

COMPUTER NEWS



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Inside This Issue

- 2 NVPCUG Special Interest Groups
- 2 NVPCUG Calendar
- 2 President's Message
- 3 Officers List
- 4 Free Security, Data Recovery, and Data Erasing Software for Home Computers
- 5 Annual Members Potluck Picnic:
August 23, 2008, 1:30 PM
- 6 Easy Media Creator 10 Suite
- 8 What's a Good Computer to Buy?
- 9 Viewing WMFs on a Mac
- 10 Your Next Computer Will Be Green
- 11 For Anybody Who Has Thought About Trying Linux
- 13 As You Like It - Music Formats

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. From January 2003 to October 2007 the NVPCUG provided 783 computers and 140 printers to local schools. Additional equipment has been given to charitable nonprofit organizations and to disadvantaged individuals.

The Aug Meeting will present

Lisa Baker of Heritage Makers

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group will meet Wednesday, Aug 20, 7:00-9:00 P.M., at the Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa, California



The meeting begins with Random Access, an open-floor question-and-answer period during which attendees can ask questions about computers and computer-related problems and receive helpful information from other meeting attendees. Questions may be submitted before the meeting by e-mailing them to Random Access moderator **Jerry Brown** at Questions@nvpcug.org.

This month there will be no Computer Tutor session. However, please feel free to send your ideas for future sessions to the Computer Tutor, **Jeff Solomon** at tutor@nvpcug.org.

The main presenter, Lisa Baker, for the August meeting has some interesting material to present. She has 25 years of experience including operating her own Photography studio in Orange County for the past 15 years. Her skills include B & W darkroom experience, retouched portraits both traditionally and digitally, and she has done restoration of old and damaged photographs. Lisa comes to us to share her passion for helping people to organize and insure that the photos and memories of their lives are not lost.

More details about Lisa's company, Heritage Makers, are available at <http://www.gotstorybooks.com>. There you will find how her company can help you make storybooks, card, scrapbooks, calendars and posters of your own photo treasures.



Could you use some practical information that would help you make better use of your computer? Come to this meeting! Guests are always welcome. Admission is always free.

Interested in becoming a member? See page 14 for application information.

NVPCUG

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS & MAC GROUP

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.

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

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

Napa Valley Mac User Group

Meets: Monthly, second Thursday
6:30 - 8:30 p.m.
Napa Senior Activity Center
1500 Jefferson St., Napa
Leader: Ron Rogers
(707) 226-5352
ronrogersnapamug@gmail.com

President's Message

By Ron Dack, president, <http://www.nvpcug.org/>,
President@nvpcug.org

August 2008

The Annual NVPCUG Member's Picnic is just a couple weeks from now. **Dianne Prior** is coordinating this event. Mark your calendars the picnic will be on Saturday August 23rd from 1PM to 6PM at **Dick & Sandy Peterson's Family Christmas Tree Farm** 1120 Darms Lane, Napa. If you are a member and you want to attend you should sign up at the next meeting or better yet e-mail **Dianne Prior** at Prior@napanet.net.



This month's meeting should be really interesting. **Lisa Baker** will be showing us how to create a storybook including pictures and text about a loved one or ourselves and how to publish it and get it printed. If you know of anybody that might be interested, bring them along. As always this meeting is free and open to the public.

It is time to look at nominating members to serve on the 2009 NVPCUG Board of Directors if you are a member and are interested in serving or want to nominate someone let one of the current directors know.



At the July General Meeting the NVCTS donated an IBM laptop to the NVPCUG. **Orion E. Hill**, President of **Napa Valley Computers to Schools** group made the presentation to me during the meeting. The NVPCUG certainly appreciates this donation and we will be using this laptop for presentation purposes. Thanks NVCTS!

If you have any comments or ideas about improving the group in any way let me know. You can e-mail me at President@nvpcug.org. I hope to see each of you at the general meeting on Wednesday August 20th at 7PM at the **Napa Senior Activity Center** and Saturday August 23rd at 1PM at the picnic. n

Take care,
Ron

NVPCUG General Meetings

Held the third Wednesday of each month, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.
Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa

NVPCUG Calendar

Aug 20	7:00-9:00 p.m.	NVPCUG General Meeting + A
Aug 23	1:30-5:30 p.m.	NVPCUG Users Group Picnic + D
Sept 3	7:00-9:00 p.m.	Board of Directors meeting + B
Sept 8	5:30-7:30 p.m.	Investors SIG meeting + C
Sept 10	7:00-8:30 p.m.	Digital Photography SIG meeting + B
Sept 11	6:30-8:30 p.m.	Napa Valley Mac User Group + A
Sept 17	7:00-9:00 p.m.	NVPCUG General Meeting + A
Oct 15	7:00-9:00 p.m.	NVPCUG General Meeting + A

Meeting Locations

- A - Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa
- B - Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
- C - Jerry Brown's home, 23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa
- D - Peterson's Family Christmas Tree Farm, 1120 Darms Lane, Napa.

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group Contact Information

Officers for 2008

Board of Directors

President	Ron Dack	unlisted	President@nvpcug.org
Vice President	Dick Peterson	738-1812	VicePresident@nvpcug.org
Secretary	Marcia Waddell	252-2060	Secretary@nvpcug.org
Treasurer	Roy Wagner	253-2721	Treasurer@nvpcug.org
Other Directors:	Susy Ball, Ron Dack, Jim Gray, Dick Peterson, Bob Simmerman, Kathy Slavens, Dean Unruh, Marcia Waddell, and Roy Wagner.		
Director	Jim Gray	unlisted	Director_Gray@nvpcug.org

Appointed Officers

Computer Tutor Coordinator	Jeff Solomon	553-2114	Tutor@nvpcug.org
Facility Arrangements Coordinator	Dianne Prior	252-1506	Facility@nvpcug.org
Greeter Coordinator	Kathy Slavens	251-9193	Greeter@nvpcug.org
Greeter Coordinator	Bob Simmerman	259-6113	Greeter2@nvpcug.org
Librarian	Dean Unruh	226-9164	Librarian@nvpcug.org
Membership Director	Bob Simmerman	259-6113	Membership@nvpcug.org
Newsletter Circulator	Jim Hearn	224-2540	Circulation@nvpcug.org
Newsletter Editor	Susy Ball	337-3998	Editor@nvpcug.org
Product Review CoCoordinator	Susy Ball	337-3998	Reviews@nvpcug.org
Product Review CoCoordinator	Marcia Waddell	252-2060	Reviews2@nvpcug.org
Programs Director	Susy Ball	337-3998	Programs@nvpcug.org
Publicity Director	Ron Dack	unlisted	Publicity@nvpcug.org
Random Access Moderator	Jerry Brown	254-9607	Questions@nvpcug.org
Special Projects Director	VOLUNTEER NEEDED		Projects@nvpcug.org
Webmaster	Ron Dack	unlisted	Webmaster@nvpcug.org
Sales Coordinator	VOLUNTEER NEEDED		sales@nvpcug.org

• All telephone numbers are in Area Code 707.

