

COMPUTER NEWS



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The Napa Valley Personal
Computer Users Group will meet
Wednesday, September 16^h,
7:00-9:00 P.M.

At the Napa Senior Activity Center,
1500 Jefferson Street, Napa, California
CoolHotNot will be the main presentation



After meeting information by the President we will have our 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 emailing them to Random Access moderator **Jerry Brown** at Questions@nvpcug.org.

The Computer Tutor session will follow. During this month's session Coordinator **Jeff Solomon** will be demonstrating one of the many features of **Microsoft Word 2007**, but he needs your suggestion as to which feature to cover. If you have a suggestion on which feature he should discuss, please contact **Jeff Solomon** at tutor@nvpcug.org.



Many of you may be asking yourself who or what is CoolHotNot. Well it is the company founded by **Dave Whittle**. He wanted to drop by and tell us about his company. For those of you who want to read more about CoolHotNot, go to

<http://coolnotnot.com>

to find out more about this Springville, Utah based company.



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 24 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@sbcbglobal.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

Use Spybot To Get Rid Of Kazaa

Kazaa loads an inordinate amount of adware, third-party programs, and other files on your PC. Use a hefty anti-spyware utility such as Spybot Search & Destroy to remove it. Open Spybot S&D and click the Check For Problems button. Wait while Spybot S&D scans your system and then click the Fix Selected Problems button. Click Yes when asked to verify that you want to remove the selected files. Spybot S&D may not be able to remove all of the selected files until you restart your PC. If prompted, restart your PC and let Spybot S&D complete its cleaning process.

Budgeting

Include room in your budget for all the extras your new CE device may require. When considering an HDTV, for example, items such as universal remotes, calibration, and wall mounts add up quickly. Keep the 50/50 rule in mind: Put half your budget toward accessories and the other half on the television itself. Also, remember to research upgrading your signal to a high-def one—providers do tend to run specials on service and any equipment upgrades your setup might necessitate.

Multiple Zones

Many new home models have single-zone home-audio setups that wow visitors who are surprised to hear the music as clearly in the basement as in the living room. If you catch yourself thinking that the people upstairs may not have the same music tastes as the people below their feet, check out multiple zone systems. Installers offer equipment that can break your audio setup into many zones, each of which may include single (or multiple) rooms.

Find Compatible Memory

Many memory manufacturers have an online database where you can look for memory that's compatible with your system. Crucial Technology (www.crucial.com) has an excellent database that can provide you with all of the specifications you need to find compatible memory. The interactive guide asks you for your PC manufacturer and model and supplies a list of compatible Crucial memory modules. Although Crucial no doubt hopes you'll buy its memory, you can use the specifications next to each module to locate compatible modules elsewhere.

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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

Sept 16	7:00-9:00 p.m.	NVPCUG General Meeting + A
Oct 7	7:00-9:00 p.m.	Board of Directors meeting + B
Oct 8	6:30-8:30 p.m.	Napa Valley Mac User Group + A
Oct 12	5:30-7:30 p.m.	Investors SIG meeting + C
Oct 14	7:00-8:30 p.m.	Digital Photography SIG meeting + B
Oct 21	7:00-9:00 p.m.	NVPCUG General Meeting + A
Nov 4	7:00-9:00 p.m.	Board of Directors meeting + B
Nov 9	5:30-7:30 p.m.	Investors SIG meeting + C
Nov 11	7:00-8:30 p.m.	Digital Photography SIG meeting + B
Nov 12	6:30-8:30 p.m.	Napa Valley Mac User Group + A
Nov 18	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 2009

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

• All telephone numbers are in Area Code 707.

NVPCUG Computer News

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Open Office.Org 3.0

An Evolutionary Improvement

By Bill Wayson, LINUX SIG Leader, Channel Islands PCUG, California,

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OpenOffice.org (OO.o) is Free and Open Source Software's (FOSS) premier alternative to the Microsoft Office productivity suite. It offers a high level of compatibility with many of the ever-changing MS Office formats, provides many of the same features as MS Office, and works similarly to MS Office. This month, we will explore the recently released OpenOffice.org 3.0, which is available for Microsoft Windows, Linux, Apple's Macintosh, Sun's Solaris, and several other operating systems. Many, if not most, users of MS Office who require the broad, deep range of features of MS Office could change to OO.o and become productive after a very shallow learning curve.

If your requirements are more for just compatibility with Microsoft's Word document formats in a word processor, you can consider more streamlined FOSS alternatives such as AbiWord.

OO.o is a full-featured office productivity suite comprised of six integrated applications: the Writer word processor (which also has a Web page editing mode), Calc spreadsheet, Draw graphics program, Impress presentations program, Base database program, and Math equation editor.

OO.o 3.0 is an evolutionary improvement on the application suite, with new features, enhancements, and user interface improvements. Users of Apple Macintosh OS X systems benefit greatly from OO.o 3.0, which will now run as a native OS X application. OS X users will also have support for Microsoft's VBA macro language and the Calc Solver component, which allows solving optimization problems where the optimum value of a particular spreadsheet cell has to be calculated based on constraints provided in other cells. Both of these features are missing in MS Office 2008 for Mac OS X.

All users of OO.o 3.0 benefit from its improvements, including the two above. Another area of significant improvement is one where OO.o is breaking out of Microsoft mimicry mode: support for open document standards. OO.o 3.0 supports the latest OpenDocument Format (PDF) specification. In fact, ODF is the OO.o default document format. ODF is gaining wider acceptance worldwide, being adopted by more companies and governments as the standard for documents, and becoming supported by an increasing number of applications. OO.o

will also read and write many other formats, including those of various versions of MS Office and Word, plain text, and several PDA document formats.

Additionally, it will read the newest formats introduced in MS Office 2007. Exchanging documents with users of Microsoft's products should not be an issue. The Writer screen now sports a handy zoom slider control, making it quick and easy to change the zoom level of the view. Additionally, it will automatically display multiple pages of the document as the zoom level is lowered. Writer now displays notes — notations added to a document that are not necessarily meant to be printed — at the edge of the editing window to the side of the document, making it easier to read them and see their context in the document. In addition, notes from different users are displayed in different colors, together with the editing date and time, facilitating collaborative work on a document.

Calc sees some useful improvements. One is in the charts feature. Now, custom error bars can be included, and regression equations and correlation coefficients can be displayed right in the chart. Another is a new feature, spreadsheet collaboration through workbook sharing. This feature allows multiple users to work collaboratively on a spreadsheet while avoiding editing conflicts. The users share a spreadsheet, each adding their data. The spreadsheet owner can then easily integrate the new data with a few clicks. And Calc now supports 1,024 columns per worksheet.

