a 'Net cult following that's hoping he'll succeed, too. Popular blogs such as boingboing have been tracking his progress.

One-click Access to Frequently-Used Programs, Files and Folders

by Glenn Richards, Lake-Sumter Computer Society, Leesburg, FL [grich32\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:grich32(at)yahoo.com) www.lscs.us

There are certain files, folders, programs, and Web sites I access frequently during the day. To make this easy I create shortcuts to them in the Quick Launch (QL) toolbar that I normally keep hidden on the left side of my Desktop. Moving the mouse cursor to the left side of the screen un-hides the toolbar, and a single left-click opens the shortcut.

All entries in this list at the left are shortcuts, so any of them can be deleted without loss of the underlying program or file. However, Internet shortcuts like YQ will be deleted if the icon is deleted (but I keep a copy of it in my Favorites folder).

The one thing that takes getting used to is that sweeping the mouse cursor to the left edge of the screen may un-hide the toolbar, thereby obscuring icons on the Desktop or menu choices on a window. This is just a matter of not letting the sharp point of the cursor get too close to the edge of the Desktop window.

Since this toolbar auto-hides, it does not take up any Desktop space. When I "un-hide" it (make it appear) by moving the mouse cursor to its position, the QL toolbar moves out over icons at the left edge of the screen and does not force those icons to shift over.

To start the QL Toolbar, right-click an empty spot on the taskbar (which is often at the bottom of the

screen), then click on Toolbars, Quick Launch. Make sure the taskbar is not locked (right-click the taskbar to see). A new rectangle will appear near the middle of the taskbar--the new QL toolbar. Move the mouse cursor to the "handle" at the left end of the QL toolbar (to result in the double-pointed arrow), press and hold the left mouse button, drag it to the left edge of the screen above the taskbar, and release the mouse button. Drag the edges of the resulting toolbar to the shape shown. Right-click an empty spot on the toolbar and click "Always on top" and "Auto-Hide." Other right-clicks on this toolbar can lead to other options (I am using large icons and no text).

(I have created my own icons for many of the choices, so I can identify the functions from just the icon -- but that is another story.)

To add a shortcut to this QL toolbar, right-click the toolbar, uncheck Auto-Hide. Then right-drag a program, file, or other choice to the toolbar so a dark horizontal bar appears, release the mouse button, click "Create Shortcut Here." The icon can be dragged up or down the toolbar to whatever position you like. Once added, right-click the toolbar again and hide it.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.

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Base-Ball, E-Mail & Pod Slurping, by Rod Scher

Some years ago, journalist/commentator Edwin Newman wrote a noteworthy and provocative book titled, “Strictly Speaking: Will America be the Death of English?” In it, he postulated that English had degenerated, and he mostly blamed politicians, business-people, and general linguistic indolence for what he saw as the deterioration of our national language.

The book was written with wit, passion, and a superb command of the language in question, and it set off a firestorm of debate. But the book's very premise was questionable. “Strictly Speaking” presented English as a static entity that needed protecting, as if it were like an automobile that required regular waxing in order to prevent its otherwise inevitable decay. Newman treated language as something that never changes, a tool that's somehow supposed to reflect culture without being allowed to respond to it. As any linguist or lexicographer will tell you, the only languages like that are the so-called “dead” languages.

As computer users, we know very well that languages *do* change and that English is far from dead. All you have to do to see that is pick up a computer magazine. (Hey, what luck! You're holding one in your hands right now.) Flip through it and count the terms that would have made no sense at all when Newman wrote his book. Here are just a few: social networking, podcast, mashup, Wi-Fi, blog, ripping, PDA, multicore, GB, MB, TB, Web café, beta, virtualization, MP3, MP3 player. (Many such terms began as nouns but have since spawned related verb usages: “I decided to Google him to find out.” Or “Did you DVR last night's show for me?”)

There are hundreds more, of course, but the management here foolishly limits me to only one page of commentary.

Now, don't send me nasty emails. I'm not an advocate of linguistic anarchy, nor do I believe that the rules of grammar and usage are irrelevant. I am an editor, after all, and a recovering English teacher. I spend a great deal of time unsplitting infinitives and rescuing poor, helpless participles that have been left dangling in terror. I spend many hours adding serial commas, changing “to” to “too” (or vice versa), and removing errant apostrophes. (“I think it's problem is that its broken.” “Avocado's For Sale!”) When we editors get together, our idea of a good time is a heated argument about whether we can use “while” in place of “although” or whether “on-the-fly” needs to

be hyphenated. Let's face it: No one knows how to have fun like a bunch of editors. (Well, I suppose it's possible that a particularly rowdy group of molecular biologists could outdo us in the excitement department.) The fact is, though, that language does evolve. Constructions change, “rules” of grammar are revised. Words are added to the language and then *those* words change in turn.