NVPCUG Computer News

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Editor: **Susy Ball**,
Editor@nvpcug.org.

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Free Security, Data Recovery, and Data Erasing Software for Home Computers

Updated Aug 9, 2008

Recommended by Orion E. Hill, Computer Consultant, member of the NVPCUG,
<http://www.nvpcug.org>, OEHill@sonic.net

Most of the following highly-regarded software products are regularly upgraded. Use the most recent version of each product. Many of the products use reference files that are often updated — some more than once weekly. Therefore, users should regularly check for updates and install all found. Most of the products can be customized to great advantage by setting various performance options. Most of the products are compatible with *Microsoft Windows 2000, 2003, XP, and Vista*. Ensure that all of the security updates for whichever operating system you use are installed on your computer. Also, ensure that all of the updates for your application software are installed.

When keying software download site addresses into your Internet browser, pay attention to the case of each letter. Capitalization can be significant. To avoid errors, copy the addresses into your browser.

Temporary File and Registry Cleaning

CCleaner 2.09.618- Slim (build) by Piriform, Ltd.

<http://www.ccleaner.com/download/builds>

Scans a user's computer, removes temporary files and, optionally, some unnecessary working files that may contain private information, and fixes Windows registry issues.

Browser Hijacker Detection and Removal

CWShredder 2.19 by Trend Micro, Inc.

<http://us.trendmicro.com/us/products/personal/CWShredder>

Scans a user's computer for versions of the CoolWebSearch (CWS) browser hijacker and destroys any found.

Data Recovery from Hard Drives and Memory Cards

Handy Recovery 1.0 by SoftLogica, LLC

<http://www.handyrecovery.com/download.shtml> (Free download link is near the bottom of the web page.)

Scans and analyzes the contents of a user's computer disk drive or memory card and recovers files damaged by virus attacks, software faults, and power failures or files accidentally deleted, including those from deleted and formatted

partitions. If this limited features version cannot recover your data, download the latest commercial version (4.0) from the same web page. Note: Data that has been overwritten cannot be recovered.

Malware (Malicious Software) Detection and Removal

HijackThis 2.02 by Trend Micro, Inc.

http://www.trendsecure.com/portal/en-US/tools/security_tools/hijackthis/download

Scans a user's computer, generates a list of Windows registry and file settings commonly manipulated by malware (especially spyware), and allows the user to decide what on the list is illegitimate and needs to be removed or disabled. Inexperienced users are strongly advised to seek help from experienced users before removing or disabling items. Removing or disabling legitimate items can cause a user's computer or its peripherals to stop working.

Software Security Vulnerability Assessment

Secunia Personal Software Inspector (Release Candidate 3) 0.9.0.4 by Secunia

<https://psi.secunia.com/>

Scans and constantly monitors a user's computer to detect insecure software, both that for which security updates are available and that at end-of-life, and provides Internet links for directly downloading updates for any insecure software found. This product monitors thousands of applications and is one of the most useful programs that you can have running on your computer.

Firewall

ZoneAlarm Basic by Check Point Software Technologies, Ltd.

<http://www.zonealarm.com/store/content/company/products/znalm/freeDownload.jsp>

Constantly provides bidirectional firewall protection on a user's computer. Inbound

protection safeguards the computer from hackers who are trying to break into it by open ports. Outbound protection provides warnings that a possibly unauthorized program running on the computer, such as a trojan, is trying to access the Internet. Note: Multiple firewall programs should not be running on a computer. ZA's installer will automatically turn off the firewall in *Windows 2003, XP, and Vista*.

System Security Assessment

Microsoft Baseline Security Analyzer 2.1 by Microsoft Corporation

http://www.microsoft.com/technet/security/tools/mbsa2_1/default.mspx

Scans a user's computer to detect security misconfigurations and missing Microsoft software security updates.

System Profiling

Belarc Advisor 7.2 by Belarc, Inc.

http://www.belarc.com/free_download.html

Scans a user's computer and provides detailed information about the computer, including brand, model, version, serial number, product number, and license data for all installed hardware and software.

Process Explorer 11.20 by Mark Russinovich

<http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/sysinternals/bb896653.aspx>

Scans a user's computer, provides information about software processes that are open or loaded and the names of their controlling programs, and allows the user to selectively kill processes.

Adware and Spyware Detection and Removal

Ad-aware 2008, Version 7.1.0.10, by Lavasoft AB

<http://lavasoft.com/single/trialpay.php>

Scans a user's computer for adware and spyware and removes any detected.

Spybot - Search & Destroy 1.5.2.2 by Safer Networking, Ltd.

<http://www.spybot.info/en/mirrors/index.html>

Scans a user's computer for adware and spyware and removes any detected. An immunization feature allows the user to immunize a computer against some spyware by downloading and adding lists of Internet domains known to contain harmful content to *Internet Explorer's* Restricted zone; it also adds options for blocking spyware, spyware installers, and known tracking cookies.

Virus and Spyware Detection and Removal

AVG Anti-Virus 8.0 Free Edition by AVG Technologies (formerly Grisoft)

<http://free.grisoft.com/ww.download?prd=afe>

Scans a user's computer for viruses and spyware and removes any detected. **Note:** Multiple anti-virus programs should not be installed on a computer.

Hard Drive Erasing

Active@ KillDisk 5.0 by LSoft Technologies, Inc.