Draw now lets you crop images the same way that most other graphics programs do, by dragging handles located at the edges and corners of an image. This same improvement appears in Impress, too. Additionally, Impress now natively supports inserting tables into presentations. Tables can be added directly into the presentation and edited within Impress as native Impress objects.

Improvements affecting the entire suite include a new set of icons, expanded feature support when exporting to XML, and a new gateway to the suite called the Start Center, which makes it more intuitive to get to where you want to go in the suite. There is nothing revolutionary in OO.o 3.0. What is new are several improvements and enhancements that will keep the suite in contention with its competitors. And we have not touched at all on the features OO.o already had before 3.0. If you need a productivity suite with both a broad and deep set of features and, particularly, if you are not married to Microsoft Office, you should give OO.o a look. It costs you nothing to try, you may just like it, so it just may save you hundreds of dollars. ■



Q: Is there a quick way to find out how Windows programs work when I can't find the manual?

Written by Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc., Tiplet@gabegold.com

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Which Beatles song describes an under-used PC resource for solving problems and answering questions? It's not "Ask Me Why?" or "Do You Want to Know a Secret". It's "Help"!

Since Windows' early days, Windows itself and most applications have included information on setting configuration options, usage, and problem determination. Being able to access this material lets you deal with problems whenever they occur, rather than waiting to call an expensive or frustrating support line during working hours. It leads to better productivity, can be faster than Google searching or pestering friends, is available when you're offline, and it can even make PC use more enjoyable by revealing techniques which impress those around you.

Using Help requires just a little knowledge and practice, since it can't — yet — read your mind and answer unasked questions. And you do need to know which rocks to look under for the information you need.

Help information in special files — usually installed with Windows or application programs — is accessed through built-in software. Fortunately, there's a common look-and-feel across most programs' Help material and interfaces.

The best way to learn Help is to experiment with your own favorite apps to see how they present their material. (And using Help is harmless — nobody need know you're doing it and you can't break anything!)

There are generally at least three ways to invoke Help: press the F1 key, click the word Help on the menu bar, and press Alt-H (hold the Alt key and press H).

Pressing F1 enters the Help system; the two other actions provide a short pull-down list of app-specific Help options (Users Guide, Reference Manual, About information, check for updates, link to vendor site, report bugs, etc.) which can be clicked.

Most Help systems provides tabs for specifying how to retrieve info; common tabs are Contents, to show main topics and subtopics; Search or Find, to explore Help information; and Index, to list all topics alphabetically. Sometimes equivalent choices are listed in the pull-down menu.

Some applications link to a Web site for Help — good news because it's always current but bad news because it requires being online. Others, such as some Microsoft

Office products — open a Help task pane within the application window. Microsoft Help sometimes includes an Answer Wizard, replacing searching, allowing entry of questions needing answers.

Some Help systems are task oriented, requiring you to select or enter what you're trying to do. That's helpful when your need matches supplied tasks but it's not as friendly for browsing or when you don't describe a task in Microsoft's terms. When that happens, don't get discouraged, simply rephrase your query or refer to the subject index.

Just as when you explore Web sites, navigating through Help leaves a trail. You can always click Back to revisit a previous display and then click Forward to retrace your path.

Two other helpful Windows facilities are often overlooked.

Dialogue boxes — sometimes only displaying cryptic buttons and choices — often contain Help buttons. These can be especially helpful since they display contextual help, describing what the dialogue box can do.

"What's This?" — clicking the question mark found in the upper right-hand corner of many dialogue boxes turns the cursor into a traveling question mark. Move it to a button or menu and click to display a brief explanation of the item you clicked.

Remember, just as Google is your online friend, answering most searching urges, Help can be a partner, giving clues to your computer's mysterious personality. ■

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October General Meeting

October 21st, 2009 →

Cleaning Inside your PC

By Gary Bentley, Editor, SouthWest International Personal Computer Club
(TX) *Throughput*, February 2009, www.swipcc.org,
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When I worked for GTE Lenkurt (subsequently GTE Network Systems) in El Paso 1978–1982 as a technologist and supervisor of electrical performance quality assurance for their telecommunications equipment produced at that location we were required to be very cognizant of the risk of damage to integrated circuits posed by static electricity.

Even static charges that produce no visible spark are sufficient to destroy, or worse, cause subsequent intermittent failure of high impedance inputs on many PC's (non catastrophic damage is more pernicious because it may permit equipment to pass performance testing and fail later in the field, also, intermittent hardware failures are difficult to troubleshoot because you have to be observing the device while it is in failure mode).

All personnel were required to wear grounded wrist straps and work on grounded conducting pads when handling integrated circuit boards. Unfortunately, the plastic tip of a household or automobile portable vacuum cleaner does not conduct electricity and so can build up a significant static electric charge when there are large volumes of air-borne dust particles swirling within and without the plastic vacuum cleaner nozzle (think of rubbing a balloon on your head and recall the immediate build up of electric charge).

There are various brands of canned dust removing gas with a form of difluoroethane gas that is static free. Combining blowing the dust away with that gas and using a cloth dampened with a dust remover will assure that you do not subject the integrated circuits of your computer to static electricity. Make sure to wipe or blow clean the openings in the case for cooling fans (to assure your system does not overheat). Do not blow the dust remover into a fan in such a way as to spin the fan, or else hold the fan while you spray it as you may create an induced electrical current back into the motherboard (remember that a motor can be a generator).

You may get away with using a vacuum cleaner some of the time, or may think you have until you observe strange intermittent failures down the road (strange crashes, blue screen of death, corrupt files or boot failures). Such failures would require you to replace CPU, memory, motherboard, video graphics card, or power supply (and the failure of any of these components may have corrupted the hard drive and all your data) or simply junk the PC (since the cost of replacement and repair may equal the cost of a new PC tower).

If you unplug the computer prior to cleaning it, remember that the computer will no longer be grounded. So, if you are wearing a grounded wrist strap you should keep one hand on a metal portion of the PC case to maintain a ground path for static charges (or ground the case with a clip to your ground pad). Note of warning: If you still have an old CRT monitor, stay out of that monitor case as there are lethal voltages that remain in the CRT even when it is unplugged, a CRT being rather like a huge capacitor (unless you have been trained how to drain the CRT without electrocuting yourself).

If you must use a vacuum cleaner on your PC, use one specially designed for cleaning electronic devices containing static sensitive components. If folks tell you that standard vacuum cleaners, even small hand held devices, pose no actual danger to your PC, ask yourself why 3M Company, for example, sells a Service Vacuum (3M Service Vacuum and 3M Vacuum in a Tool Case) that keeps the motor portion (with high electromagnetic fields that could damage data on a hard drive) in the carrying case and permits the service technician to vacuum the inside of the PC or other electronic device with a long hose with static dissipative attachments (dusting brush, crevice nozzle, needle nose nozzle) "to prevent static buildup" for use "involving static sensitive electronic components such as circuit boards" (quoted from 3M Service Vacuum and Vacuum in a Tool Case Operating Instruction manual).