The word “email” is a perfect example. In the 1960s, the word didn't exist at all. An engineer named Ray Tomlinson sent what is arguably the first true email in late 1971. As the technology evolved, the process of sending messages to specific nodes on a network quickly became known as “electronic mail.” From there, it was a short step to abbreviating it as “e-mail.”

Most of us can remember when “email” was routinely hyphenated. In fact, *most* new words that are created by compounding—that is, by adding a new prefix to an existing term—are at first hyphenated. Back in the 1800s, for instance, the word “baseball” was for several years printed as “base-ball.”

But language (if it is not dead) evolves, and it tends to evolve toward simplification. One example of that is the tendency to remove such hyphens as people become familiar with the term in question. Thus, “base-ball” became “baseball” and “e-mail” is in the process of becoming “email.”

In the world of technology, of course, language changes even more swiftly than in other areas. Why? Because technology itself changes more rapidly than most things. As a reader of *Smart Computing*, you're well aware of this tendency and of how difficult it can be to keep up. There are just too many changes (and then changes to the changes) to stay on top of everything. Fun to try, though, isn't it?

And speaking of new tech terms, next month, let's talk about my favorite: “pod slurping.” You could look that one up ahead of time, but it's possible that it will have disappeared or evolved into something else by then.

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Web 2.0 and Portable Computing.

By John Abbott, member of the Bentsen Grove Resort Computer Club, Mission Texas

Portable Computing has always lagged behind the rest of the computing market. This is probably because there are currently fewer mobile devices than computers. But that is about to change. According to Steve Rupel (leading PR company on the planet) billions of mobile devices will reach the market this year and by 2010 there will be 50 million of them sold quarterly.

Mobile device? You won't be calling them Pocket PC or Cell Phone long; maybe PCC for Personal Communication Center. The merger of all forms of digital communications is rapidly taking shape. Cell phones now contain very limited access to the Web, receive very limited e-mail, and take limited resolution pictures – oh, and they work as phones too. With smaller and more-low-powered devices quickly coming on scene, these limits will expand exponentially.

My project over the past month has been the installation of an operating system on a USB Flash-memory Device (UFD). I started with a full-blown Linux distribution on a USB 80 gigabyte micro hard drive. Well, after some real torture and lots and lots of reading I managed to get it operational. However, in editing the boot file I managed to misspell something, and now I've got to start all over again.

But I did find a couple of small Linux distributions: *Damn Small Linux* and *Puppy Linux*. I downloaded the ISO files for each and started working on a flash drive. Today I managed to get the thumb drive fully functional. Along the way I've learned a lot about what I still need to learn about executing from a CD or a UFD. But DSL in a tube really works.

Why do this? Well, because I know that Web 2.0 is going to dominate the future of the Web. With more and more of the platform being located on the Internet, less and less will be required on your local computer. The computer will take on more and more of the role of thin client (from a client/server relationship where all the applications are on the server). This in turn will have a direct impact on the cost of computers, which will no

longer have to come with expensive third party software. So I created a portable thin client.

Web 2.0 (platform on the web) will take away a great deal of the chest thumping over O/S because the web interacts with all operating systems. The feature-rich Web already offers online mail processing that works perfectly with thin client or host computer. I am an advocate of Google's Gmail. I can access it on the Web where it neatly threads my messages and stores up to 2.5 Gigabytes of mail in the in-basket or in the searchable archive. From within that mail system I can also originate chats with my friends and maintain my calendar. I can make my calendar, or part of it, accessible to colleagues for event coordination.

I can use *Zohowriter.com* for my word processor. *Zoho* is a full-strength word processor with all the power you find in *Works*, *Word* or *Open Office* (or any of the dozen or so other word processors available). I am able to store my documents on-line, download them to my computer, publish them on the site so they can be collaborated by associates with whom I have previously arranged access. I can upload files from remote files (my computer or yours) and modify and store or simply store them online. And as an added feature, I can use *Zoho* as a mail client; sending, receiving and originating e-mail. *Zoho* automatically assigns you an e-mail account when you register (free).

There will be some who say: "Well, I can have several programs open at once on my desktop." And my response would be, Fine; I have multiple Web pages open on my computer as I use *Zoho* to write this. I have a page set up with *Wikipedia* to check facts, the weather, my *Google* mail, my personal mail Web account, XM radio playing great jazz. And in a few moments I'll open another and watch the news on TV – all from my thumb drive. I sure hope my Gizmo or Skype phones don't ring during the news!

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.

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