<http://www.killdisk.com/downloadfree.htm>

Erases data and formats a user's computer hard drive without the possibility of data recovery. DOS application can be run from a boot disk. To avoid accidental use, do not install this product on your computer hard drive. ■

Annual Members

Potluck Picnic:

August 23, 2008, 1:30 PM

Thank you to Dick and Sandy Peterson for again hosting our August Members Potluck Picnic. The location is in the redwood grove by the pond at Peterson's Family Christmas Tree Farm, 1120 Darms Lane in Napa. The date is Saturday, August 23rd from 1:30-5:30 PM. Mike Ball will oversee the barbecuing of NVPCUG supplied steaks & chicken. The group will also provide nonalcoholic beverages

& ice, paper plates, cups, plastic ware, & napkins. Alcoholic beverages are BYOB. There will be games & prizes as well as time to visit with old friends and make new ones.



Signups will be available until our

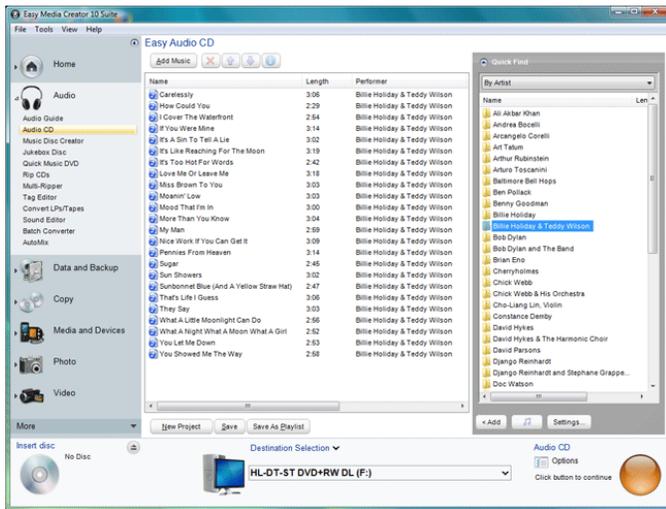
August 20th meeting. You may e-mail me before then at prior@napanet.net with "NVPCUG Picnic" in the subject, telling me the member's name, who will be attending with you, what you are bringing for the potluck (we need some appetizers), and if you can help with setup at 1:00 or cleanup.

The potluck picnic is always a lot of fun and the food is great and plentiful. We hope to see you all there.

Coordinator Dianne Prior (252-1506),
prior@napanet.net. ■

Easy Media Creator 10 Suite

By Ron Dack, member of the NVPCUG, <http://www.nvpcug.org/>,
RonD_Personal@comcast.net



Built in Modules

When NVPCUG's Review Coordinator **Susy Ball** told me she was getting a copy of **Roxio's** media creation software for review I agreed to use the program and write the article about my experience with it for the "Computer News". I have used previous versions of the software and found them to be highly useful.

Shortly after Susy gave me the software I installed **Roxio Easy Media Creator 10 Suite** on my Intel P4 XP-SP2 desktop computer with no problems what so ever. When I opened the program a registration form came up and after entering my name and e-mail address it connected to the **Roxio** website and I became a registered owner. Just to see if I had the current version I clicked on the check for updates menu and after a few seconds I was informed that I had the latest version.

I then looked at this new version and found it to be much more than a simple program to burn CDs and DVDs. I also found that if and when I finally upgrade to **Microsoft Vista** this version is ready for it.

Easy Media Creator 10 Suite is in fact an entire suite of useful programs. The first thing that started when I clicked the shortcut icon was **Roxio Central** where the

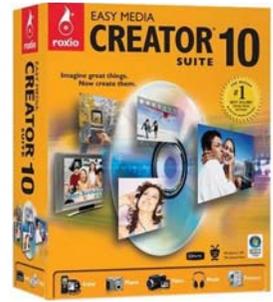


Everything but the Kitchen Sync

entire suite is broken down into click on icons. I began by launching each of the included applications, utilities, and assistants just to see what they do.

Breakdown

Here is a breakdown of some of the included applications:



BackonTrack 3: A system restore and backup program that lets you restore your system to a stable state in the event of a disasters like system crashes and virus attacks, replace individual lost or corrupted files, and backup your data.

CinePlayer: View your video files and commercial DVD movies on your computer. This is one of my favorite apps because I can stop working for a while and watch a favorite movie or part of a movie like "**Dirty Harry**" when Clint said "Do you feel lucky? Well, do you punk?"

Creator Classic: In this app I can do all the CD setups and burns that I did in the 3 previous versions I owned. In fact I use this app to make the disks the NVPCUG distributes for donations at the meetings.

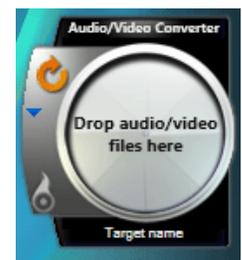
Label Creator: I have never gotten into labeling my CDs and DVDs. A couple experts at **Philips Electronics** (developer of the CD) told me that paper labels have a tendency to unbalance the disk and can damage the player.

Media Manager: This application makes it easy to import digital media from almost any source, create albums, slide shows and share these via print, e-mail, CD/DVD, etc. It also will sync this data with almost any other device including flash drives, hard drives, I-pods, etc.

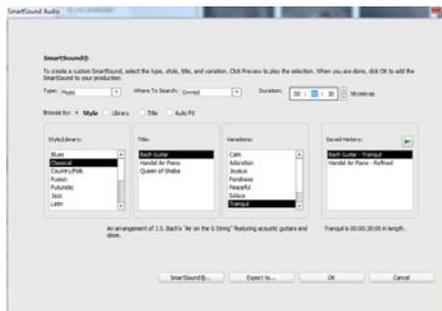
Music Disk Creator: Lets you create music disks in numerous formats and from any source you can connect to your computer including the web, stereo system, CD/DVD, mic, and midi.

MyDVD: Create your own DVD movie. Capture/Import media and edit, add, and configure your DVD the way you want it.

PhotoSuite: A complete photo program included so you can enhance, correct, and repair photos before you put them



Go-Go Gadgets



Cue Music Composer

on **MyDVD**, a CD, save them to your hard drive, or print them.

Sound Editor:

Clean up that sound tract or recording before you add it to your project. Complete audio editing.

Video Copy & Convert: Copy video from multiple sources, compile and convert it to a single format before you burn it to a DVD.

VideoWave: Layout your video frame by frame. Add text, transitions, effects, backgrounds, overlays, audio, and photos.

That is just a brief description of the most prominent applications that are included in **Easy Media Creator 10 Suite**.