Paraphrasing Clint Eastwood in *Dirty Harry*, if you intend to use your home vacuum cleaner (portable or otherwise) inside your PC case you gotta ask yourself, "Do you feel lucky, well, do 'ya?" ■

Mr. Bentley studied electrical engineering at the University of Texas, began working in the electronics industry in 1978 with GTE Network Systems (Lenkurt), then software engineering with various startups in the 1980's, designing and implementing, among other things, pre-Internet email communications systems multitasking on Intel platforms and MSDOS PC's. 1984 - 1986. Gary now provides Information Technology consulting services in the El Paso, Texas and Las Cruces, New Mexico areas. Gary has edited and contributed articles to the award-winning Southwest International Personal Computer Club monthly magazine, "Throughput", since December, 2003

Extended Q & A
Ask our panel



Driver Query Helps Resolve Driver Problems

By Vinny La Bash, a member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., Florida,

www.spcug.org, labash@spcug.org

Module Name	Display Name	Description	Driver Type	Start Mode	State	Status	Accept Stop	Accept Pause	Page
2	Microsoft ACPI Driver	Microsoft ACPI Driver	Kernel	Boot	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
3	adp94xx	adp94xx	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
4	adpahci	adpahci	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
5	adpu160m	adpu160m	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
6	adpu320	adpu320	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
7	AFD	Ancillary Function Driver for W	Kernel	System	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
8	agp440	Intel AGP Bus Filter	Kernel	Manual	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
9	arc7box	arc7box	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
10	amide	amide	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
11	amide	amide	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
12	AmdK8	AMD K8 Processor Driver	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
13	arc	arc	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
14	arcas	arcas	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
15	aswFsBk	aswFsBk	File System	Auto	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
16	aswMonFt	aswMonFt	File System	Auto	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
17	aswRdr	aswRdr	Kernel	System	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
18	aswSP	asw! Self Protection	Kernel	System	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
19	aswTdi	asw! Network Shield Support	Kernel	System	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
20	AsynMac	RAS Asynchronous Media Driv	Kernel	Manual	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
21	atapi	IDE Channel	Kernel	Boot	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
22	bowser	Bowser	File System	Manual	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
23	BiFtLto	Brother USB Mass-Storage Lo	Kernel	Manual	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
24	BiFtUsp	Brother USB Mass-Storage Usp	Kernel	Manual	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
25	Brsndr	Brother MFC Serial Port Interfa	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
26	BiSerVdm	Brother WDM Serial driver	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
27	BiUsbMdm	Brother MFC USB Fax Only M	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
28	BiUsbSer	Brother MFC USB Serial WDM	Kernel	Manual	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
29	BthEnum	Bluetooth Enumerator Service	Kernel	Manual	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	

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Anyone using Vista for any length of time knows that most of the common driver problems were resolved long ago. Advances in computer technology including removable devices however, have called attention to problems that may be caused by device drivers that are no longer needed, but still installed on the system. These drivers can become corrupt over time. If they become inadvertently enabled they can cause memory conflicts which under some circumstances could crash your system.

Most people beyond the novice level have some familiarity with Device Manager, but are usually not knowledgeable with its limitations. They know that Device Manager will allow a rollback to a previous version of a driver if problems are encountered, but few know that Device Manager has no way of keeping track of a device driver's history. This is important because you can't document which version of a device driver is good and which version could cause problems.

You can get around this limitation by using a command-line tool called Driver Query that will track the history of all the device drivers on your system. From the Start Menu, open Accessories, and activate the Command Prompt. Type driverquery.exe at the command line and you will see a list of all the device drivers with some basic information included. This list by itself won't do you much good. You need to use some command-line switches to get the information that you need. At the command prompt type.

DRIVERQUERY /FO:CSV /V > C:\DRIVERINFO .CSV

DRIVERQUERY is the primary command that tells the operating system to run the query.

The /FO switch says you want the output to be formatted.

CSV (Comma Separated Variable) tells Vista to format the output so it can be displayed in a spreadsheet.

/V (Verbose) tells the query to blab its head off and tell everything it knows about each driver in the system.

C:\ says to put the output file in the root (primary) directory of the primary drive where your operating system is installed. This makes the file easy to find in case you can't remember where you put it.

DRIVERINFO.CSV is the name of the file with an old DOS style extension. You can

name the file anything you want, but do end it with the CSV extension or you might confuse your spreadsheet when you try to open it.

After creating the file, open your spreadsheet, click the file open icon and in the File name: box type:

C:\DRIVERINFO.CSV

By opening the file this way you don't have to get into DOS commands. You may, of course, use DOS if you feel Vista isn't complicated enough.

Your spreadsheet will resemble the illustration. After expanding the columns you will have to scroll horizontally to see all the available information. The amount of information for each driver has greatly increased, but you still don't get the driver version. Tracking driver changes is possible if you run the query periodically and compare the Link Date column for changes. It's clunky and cumbersome, but it does the job.

Another important piece of information that's missing is any data about whether or not the driver is signed. A signed driver is a device driver that includes a digital signature which is an electronic security mark that tells you who published the driver. It also indicates if the original software has been altered in any way. Signed drivers provide assurance that the software actually comes from the manufacturer and hasn't been changed.

This exercise is an excellent illustration of the laws of information availability.

1. The information you have is not the information you want.
2. The information you want is not the information you need.
3. The information you need you can't get.
4. The information you can get is either too expensive or too troublesome to obtain. ■

Free Software Helps Caregivers

Written by Mike Morris, Editor, Front Range PC Users Group, Fort Collins, CO, kByte™
Newsletter, June 2009, <http://www.frpcug.org>, twriterext@gmail.com

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An article with the title “Caring for the Caregiver” appeared in the in the November/December 2007 issue of AARP magazine¹. Here is an extract from that article:

“A cascade of studies in recent years has shown that caregivers stand at particular risk for a host of mental and physical illnesses, many of which have roots in stress, exhaustion, and self-neglect—symptoms some medical professionals have begun calling caregiver syndrome. . . . According to a 2004 national survey by AARP and The National Alliance for Caregiving, nearly 23 million households are currently home to a caregiver, most often a woman who is taking care of someone 50 or older. Some 43 percent of these caregivers are over 50 themselves—13 percent are over 65—and they spend good chunks of their weeks on a heady range of chores, from medication management and bathing to feeding, clothing, and arranging health care services. . . . Unfortunately for many friends and family members of caregivers, it is difficult to know when to step in—or what to do. . . .”

I recommend this article to all caregivers, and to friends and family members of caregivers. Yes, it is difficult for friends and family members of caregivers to know what to do. It can also be overwhelming for a caregiver to add another task—coordinating help from those friends and family members—to an already burdensome schedule.