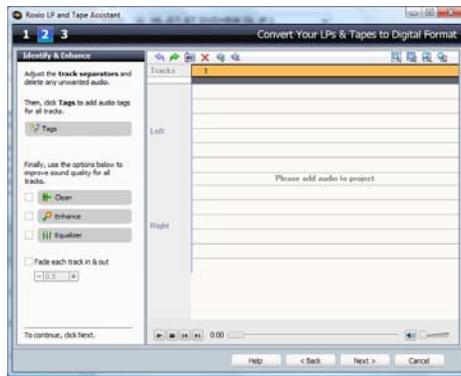
Utilities

There are numerous utilities included to help you accomplish your projects whether they are audio, video, or safety. Below is a list of some of these utilities:

- Audio Converter** – Changes audio file formats (MP3, MP4, WAV, etc.)
- Audio Tag Editor** – Add the artist name, title, album name, etc.
- AutoMix** – Work with track lists
- CineMagic** – Fully automated editor that helps you take raw video and audio and create a final polished production.
- Create Panoramas** – Stitches a series of photos into a panorama.
- DVD Music Assistant** – Create a DVD music video disk.
- Disc Image Loader** – Disc Image Loader lets you create emulated drives and load disc image files to emulated drives.
- Easy Audio Capture** – Assists in capturing audio from different audio sources
- LP & Tape Assistant** – Assists you in getting audio from these sources
- Media Import** – Using Media Import, you can copy or record all types of media formats to



redesigned interface



Step-By-Step Structure

your computer—including digital photos, video, audio, and DVD movie titles.

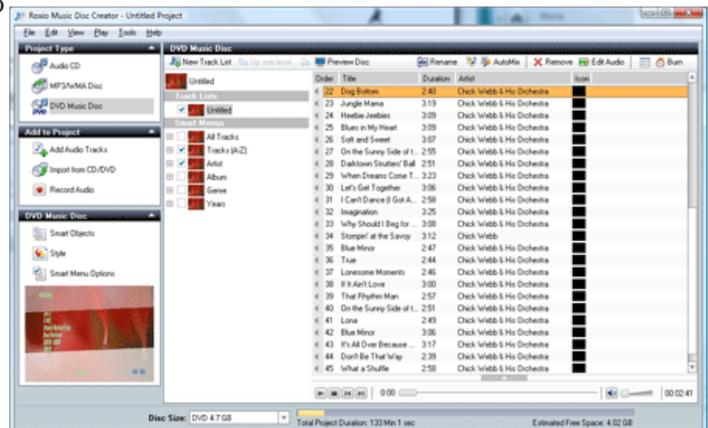
Multi Photo Enhance – You can use this assistant to edit multiple photos in one easy step.

So far I have found this suite highly useful for every media related project I have done since installation.

Minimum System requirements:

- Windows Vista with 1.6 GHz Intel Processor; 512 MB RAM
- Windows XP with 500 MHz processor or faster; 128 MB RAM
- 1 GB of free hard disk space for installation of all components
- 1024x768, 16-bit color graphics card
- For DVD, slideshow or video authoring; 1.6 GHz Intel P4 or equivalent; 512 MB RAM
- DirectX 9 or higher compatible sound card and graphics card
- Windows Media Player 10 or greater
- Internet Explorer 6.0 or greater with JavaScript enabled for reading Help and Tutorial files.
- A disc recorder equipped with BURN-Proof technology.
- For all recorders:
 - 500 MHz processor, or faster
 - Bus-mastering EIDE controller
 - DMA enabled on the hard drive

The only thing I didn't care for was when I installed the new version it removed the old **CinePlayer** but left the rest of the old version installed. I am hesitant to uninstall the old version because there may be shared files that I want to keep. Even so the **Roxio Easy Media Creator 10 Suite** is operating just fine and I am finding new things it will handle every time I run it. If you are planning to burn some music CD's or create a DVD movie I recommend that you upgrade to this version and complete your project the easy way. It is available at Costco for around \$79. ■



Non-stop music

What's a Good Computer to Buy?

Some Tips by Doug Fairchild, Director, Exton PC Council, PA, www.extonpccouncil.org,
dbfair@verizon.net

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

As a person who is active with a computer user's group and who has had formal training in Windows 2000 and Windows XP, I'm often asked "what computer should I get?"

This is an age old question in terms of computer technology time. Almost any professional that provides unbiased advice will tell you that it is not an easy answer. The first question that comes to mind is, what do you intend to do with it?

Many persons, who are not involved with what's current, do not really know just what's encompassed with their regular routines. A typical answer is, "I don't do that much and don't need an elaborate machine".

It seems to me that as technology advances, more and more uses will become commonplace requiring more oomph from the computer being bought today. Therefore, my recommendations focus on a machine that is good enough for now, with specifications that would hopefully add enough to carry over for a little time to come.

Any professional who keeps up with technical publications can tell you that ratings change faster than the weather. Also, new machines and technology keep changing.

So how's a person to choose?

Typically, in the past, the common time frame was to hope for a machine that would last 5 years before being outdated. Today, the best equation I can offer is that it's like buying a new car. How much can you live with, before getting something that has great new features?

With that being said, let's look at the core components of a computer with what, in my opinion would be the minimum for a Windows machine to last for a little while. These choices are based on using equipment with name brand components and include web sites where applicable for further research of these products. I strongly recommend that if you are considering an alternate to name brands, you research that brand.

Some comments about Apple computers follow after the discussion on recommendations for Windows machines.

OPERATING SYSTEM – Windows XP (any version) – Windows VISTA (Home Premium or better)

Since the release of VISTA, many computers are still being offered with Windows XP. VISTA Home basic is considered by most professional reviewers as less desirable than any version of Windows XP. While there has been a lot of VISTA bashing, some of the derogatory statements are not true. For clarification and a

better understanding of problems related to VISTA see: <http://blogs.zdnet.com/Ou/?p=785>

It is definitely true that some peripherals like various printers and some other devices do not work with VISTA. However, it needs to be said that at some point, progress needs to preclude older technology. For example, how many people can work on their automobiles like they used to. It takes much more sophisticated and expensive equipment. To see what devices will be affected by VISTA, download and run upgrade advisor. Even though you are not upgrading but considering a new computer this will let you know what devices will be affected by VISTA.

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/windowsvista/buyorupgrade/upgradeadvisor.mspx>

CPU - PROCESSOR - Intel® Core™2 Duo or AMD equivalent. <http://www.intel.com/> - <http://www.amd.com/us-en/>

RAM (base memory) – Window XP -1GB (or more – consider 2GB) – Vista -2GB(or more)

The type and specifics will be controlled by the computer model you select. One consideration is to allow for expansion at a later date. Check to see if there are open slots to add additional memory. It can be worthwhile and can save in the long run to pay a little more upfront by having the memory configured to allow for this upgrade. While Windows Vista states 1GB as minimum, you probably will want 2GB.

VRAM - Video Ram (Memory on your graphics card) – 256MB (or more)

This is frequently ignored by inexperienced shoppers, but can make a world of difference on the performance of a PC. For a detailed explanation see http://searchstorage.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0,,sid5_gci213325,00.html

A few popular graphic card manufacturers: <http://ati.amd.com/products/index.html>, <http://pny.com/>, <http://nvidia.com/>

HARD DRIVE – 100GB (or more)

Most new hard drives use a newer type of interface referred to as SATA (Serial ATA). Look for this specification unless you have an older

hard drive you wish to use in your new computer (which is more likely a PATA (Parallel ATA)). One of the newest technologies is a FLASH Hard Drive. Currently this is primarily for notebooks (laptops). It has some definite advantages but also some drawbacks. It's expensive and has limited capacity. It may be the upcoming future of Hard Drives. See <http://www.pcworld.com/article/id,126833/article.html> for a PC World review.

A couple of popular hard drive manufacturers: <http://seagate.com/> (note that Maxtor has been acquired by Seagate Technology) <http://westerndigital.com/>

POWER SUPPLY – Varies with the devices built into the computer. If you believe that you may be adding internal devices, consider a computer with a power supply that has more capacity than needed for preconfigured devices. This can be a little complicated, but should be an answerable question to the person selling the computer (get someone who has technical awareness). For an explanation of the power supply see: <http://computer.howstuffworks.com/power-supply.htm>

There is also an excellent video at this site to gain a basic understanding of the core components.

MOTHERBOARD – Normally this will be controlled by the computer model you select unless you are purchasing with the option to customize. Being aware and specifying the other core components listed, the motherboard should be suitable and not normally something you choose independently. If you are buying a desktop, you may want to inquire about available PCI slots or other expansion capabilities. In the past, this has afforded the ability to economically install hardware upgrades which may keep your machine current for a longer period of time. Laptops do not, as a rule, offer the same capability to expand and upgrade other than memory and optical drives.

OPTICAL DRIVE AND OTHER PERIPHERALS

– There are many choices and most computers today offer a DVD drive with read/write (this is the ability to play and create DVD and CD disks). Ask what it has and what it will do – also compared to other options.

Notes on Apple Computers - While I do not have firsthand knowledge about Mac (by Apple) computers, the reviews and information I've seen tends to make me believe that the new Mac's are superior to many other brands of PC's. I would

emphasize new versus computers manufactured prior to 2007. One of the indicators that this is true, is the fact that while sales of other PC manufactures are falling, Mac's have realized an increase in sales. They are, however, more expensive.

If I had the money I would look seriously at a new Mac with the idea of loading Windows as a second OS (operating system). Mac has a feature called Boot Camp which accommodates adding other OS's. Boot Camp is software included with Mac OS X 10.5 Leopard that lets you run compatible versions of Microsoft Windows on an Intel-based Mac. While they do not offer technical support for other OS's, Mac's will run multiple OS's (including VISTA) as well as other PC OS. You, of course, have to own or buy the additional OS's to be installed. See: <http://www.apple.com/>

Notes on Linux OS – Again, I do not have firsthand knowledge about Linux OS's. However, I've been led to believe that they make a lot fewer demands on the computer. From what I've heard, you probably in most cases do not need a new computer to install and run. For more information see <http://www.linux.org/> ■

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Viewing WMFs on a Mac

Many Windows video programs, such as, Windows Movie Maker, only to make WMV (Windows Movie Video) videos and slide shows into which could only be viewed by friends with Windows computers. However many have Mac friends, too. Member Bernard Krevet tells us of a new download that can help.

The download url is <http://www.videolan.org/vlc/>.

Definition (from Wikipedia): VLC media player is a free software media player written by the VideoLAN project. It is a portable multimedia player, encoder, and streamer supporting many audio and video codecs and file formats as well as DVDs, VCDs, and various streaming protocols. It is able to stream over networks and to transcode multimedia files and save them into various different formats. VLC used to stand for VideoLAN Client, but that meaning is now deprecated.

It is one of the most platform-independent players available, with versions for BeOS, Syllable, BSD, Linux, Mac OS X, Microsoft Windows, MorphOS, Solaris and Windows CE, and is widely used with over 85 million downloads for version 0.8.6. ■

Your Next Computer Will Be Green

By Marjie Tucker, Editor, Mountain Computer User Group, GA, www.mcug.org mcug@dnet.net

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With Europe leading the way, the computer industry is decidedly becoming "green." The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) and the Restriction of Hazardous Substances (ROHS) directives went into effect earlier this year. These two directives state that certain electrical and electronic equipment must cut down on hazardous materials such as lead, mercury, and cadmium. They also give customers the right to return their equipment free of charge. Companies have several years to fully implement these directives, but the leaders have already started to make changes.

Dell, for example, is advertising Energy Smart workstations and notebooks that can reduce power consumption by as much as 78%.

The Energy Smart configuration uses a default power setting that is designed to reduce consumption and energy costs right out of the box. In addition, the power supply, fan, and motherboard use significantly less energy to maintain cool internal temperatures.

HP is using 80 Plus power supplies to lower energy bills and AMD technology that reduces heat output and PC power consumption. In addition, they have already introduced an HP recycling program where you can trade-in or donate the products.

Government Initiatives Many U.S. government agencies have implemented standards and regulations to encourage green computing. The Environmental Protection Agency launched an Energy Star program in 1992 and strengthened its requirements in 2006. In 2003 the California State Senate enacted the Electronic Waste Recycling Act and in 2007 President Bush issued Executive Order 13423 requiring all federal agencies to use the Electronic Products Environmental Assessment Tool when purchasing computer systems. In addition, a global consortium called The Green Grid was founded in 2007 by AMD, APC, Dell, HP, IBM, Intel, Microsoft, Rackable Systems, SprayCool, Sun and VMware.