Both caregivers and those willing to help may find a scheduling solution with a web site called **Lotsa Helping Hands .com**. This web site allows a caregiver or family member to:

“Create a free of charge, private, web-based community to organize family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues—a family’s ‘circles of community’—during times of need. . . .”

There are three primary templates:

1. Caregiving
2. Eldercare and Long Term Care
3. Military and Veterans Families

There are four additional templates:

1. Volunteering
2. Parenting
3. Schools
4. Religious Groups

These templates allow one person to coordinate the activities of others by identifying the needs and allowing volunteers to accept tasks. All of this activity takes place online, relieving the caregiver of the burden of many phone calls and separate schedules. For those familiar with Google Documents™, there is a slight similarity between the two. However, the Lotsa Helping Hands templates are designed specifically for caregiving situations.

“Each community includes an intuitive group calendar for scheduling tasks such as meals delivery and rides, a platform for securely sharing vital medical, financial, and legal information with designated family members, and customizable sections for posting photos, well wishes, blogs, journals, and messages.

Now, when someone asks ‘what can I do to help?’ the answer is ‘give me your name and email address’ – the system takes over and allows people to sign up and start helping.”

A web based service such as Lotsa Helping Hands is certain to generate questions about privacy and security. You will find answers to these questions in the “Terms of use” page of the web site. Included in the Terms are descriptions of the data security, data integrity and access (among other) protections.

[Note: The scheduling features are not dependent upon the use of private information. It is not necessary to include medical, financial or legal information on the web site—although that information is protected].

Lotsa Helping Hands has many non-profit partners, including the Alzheimer’s Association, the Family Caregiver Alliance, The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and many more. Check the Partners page of the Lotsa Helping Hands web site for more information.

You can read what national media, such as Business Week, NY Times and others have to say about Lotsa Helping Hands by clicking on the links on the Media page of the Lotsa Helping Hands web site.

I have not personally used this service, although there was a time, not so long ago, when I would have used it had I known about it. After reading the description of the service, and the “How It Works” section of the web site, I am convinced that the service is, indeed, very valuable and also secure. I recommend that caregivers try this service. There is at least the potential to reduce your levels of stress and exhaustion associated with your role of caregiver. ■

Footnotes

1. Crute, Sherre, “Caring for the Caregiver.” AARP Magazine, November and December, 2007

Let's never forget the first king: DOS

By Rick Smith, a member of the Channel Islands PC Users Group, CA, www.cipcug.org/vccomputers.com, Rants@vcmail.net

*Oh where, oh where has my little DOS gone.
Oh where, oh where can it be,
with its life cut short and windows cut long
Oh where, oh where can it be?*

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Some might say that I'm losing it, but you cannot lose what you never had. Where has DOS gone? Some might say it's still around in the various forms of Linux. Others might say it's buried deep in Microsoft operating systems waiting to be called out by a powerful wizard to cast potent spells with a command prompt. But most of us just believe that it's just lost, never to be found again. Like a lost pet that you once had affection for, once it's gone you seem to remember only the good times and seem to forget all the problems that it caused you.

DOS does that to people. There are still a few of you "old-timers," and you know who you are! Those who sit at the doughnut table at club meetings and reminisce about the "good ol' days" when all you needed was a Northgate keyboard and a monochrome screen to have absolute power over your world. You know what I'm talking about. Way back when people spoke about computers with fear and awe. They were things better left to experts and shady government entities. The quickest way to kill a conversation in those days was to talk command line technobabble. It always made everyone in the room feel uncomfortable that they couldn't understand you, like you were speaking a different language.

On the flip side, though, it gave you an incredible feeling of power, that you, and you alone, could master the savage beast and control your own destiny. Neh Ahh Ahh Yahh. (Sometimes I think all those comic books I read have permanently warped my thinking.) But really, didn't you feel special? That you and you alone, could master something that would make others wince and shirk away. You didn't have to be popular at school. You didn't have to be good looking. You didn't have to be wealthy. You did not have to have any of those things that everyone else needed to be important. You had knowledge.

And knowing the secrets of the PC universe, did you use that knowledge to gain wisdom or for greed? I think most of you, unfortunately, like me, used it for personal greed. We gave ourselves over to the dark side of the force and used our skill to enrich ourselves financially. But eventually as we all grew older, and some of us wiser, we started using our skills to teach and help others, which led you to me, to read these words and words of others in this tome. You all became a band of brothers forming the fellowship of the DOS.

And just! And just as your powers were at their peak, everything came crashing down like the Jedi of old. A new power rose in the universe to supplant the old ways. Windows came rushing down like a wind from heaven with trumpets blazing and fire and smoke billowing up in great clouds. And when this behemoth came to rest, its great weight crushed the last vestiges of DOS underneath its feet.

A new group came forth to rule the PC world. A group of men, and, yes, women, too, who knew nothing of the old ways but were formed from clay in the new ways. These new acolytes grew up in the ways of the PC, each having their own since they were young.

Gone was command prompt. In was the mouse. The wizards of old became legend. And after time they have become forgotten to be remembered by only a few at computer club meetings. There are still a few prophets preaching to us not to forget the old ways. I saw one at last month's meeting giving a history lesson at the club meeting. But they are old and feeble now with most of their words echoing on deaf ears.

So I say to all today! Remember the DOS! Don't let the old ways die, as you never know when you will be called upon as I have this week to use my skills again. Fortunately, I have not been found wanting as I was able to vanquish the beast with my skill at the command prompt. I have beaten down one enemy, but more are waiting to attack.

So be on your guard, be ready, and be faithful to the cause. Put away your mice as they are no use against such foes. Operate your PC only with the keyboard and keep yourself ready for the fight. For it shall come. It shall come. ■

Door Prize:
Color HP Printer
(Just in time for your holiday printing)



Speed Demons

Written by Bill Roman, Advisor to the Board of Directors, The PC Users Group of Connecticut, www.tpcug.org, br@numbercrunch.com

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There is an issue that I feel must be addressed, since the issue continues to come up on a regular basis. As a

PC technician I constantly get asked why the clients' computer has become so slow, and if there is anything wrong with it.

The first thing I tell the client is that there are two main culprits that contribute to a PC becoming very sluggish. The first being lack of RAM memory. This answer usually elicits a quick response from the user that they "only do e-mail, Internet and word processing" or some similar response. I then go into a discussion with the user that there are two kinds of memory in a computer: hard drive storage, which holds all their music, pictures, documents, etc. and RAM, or working memory. A user could have plenty of hard drive space to store all of their documents and stuff, but when they don't have enough RAM, the computer will, over time, become slower and slower.