Another initiative formed by a group of Global-minded IT executives, the Green Computing Impact Organization (GCIO), was created to be an active participant in transforming the IT community from an environmental liability to an Earth conscious example of responsibility. GCIO is a nonprofit organization that is based on environmental audit programs for consumers and small

business homes with respect to general energy-efficiency programs (including lighting, heating, insulation, etc.). GCIO's mission is to educate and assist enterprise technology users in the design of environmentally aware and responsible information system operations. They help consumers become more environmentally responsible by reducing energy consumption and electronic waste in an effort to protect the Earth.

GCIO is sponsoring educational programs across the country and participating in a Green Computing Summit that will be held in Washington, DC on May 20th. The summit will address how public sector IT managers, procurement officials, and program managers public sector professionals can transform their IT and data center operations into more environmentally conscious yet efficient solutions. This conference will attract senior government IT professionals and their industry partners tasked with helping agencies become greener in the coming years. Attendees will represent federal, state and local governments, public policy organizations and suppliers to government. You can read more about this event at www.e-gov.com/EventOverview.aspx?Event=SGCS08.

Features of Green Computing

Power management is the most popular method. The operating system of the computer can be set to directly control the power saving aspects of the hardware. It can automatically turn off the monitor or hard drive after a period of inactivity. Or, the entire system may hibernate, turning off most of the components such as even allow the user to manually adjust the voltages supplied to the CPU to reduce the electricity consumption and the amount of heat that is produced. As of July of 2007, all new Energy Star certified desktops must have a power supply that is at least 80% efficient.

Other features include using motherboard video output instead of a video card, hard disks that consume less power, flash based solid state drives that require fewer write cycles, and lower energy monitors. And, manufacturers of networking equipment are developing switches and routers that reduce energy costs.

Recycling Materials

Obsolete computers can be reused for charities, nonprofit organizations, and developing countries. Parts from really old systems can be recycled through some



recycling centers. Some recycling charges can be passed back to the manufacturers.

Recycling this equipment keeps the lead, mercury, and chromium out of our landfills. In addition, computer supplies such as cartridges, paper, and batteries can be easily recycled.

How Can We Work Greener?

Visit the website for Climate Savers Smart Computing at www.climatesaverscomputing.org to view a three step program to go green. Here are the basic steps that they suggest:

Step One - Turn on Power Management. Since the average desktop PC wastes nearly 50% of the energy it consumes as heat, it makes sense to use the power management features that are built into Windows XP and Vista. The benefits? You will reduce your electricity bills and your energy footprint will be lowered as you reduce your greenhouse gas emissions. The Climate Savers organization predicts that the power management features on your computer can save nearly a ton of CO2 and more than \$60 a year in

Step Two - Buy an energy efficient computer. Energy Star, the program designed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, specifies the standards that equipment and appliances must meet to wear the Energy Star badge. You can visit their website at www.energystar.org for specifics. Basically an Energy Star compliant PC uses 15 to 25 percent less energy. This program is expected to save U.S. consumers and businesses more than \$1.8 billion in energy costs over the next five years and prevent greenhouse gas emission equal to 2.7 million vehicles.

Step Three - Unplug from phantom power. As long as your computer is plugged in it still uses electricity, even while it is turned off or in standby mode. A computer that is turned off, but still plugged in, can use up to 10 watts. The Climate Savers estimate that you can reduce your electricity bills by as much as 10% by unplugging your appliances and electronics when they're not being used. ■

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For Anybody Who Has Thought About Trying Linux

By Drew Kwashnak, Linux SIG Leader, Danbury Area Computer Society, CT, www.dacs.org, dacseditor@dacs.org

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For anybody who has thought about trying Linux, it has become easier than ever before with Ubuntu 8.04 LTS Hardy Heron. As with most Linux distributions, Ubuntu is available as a free download and is freely distributable. It is even available already installed on Dell computers. The most common method is downloading the ISO image from Ubuntu's website (<http://www.ubuntu.com>) and burning it onto a CD.

From the site, you can download the Desktop version or Server for 32-bit and 64-bit systems. There is even an option to download what is called an alternative version which is just the installer and does not include the LiveCD portion, which also includes an installer. If you are like me, until a couple months ago, and living on dial-up or you do not have a CD burner handy or just don't want to put in that much effort then you can order a free CD through the corporate sponsor of Ubuntu, Canonical, ShipIt department.

I have been very pleased with the speed with which their CDs arrive. Alternatively, the website contains links to vendors where you can buy the CDs from under \$5 to more, and they can handle large orders as well.

Once you have your CD in your hot little hands, trying Ubuntu is as simple as placing it in your CD-ROM tray and rebooting your system. If system will boot from the CD and after a short moment you'll be greeted with the Ubuntu welcome screen. If you want to "try before you buy," then you can choose the default "Try Ubuntu without any changes to your computer" and your hard drive will not be touched during your session unless you choose to. You don't even need a hard drive to select this option; you just will not be able to install it from the session.

If you are more certain or just daring then you can go straight into the installer and in about 60 minutes (45 minutes if you know what Different Strokes For Anybody

Linux cont. on Page 12



Who Has Thought About Trying Linux by Drew Kwashnak you are doing) you're booting to your new Ubuntu installation.

Ubuntu will scan your hardware and load the modules and drivers necessary for your system. If you have hardware that has proprietary drivers available, Linux cannot include them in the CD for legal reasons. Ubuntu works around this by providing a Restricted Drivers tool that lists all such hardware found on your system and provides the ability to download and install the necessary drivers in a click or two, legally.

Now that you have Ubuntu up and running on your system, what can you do? Plenty! Ubuntu brings you a full featured operating system complete with:

- Firefox 3.05 beta web browser
- OpenOffice.org 2.4 full featured office suite compatible with pre-Office 2007 Word, Excel, PowerPoint and some Access files.
- Evolution personal information manager for email and calendar goodness, a Microsoft Outlook user can feel comfortable with. There is even plug-ins to allow Evolution to access existing Microsoft Exchange servers.
- Pidgin multi-protocol instant messenger including Yahoo, MSN, AIM, Jabber, IRC and more.
- Gimp (GNU Image Manipulation Program), a powerful Photoshop-like image editing program that includes filters, layers and a host of goodies.
- F-Spot image manager for categorizing and minor editing of all of your pictures as well as easily importing pictures from your digital camera.
- And much, MUCH more...

If Ubuntu doesn't come with a particular application, thousands of free applications are available from the Ubuntu online repository which are easily installed and updated from the Synaptic package manager.

When you decide to install Ubuntu onto your hard drive or virtual machine you only need to click the "Install" icon on the desktop to start the process. After seven or so easy questions the installer will copy the files over to the hard disk. Depending on your system's speed this could take about 60 minutes, more or less. It will even detect if you have Windows installed and offer to transfer over your files and compatible settings from your Windows accounts!

Of course, if the limitations of the LiveCD, such as settings are not saved from session to session, and you are hesitant to partition and install the full operating system on your hard drive Ubuntu offers yet another alternative

called Wubi. Wubi is, from the Ubuntu website: "Wubi is an officially supported Ubuntu installer for Windows users that can bring you to the Linux world with a single click. Wubi allows you to install and uninstall Ubuntu as any other Windows application, in a simple and safe way.

Are you curious about Linux and Ubuntu? Trying them out has never been easier!" Wubi can be downloaded as an .exe file directly. With Linux the installation is not the end, only the beginning! Whether you try the LiveCD, Wubi or a full installation you will find a wealth of quality applications, refreshing freedom and a community unlike any other! If you have problems, questions or want to find out more then you need look no further than the third Wednesday of every month for the DACS Linux SIG at 7:30 p.m. in the DACS Resource Center!

Drew Kwashnak: Has been losing more nights of sleep with Linux since 2002 and just can't keep from downloading and trying the latest versions! When not working with Linux he works with ASP.NET and Microsoft SQL Server for a small financial company. He is also the DACS Linux SIG leader and a father of 3.

Links:

Ubuntu:

<http://www.ubuntu.com>

Get Ubuntu:

<http://www.ubuntu.com/getubuntu>

ShipIt:

<https://shipit.ubuntu.com/> ■

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Screen Flicker

One of the causes of screen flicker, especially on CRT (cathode-ray tube) monitors, is a screen refresh rate that is set too low. In general, it's best to set the refresh rate to the highest possible setting. In WinXP right-click the Desktop, click Properties, choose the Settings tab, click the Advanced button, and choose the Monitor tab. If you see a Hide Modes That This Monitor Cannot Display checkbox, select it. In the Screen Refresh Rate drop-down menu, select the highest possible rate available. Click Apply, and if prompted, click Yes to keep the new settings. Click OK to close the dialog boxes and save your settings. In Win98 right-click the Desktop, click Properties, choose the Settings tab, click the Advanced button, and choose the Adapter tab. Select the highest refresh rate from the drop-down menu, click Apply and OK.

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As You Like It

All About Music File Formats

By Seth Colaner, From Smart Computing February 2008 • Vol.19 Issue 2, Page(s) 50-52
in print issue, <http://www.smartcomputing.com>



Although there is a host of ways to categorize audio file formats, the most pertinent method for most people is by how audio files save information. Using this guideline, there are three types of audio files: uncompressed, lossless, and lossy.

While these are also conveniently descriptive. Thinking in terms of compression, an uncompressed file is just that: not compressed. **Compression** is the efficient reorganization of data or removal of data to reduce a file's size. An uncompressed file is saved without adulteration; it's raw data. A **lossless** file is one that has been compressed but has not lost any information. **Lossy** compression removes information in the raw file that is essentially redundant or unnecessary. Doing so degrades the quality of the file's sound, causing it to "lose" some of its information.

Open vs. Proprietary

A second tier of audio file categorization is whether a file type is open or proprietary. Open file types are not restricted by patents or DRM (digital rights management), whereas a proprietary type of format has been designed and copyrighted by a company. This allows companies to, among other things, steer consumers toward their products and embed DRM protections into the files they sell. (For more information on DRM and the role it plays in digital music, see "Who Put The DRM In Digital Music?" on page 53, February 2008 • Vol.19 Issue 2.)

For example, if you buy a song in WMA (Windows Media Audio), Microsoft's proprietary audio format, it won't play on iTunes (made by Apple) without being converted or decoded in some way.

By contrast, open file types such as Ogg Vorbis and FLAC (Free Lossless Audio Codec) can be used on any product that is configured to play them. Makers of proprietary audio file formats, such as Apple and Microsoft, do not usually configure their products to play open formats because it would enable consumers to acquire their music from any source. Most device manufacturers, however, configure their products to play open formats because, in most cases, they aren't beholden to any particular music service.

Uncompressed

Audio files that are uncompressed are higher-quality than files that have been compressed. They are also much larger, because none of the raw data has been altered or removed.

This is a boon to audiophiles who demand the highest possible quality from their music, as well as music professionals who need to mix, edit, and process audio. The downside is that uncompressed files take up gobs of space—an uncompressed audio file will be about 10MB per minute of recording, depending on sample rate and bit depth. **Sample rate** is the frequency at which measurements are taken from a continuous signal. **Bit depth** indicates how precise those measurements are. AIFF (Audio Interchange File Format) and uncompressed WAV



With firmware from Rockbox (www.rockbox.org), you can play open-source audio files on a wide variety of digital music players, such as the Sansa e200 pictured here.

(Waveform), the two most popular uncompressed file formats, were developed by Apple and Microsoft, respectively, in collaboration with other manufacturers. Oddly, both file types will play on Windows Media Player, as well as iTunes. Because of the large file sizes, however, they are more practical for other applications, such as recording and editing. Indeed, both file types are frequently used by music professionals.



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Display

The image or text viewed on a monitor. More recently, display has become synonymous with the monitor itself, particularly when referring to flat panel displays.



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Revised 4-23-07

Lossless

Lossless compression can be a bit difficult to understand; after all, how can a file be compressed yet not lose any information? Think of lossless files as being similar to ZIP files: Although unzipped files may be quite large, they can be packaged (zipped) so that they take up very little space when being transported or downloaded. Once they arrive at their destination, the user unzips them, and nothing in the files has been lost.

Because lossless files still contain, in some capacity, all the same raw data as an uncompressed file, they can only be reduced in size up to about 50%. While that leaves file sizes a little bulky (a three-minute song could be as large as 15MB), such a significant reduction in file size still gives you the ability to store twice as much audio without sacrificing quality.

ALAC (Apple Lossless Audio Codec), WMA Lossless, FLAC, and WAV are popular lossless formats. ALAC belongs to Apple, and WMA is strictly for Microsoft and compatible products, but WAV (even though it was originally developed primarily by Microsoft) and FLAC are open formats. FLAC was developed by the Xiph.Org Foundation, which also gave the world Ogg Vorbis. Like Ogg Vorbis, FLAC is open-source and is supported by a host of devices, including the iPod and the Xbox, although sometimes third-party software or firmware support is required.