Why you ask? When the computer was originally purchased (usually somewhere between 2 and 5 years ago) Windows XP, in this case, required about 512MB of RAM to run properly. As Windows critical security updates and service packs are installed, as well as upgrades and updates to all sorts of programs used on a daily basis (antivirus, Internet Explorer, AOL, Adobe Reader and Flash Player, printer updates, etc), the programs NEVER get smaller, always bigger.

Now, several years later and the programs being used are double or triple in size, but the computer is the same one with the same specs as when it was purchased. Adding more RAM memory is a quick, cheap way to improve performance to an aging computer, and extend life before a replacement is in order. Windows XP should have at least 1024 MB (1GB) of RAM to run properly, and Windows Vista (32bit) needs 3GB of RAM. More is not better in the case of Vista for technical reasons I will not go into in this article.

This is only half the battle. The other half is to beat down what I will call the "moochers". Years ago when I would inspect a computer for sluggish performance, it was usually because of a rogue game that was installed. Back then

quite a few games adopted the theory that the only reason you owned your \$3000 or \$4000 computer (yes, it was that much back then, even more depending on how far back you go) was to play some ridiculous \$49 game. The game would change many settings that allowed the game to work properly, but made it miserable to perform simple tasks like type a letter.

Now, in 2009 every program under the sun assumes that they are the main focus, and must be given priority at all times. What does this mean to you, the end user? Each time when an upgraded revision of Adobe Reader comes out it always wants to include the new "MSN Toolbar" or "Yahoo Toolbar" etc. This adds unnecessary junk to your browser, which slows down getting online. In addition, many of these programs load an additional program when Windows starts to speed it up when starting it. This is just lousy practice that is a very poor substitute for tight efficient programming. If the program was small and lean there would be no need for "speed loaders," which make your computer take an exorbitant amount of time for Windows to start.



Not to pick on, but a classic example of this is how much Apple's iTunes has grown through the years. iTunes 6 which was released in January 2006 was about 35MB in size. iTunes 7.5 was 52MB and iTunes 8.1 (the current release) is now up to 70MB. The program is twice as large only three years later, and loads a number of programs when Windows starts to aid loading this memory hog.

What to do about this? In short be mindful when installing updated programs to unselect add on toolbars and, if available, to kick them out of starting up when Windows loads. I have discussed at our local computer club meetings to do your best to keep running processes to a minimum. By clicking control, alt, delete once (with no programs active) will bring up the task manager and show how many processes are running. A good number for Windows XP is less than 35, and for Vista it's about 45.

Startup Cop and the free CCleaner utilities have the ability to disable or remove programs from starting, but I would check online in a Google search before disabling anything unless certain. I do hope this article sheds some light on the subject of pokey computers. Remember, it's not so much the hardware as it is software that kills a computer! Until next time! ■



Using CrossLoop to Troubleshoot and Control Remote Machines

By Vinny LaBash, Member and Contributing Columnist, Sarasota PCUG, Florida,
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Third party Windows applications are rarely examined in this column, but CrossLoop is too good a utility to ignore. Trying to walk someone through a computer problem over the telephone is often an exercise in frustration. There is no substitute for seeing what is actually on a user's screen to find out the root cause of a problem.

Vista has a built-in support tool known as Remote Desktop, but far from making the process easy, it has a tendency to confuse those with no technical background. Remote Desktop makes it rough on those who don't know how to handle the added complications of firewalls and routers. CrossLoop, which is a free remote support utility, could be an excellent solution.

CrossLoop shields users from tricky situations involving communicating through routers, firewalls, and other potential obstacles. Setting up a communications session between two computers physically separated, but connected through the internet, is reduced to a process hardly more complex than turning on your TV. Those concerned about security can relax. CrossLoop uses something called TightVNC which safeguards data with 128 bit encryption.

Crossloop is useful for people who want to train or support others remotely. If you're an experienced web surfer, for example, and need to show someone how to access a disk drive or retrieve a lost document, CrossLoop allows you to take control of their computer screen, and show them exactly how to do it.

Hard core geeks may not be satisfied with CrossLoop. It's not complicated enough. It works better than most similar commercial utilities, and your technically challenged friends and relatives will find it aggravation free.

You can download the program without charge from <http://www.crossloop.com>. The site has a video that demonstrates how to install and use the program which is very helpful for technophobes.

Once you're up and running, the interface presenting itself is a model of simplicity which effectively masks the complexity behind the scenes. As mentioned earlier, security and remote control is handled by TightVNC. VNC stands for Virtual Network Computing, and is a very well designed software tool that easily allows remote access to Operating Systems with a graphical interface. The technical specifications say you need Windows 98 or higher. A broadband internet connection is also a requirement. Dialup connections won't work. Drive space,

processor speed, and memory requirements are negligible given the general power of today's computers.

Another benefit of TightVNC is the built-in 128 bit encrypted security. When you begin a communications session, the program generates a new 12 digit access code. The access code then generates the encryption codes giving you an additional layer of security. Not bad for a free utility.

CrossLoop Graphic Running the program is so easy it's almost boring. As you can see from the illustration, the interface is simple and straightforward. Assuming you started the session, the next step is to communicate the access code to the person you are communicating with. You can do this by email, telephone, screaming into the next room, etc.

After starting the session, your friend types the access code into the box and clicks **Connect**. When the **Connect** button is clicked on both sides the two PCs are linked.

This method of troubleshooting a remote PC eliminates all the hassles of trying to interpret what an inexperienced user is attempting to explain. It's difficult to imagine anything less complex than a one button interface. With 128 bit encryption built in, it's tough to beat.

Other applications that make such connections possible have been available for years, but nothing I've seen makes it as simple as CrossLoop. ■

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Standalone Music Recorders

Using a computer and audio interface combination isn't the only way you can record high-quality sound. If you'd like to make a recording, consider one of the many standalone music recorders that are available, as well. Consider a digital 4- or 8-track recorder, which allows you to record and mix multiple audio tracks and add some audio effects (such as reverb or a phaser effect) on a single device. Then, you can export the project (or individual files) to a computer or, in some cases, burn them directly to a CD.

Other music recorders are compact, so you can take them with you wherever you go and record your masterpieces as they come to you, and many of them still let you create multitrack recordings and add effects.

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If You like GMAIL, You might Love Mailplane

Written by Kurt Jefferson, Macintosh SIG Leader, Central Kentucky Computer Society, May 2009
Newsletter, www.ckcs.org

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Raise your hand if you use Gmail (Google's email service). Plenty of people do. But I have always preferred viewing my email using an email client rather than Web mail. (A client is just computer jargon for an email program such as Apple Mail, Microsoft Entourage, or Thunderbird).

For free, Gmail allows you to configure your email client so you're able to get and send email that way rather than through Gmail's Web site. You can even choose between POP (an older system of email delivery) or IMAP (a newer system).