Lossy

Working with lossy formats requires some give-and-take. While these formats significantly reduce file sizes, rendering audio more portable and space-efficient, quality is lost. Granted, most of the lost information is unnecessary — for example, the removal of frequencies beyond the capability of human hearing — but that information is gone forever. Should you decide to apply audio effects or re-edit such files, it could illuminate that missing information in a negative way.

Still, for everyday enjoyment of music, most listeners never notice the differences among lossy audio files and their higher-quality counterparts. Between the lower-quality media and generally noisy environments,



iTunes supports most audio formats, but forget about playing DRM-protected WMA (Windows Media Audio) files on it.

even discerning ears can't always tell the difference between lossy and uncompressed audio when listening to music with ear buds or in the car. The difference can be heard primarily when listening on a high-quality home stereo system or with good headphones in a quiet environment.

The primary advantage of lossy compression is size. The files are significantly smaller than the original recording, around 80 to 95%. Their petite package means they take up substantially less space and are therefore faster to download. They're also easier to transport; you can fit many more of these files on a flash drive or digital music player, and they're more likely to be small enough (under 10MB) to send as email attachments.

Lossy file types include Ogg Vorbis and AAC (Advanced Audio Coding), but the most famous of the bunch is MP3. The MP3 format has become so popular that its name has become a misnomer for products; as tissues are often known as Kleenex, digital music players are frequently referred to as MP3 players. RealAudio is another hugely popular lossy format, but it's usually reserved for streaming, as from an Internet radio station.

Which Is Best?

There is no one "best" audio format. Each type exists for a reason, and different file types are better or best depending on the situation. Uncompressed files will have the highest quality; if you edit audio files or crave perfection, this type is best. You get the best of both worlds—smaller size without sacrificing the quality—with lossless files. Lossy files are best if you're concerned with storage space and download times. Apart from those three categories, the "best" audio files are the ones that work with your software and hardware.

Defining Codecs

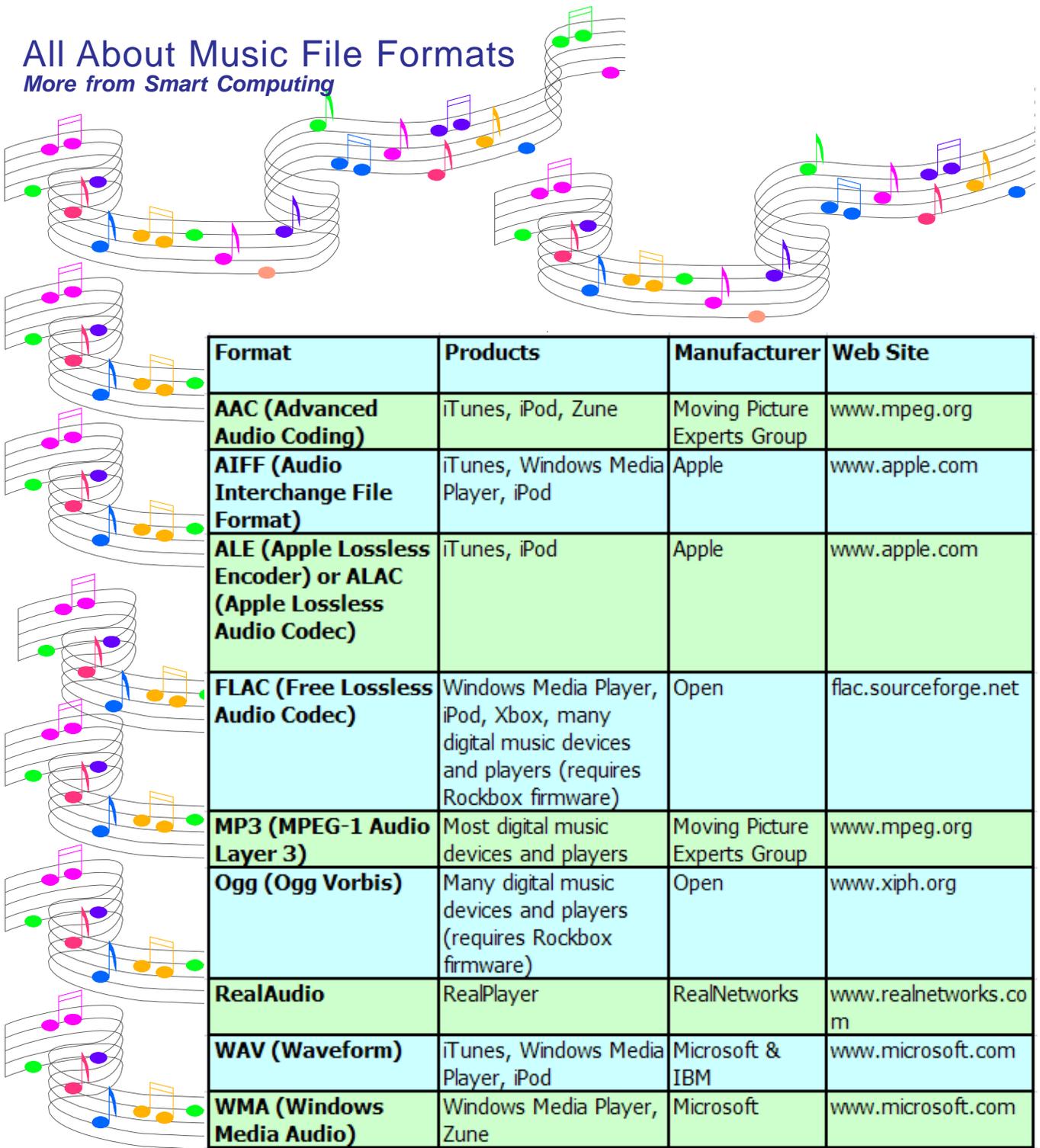
It's a common misconception that codecs and file formats are the same thing. A **codec (compressor/decompressor)** is actually a computer program or a device that encodes and decodes digital data, while a **format** is a medium for storing the data. Take Ogg Vorbis for example: Ogg is the actual file format, while Vorbis is the codec that decodes the file so it can play.

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Chart of Music Formats follows on see page 16.

All About Music File Formats

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