But using Apple's Mail program with Gmail didn't seem to be the best option for me. Joe Kissell, who's written a number of books about Apple Mail and email in general, writes in a TidBits article: *In particular, if you expect Mail (or any IMAP client) to work just like Gmail's Web interface in the way it handles archiving, some of what I describe here may disappoint you.*

Kissell writes that Gmail started life as a Web-only email system without folders. The idea was to throw all your email into one big mailbox and then do a Google search to find older messages. Later, Kissell says, Gmail allowed users to apply multiple labels to messages. That way, it was easier to find messages by remembering which label or labels applied to a specific message.

Finally, Google decided to allow users to access their Gmail accounts through their own email client. But there could be a catch if you own more than one Mac or PC. Kissell says the folks at Gmail monitor what they consider to be excessive email activity such as downloading all of your IMAP messages a number of times each day. The mathematical equation detailing what Google considers excessive isn't public, but Kissell has run into the brick wall before. He says he's been locked out of all IMAP access for up to 24 hours.

In other words, when Kissell checked his email, Gmail stopped delivery because he exceeded the message limit. How did he get around this? You can follow step-by-step directions in his TidBits article. You might especially be interested in the section labeled, "How to Configure Everything for Maximum Happiness."

Joe Kissell's Tidbits article is here: <http://db.tidbits.com/article/10253> Kissell changed his settings in Apple Mail so he could live with Gmail's reliance on labels and archiving, Mail's reliance on

mailboxes (folders), and the fact that Gmail began life as a Web mail service.

I went another route. Since I'm not a huge fan of Web mail (I use it when I'm away from home but prefer a small client), I became searching for alternatives to use my Gmail account.

I stumbled upon an article in Macworld describing an email program which I had never heard of before. It used WebKit, the same open source software on which Apple's Safari is built.

In other words, this email program mimics Gmail's Webmail (even though it's not Webmail), works only with Gmail, and provides a toolbar that can be customized.



The program is called Mailplane. It's unique in that it supports standard Mac OS X features, allows Google searches from within the program when activated, and uses Gmail's labeling and archiving options. A plug-in allows the user to send photos from within iPhoto. The Dock icon notifies the user by revealing how many new unread messages have arrived. A Mailplane icon in the menu bar also reveals the new message count, checks

for incoming messages, and lets the user quickly check for messages in more than one Gmail account.

One of my favorite features is Mailplane's address book. It pulls email addresses directly from Apple's Address Book in my Applications folder. I can either begin typing a recipient's address in the proper Mailplane pane and it will autofill or I can choose Mail → Insert → Email Address from the program's menu bar.

If you're a fan of Gmail's keyboard commands don't sweat it. You'll be glad to know that Mailplane uses most of the same Mac shortcuts. Need to include an attachment? Simply drag and drop it into the Mailplane window (or click on the paper clip and find the attachment in the Finder). One neat feature lets the user adjust the size and quality of an attachment by using a slider bar. In addition, Mailplane 2.1 (in beta) supports offline Gmail so the user can read his or her messages without being connected to the Internet.

As I write this, I have 26 days left to evaluate the program. It costs \$24⁹⁵ for one copy or \$15 for a family option. If you've got up to 5 Macs in your household, the latter is the wiser purchase.

Mailplane is not perfect. It is a work in progress. But so far, it appears to offer a good alternative for Gmail users

who don't like to use Web mail. As Google keeps expanding its Google Labs programs, Mailplane keeps allowing the user to expand the email program's offerings. If you use Gmail on a Mac, give Mailplane a chance. You might find yourself wondering how you got along without it.

- Dan Frake's review of Mailplane 2.0.9 is here (Mailplane is now in version 2.0.10) <http://www.macworld.com/article/140479/2009/05/mailplane.html>
- Read about Mailplane from the developer's Web site: <http://www.mailplaneapp.com/>
- The Unofficial Apple Web Blog review of an earlier version of Mailplane: <http://www.tuaw.com/>

[2007/03/15/first-impressions-mailplane-the-desktop-gmail-client/](http://www.thinkmac.net/review/review-mailplane-gmail-application-your-mac-desktop)

- Thinkmac.net Review of Mailplane: <http://www.thinkmac.net/review/review-mailplane-gmail-application-your-mac-desktop>
- MacUser (the British magazine) review of an earlier version of Mailplane: <http://www.macuser.co.uk/reviews/186447/mailplane.html>
- Bill Sodeman reviews Mailplane at BrightHub: <http://www.brighthouse.com/computing/mac-platform/reviews/2214.aspx> ■



PPC Locking HDMI Cable

A Hardware Review by Bob Clyne, Member-at-Large, SEMCO (Southeastern Michigan Computer Organization, Inc.), SEMCO Data Bus, June 2009 Issue, www.semco.org, clyne@mich.com

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For those of you not familiar with it, HDMI is the current cable standard for carrying digital audio and video signals between pieces of equipment such as TV sets, DVD players, Blu-Ray players, AV receivers etc. Some computers also have a HDMI output so that you can feed the audio and video from the computer to your TV set. HDMI combines both the audio and video signals in one multi-conductor cable, which makes it much more convenient than other types of connections that use separate cables for audio and video. If you would like more information about HDMI, visit <http://www.hdmi.org>.

One of the few problems with HDMI cables is that they are prone to fall out of the sockets. PPC <http://www.ppc-online.com> has a solution to that problem with the PPC Locking HDMI cable.

The cable comes in the ubiquitous heavy plastic blister pack. Manufacturers love this packaging, but consumers hate it. The advantage of this packaging is that it makes the product visible while protecting the contents from damage or tampering. The disadvantage of this packaging is that it is extremely consumer resistant. Getting the product out of the package requires a sturdy cutting implement. A knife will work, but there is considerable risk of injuring yourself or damaging the product due to the force required. A sturdy pair of scissors will also work and gives your hand considerable exercise in the process.

The cable is a HDMI Category II cable, which means that it can carry the highest definition signals for which there is a current standard. It is capable of handling not only 1080p signals but also 1440p. The cable has

both foil and braided shielding to shield the signal from outside interference. The cable appears well made, with a braided outer covering on the cable and a plastic covering over the connectors. The cable is quite flexible.

The locking connectors are what sets the PPC cable apart. The connectors just push onto the HDMI sockets on your equipment. No special sockets or adapters are needed. You may hear a slight click when it seats. Once seated in the socket, the cable is quite resistant to being pulled out. I did not test to see just how much strain they could take, but I pulled fairly hard on the connector and it remained firmly seated in the socket. I think the amount of tension that I applied would be more than would be encountered in normal use.

To remove the cable, you press on the tab on the side of the connector while pulling it out. I found that with some sockets, quite a bit of pressure was required on the release button but you, presumably, won't be removing your HDMI cables every day. One possible problem that I can foresee is if you had a series of HDMI connectors closely spaced in a row, you might not be able to get your fingers between them to press the release button. In this case, you would have to start removing them at one end until you got to the one you wanted to remove. But this is a small price to pay for not having to re-plug cables that have fallen out. There is also the danger that a cable pulling out while live could cause electronic damage to your equipment.

PPC Locking HDMI Cables are available in 3', 6', and 9' lengths for \$48⁹⁹, \$59⁹⁹, and \$72⁹⁹ respectively directly from PPC at <http://connect2ppc.myshopify.com/products/locking-hdmi-jumper-1> and you may find them for lower prices from resellers. ■



The Emergency Tool in the Palm of Your Hand: Your Mobile Phone

Written by Lorin Goldstein, a family member of The PC Users Group of Connecticut,
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Your mobile phone can actually be a life saver or an emergency tool for survival.

Check out what you can do with it:

UNLOCK YOUR CAR FROM MILES AWAY

You've locked your keys in your car and you are at least an hour from your house. Does your car have remote keyless entry? Your cell phone will open your car for you.

You will still need someone at home to find your spare keys. The deal is they don't have to drive out to you if you have your cell phone handy. Call someone at home on their cell phone from your cell phone. Hold your cell phone about a foot from your car door and have the person at your home press the unlock button, holding it near the mobile phone on their end. Your car will unlock.

Distance is no object. You could be hundreds of miles away, and if you can reach someone who has the other 'remote' for your car. you can unlock the doors (or the trunk).

Emergency 112

The Emergency Number worldwide (outside the US) for Mobile is 112. It will work even when you find yourself out of your mobile network's coverage area. Dial 112 in an emergency and the mobile will search any existing network in your area to establish the emergency number for you. This number, 112, can be dialed even if the keypad is locked! I'd tell you to try it but give the emergency operator a break and wait until you really need it to try the number.

Hidden Battery Power

Your cell phone holds a secret. You will only discover it when your cell battery is very low. Press the keys *3370# to activate your cell's reserve battery power. Your cell phone will restart with the reserve and will show a 50% increase in battery. This reserve will get charged when you charge your cell phone next time.

disable a STOLEN mobile phone

Once again you left your cell phone behind. This time you don't have to worry that someone else is stealing all your data. That is if you move quick enough before they act.

You will need your cell phone's serial number to do this. To get your cell phone's serial number key in the following digits on your phone: *#06#. A 15-digit code will appear on the screen. This number is unique to your handset. Write it down and keep it somewhere safe.

If your phone gets stolen, you can phone your service provider and give them this code. They will then be able to block your handset so even if the thief changes the SIM card, your phone will be totally useless. You probably won't get your phone back, but at least you know that whoever stole it can't use/sell it either. If everybody does this, there would be no point in people stealing mobile phones.

Free Directory Service for Cells

Have you used your cell phone to call 411 information for a telephone number? Like your local telephone company, cell phone companies charge us \$1.⁰⁰ to \$1.⁷⁵ or more for 411 information.

The trick is to not use your cell phone company's 411 service. When you need to use the 411 information option, simply dial one of the free 411 services instead. Try any of these numbers and you won't be charged any fee:

(800) FREE411 or (800) 373-3411
Sponsored by McDonald's

(800) GOOG411 or (800) 466-4411
Sponsored by Google

You will have to listen to a quick ad and be prompted to dial for some service but the call is FREE. That is as long as you don't dial out to the advertised company after the short sales pitch. If you have free text messaging you can even get the number texted to you free. Otherwise text messaging fees from your provider will apply.

Don't leave all these numbers to memory. Save them to your cell phone and you'll have them handy when you need them.

SO MANY TIPS SO LITTLE VALUE

If you have been trying these tips as you read them you would know that, for the most part, they are not true. That is because they are from an email I have repeatedly received from friends and family. The email is a bunch of junk (mostly) and possibly contained a virus or spyware at some time (my IT person/ geek — otherwise known as my husband) has my computer with all sorts of virus protection and anti-spyware to protect my computer so the information may have been pulled and forwarded in a clean email but it is still mostly junk.

A good parameter to follow with deciding whether to forward email you receive is if it sounds too good to be true it probably is not true. In which case, the best way of stopping the email is not forwarding it on again.

If you are not sure about something you received you can always check at www.snopes.com. You can also Google the topic and will probably come up with a bunch of sites that will help. This email I found at an urban legends **website**. I don't normally read these web sites (who has the time) but I do check out the things I receive before I become part of the junk and spam mail problem.

For those who have not checked yet

1. **Unlocking your car: FALSE** Cell phones and car key remote locks work on different frequencies.
2. **Emergency 112: MOSTLY FALSE** It works pretty much only in Europe. Stay with 911 here.

3. **Hidden Battery Power: FALSE** For some Nokia phones this code this code will enhance voice quality but at the cost of battery power loss.
4. **Disable stolen cell: NOT ALWAYS & WHY BOTHER** On some phones this will cause your account information to be displayed but your provider already has this information. Just call them tell them the phone was stolen.
5. **FREE411 TRUE But** The only part that may not be true is that McDonald's may not be the sponsor when you call. The sponsor varies regularly and so far I do not recall having McDonald's as a sponsor when I have used it.

So the next time you feel the need to send on your words of wisdom, be sure they ring true.

Happy emailing. ■

** If you have not figured it out yet, the real title for this article is: EMAIL AWARENESS*



The Disintegration of Service

By Jerry Goldstein, Vice President and Newsletter Editor, The PC Users Group of Connecticut, www.tpcug.org, jerryg@attygoldstein.com

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Want to make a free over sea calls to India? Just call for technical support on your computer, Internet service, or cable service. You are likely to be routed overseas to India. You then get the pleasure of talking to the "well trained" script readers. About the only thing they are trained for is to tell you: "Yes, very much I can help you". You hear this phrase whenever you call for tech support. The techs use that phrase to hide the fact that they are spending that time to check their index sheets for key words in what you told them was your problem. They then turn to that page in their script book and start reading off a page that is supposed to match your problem. The key word is "supposed". Reality is far from tech support fantasy.

Tech support used to mean reaching a person knowledgeable in the problem you were calling about. Now it is a means the manufacturers and utility suppliers use to avoid dealing with customers. There was a time when the support staff knew and understood computers. But then the corporations came up with the idea of making support calls difficult. They figured we would be less likely to complain if doing so was difficult. It is not bad enough instructions are written by non-English speaking people. Now we have to get the instructions interpreted by someone who failed a course in English as a second language. Which is pretty tough to do in India, a country where English, along with Hindi, is the official language. (I won't even go into how all those people in India suddenly have American names like Jack and John when they join tech support.)

I know my patience has a limit. I test it regularly when I call for Tech Support. Thanks to the service quality of my utility, cable, and Internet providers I get to test my

patience all too often.

Tech support did get smarter, though not for the better or to the benefit of the consumer. Used to be you could ask for a supervisor and be moved up to someone in the states. Now tech support in India has their own supervisors who are as good as the base level worker at helping. Pretty much no help at all.

If you are lucky enough to be moved up the ladder to what is often called the "corporate escalation department" you will find your anger escalate as well. Corporate only works business hours and Monday through Friday, sometimes. Holidays or any other excuse, means you won't reach corporate help. What will corporate escalation do when you get there? Route you to the technical support staff in the states you needed from the beginning. But first you need to wait 24 hours for a return contact. Oy*

How do I know so well how tech support fails to work? I am my family and business's IT person. That means I am often on the phone with tech support. I recently spent five days without Internet service thanks to Earthlink's outsourcing it's tech support to India. After days of trying to get Earthlink to fix the problem I called the line provider that Earthlink uses and had them fix the problem myself. Total outsourcing.

Is there a way to avoid all this? There are less chances everyday as corporate America outsources its human interface with its customers. Can we do anything about it? Sure. When looking at what to buy, or a service to use, take into consideration how the manufacturer or provider will support its product. Use products and services that support you as a human and not as a joke. ■

* = For those few unfamiliar with "Oy" please see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oy_vey

Vipre Performance

Written by Ted Wirtz, a member of the Orange County PC Users' Group, CA,
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I recently purchased two copies of Sunbelt Software VIPRE malware protection. I use the term "malware" because VIPRE scans for spyware, viruses and root kits all at the same time. I installed one copy on my older Windows XP computer and one on my new Windows Vista computer.

I needed to make a change because the antivirus provided by my ISP (AT&T) on my WinXP computer was being discontinued. They offered a free upgrade to McAfee Internet protection, but I didn't want that suite. The security programs I was using were Webroot Spy Sweeper, Computer Associates (CA) for virus detection, and Kerio firewall. CA updates were to be shortly discontinued.

On my Vista computer I had Webroot, Trend Antivirus, and COMODO firewall. I started receiving notices that it was time to renew my Trend subscription. It was time to do "something."

Since Kerio firewall has been absorbed into Sunbelt Software, I have periodically received advertisements for Sunbelt products. Recently, they have been touting their new product, VIPRE, so I decided to give it a try. According to their literature it has been designed "from the ground up" to be very fast, yet use minimal computer resources in the process.

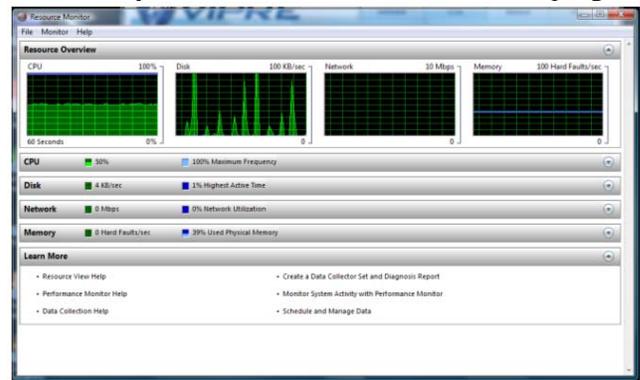
I am not sure how often signature updates are generated at Sunbelt, but there seems to be a new update applied every time I turn on the computer. I have also seen a new update applied more than once in a day. The default scheduler wants to check for updates every two hours. That's not to say a new update is created at those intervals, but instead to be sure that if an update for a critical new virus has been created, you will get and apply it in a reasonable period of time. Sunbelt also states that VIPRE is guaranteed to be compatible with Kerio or their current firewall.

windows vista

I removed both Trend and Webroot using the REVO Uninstaller. (I have found that REVO does a good job of cleaning up "leftovers" that often still remain after uninstalling a program using the standard Windows Add/Remove module in the Control Panel.) Then I installed VIPRE, input the Registration key and I was ready to go. I downloaded the most recent update table, and then started a "Deep" scan. VIPRE has two options: "Quick Scan" which scans running processes in memory, the registry, and the file types most likely to become infected. A "Deep Scan" scans all the above but includes every file on the computer, which obviously takes longer than a "quick" scan.

A bit of info about the Vista computer hardware: HP Pavillion Desktop with AMD dual core 5600+ processor (2.8 GHz) . 3GB dual channel DDR2 RAM. 500 GB Seagate SATA II hard drive. Nvidia based 7600 series video card. I am also running COMODO firewall. There seem to be no compatibility issues between VIPRE and COMODO.

After the scan was started, I opened up the Vista Resource Monitor to track what was happening. See Figure 1 below. As can be seen, CPU usage was consistently right at 50%. Looking at the task manager, I could see the load was being shared equally across both cores. I suspect the sharing was controlled by the Vista OS rather than the VIPRE program.



As expected, disk usage was in bursts. Short files were analyzed quickly, generating another disk request, where larger files took longer to analyze, leaving the disk idle periodically. The drive had been defragmented just two days before the tests, so fragmentation should not have been a factor in file access times.

There was no network activity since I had no other applications open at the time. VIPRE used 39% of the 3GB memory.

After scanning was complete, VIPRE reported the following in its scan summary:

Files – 154,335

Processes – 75

Registry – 28,937 entries

Cookies – 556 (15 flagged as tracking cookies)

Quarantined – 1 file, an HP uninstall.exe. Suspected as a ZLOB media codec trojan.

I believe this to be a false positive, since the file has been on the computer since its factory install, and was never flagged by the previous antivirus program. I have submitted the file to Sunbelt for further analysis.

Scan time was 86 minutes 30 seconds.

windows xp

As mentioned previously I also installed VIPRE on my older (about 5 years old) Windows XP computer. I first removed Webroot and the the CA antivirus programs. I then ran CCleaner to remove any “telltales” left behind, then installed VIPRE.

Windows XP computer hardware: ASUS A7N8X-E – Deluxe motherboard. AMD Athlon single core at 1.66 GHz core frequency. 1 GB of dual channel DDR2 RAM. Two Seagate 160GB SATA I hard drives in Raid 1 configuration (Mirrored drives). Mirroring on this machine is a combination of hardware and software. Disk is approximately 3 % fragmented. Nvidia based 7400 series video card. I am also running Kerio firewall.

After running a deep scan, VIPRE reported:

Files – 113,714

Processes – 41

Registry – 31,837 entries

Cookies – 327 (13 flagged as tracking cookies)

No other risks detected.

Scan time was 70 minutes 35 seconds.

(As a comparison the last deep scan that I ran using CA antivirus took 2 ½ days!)

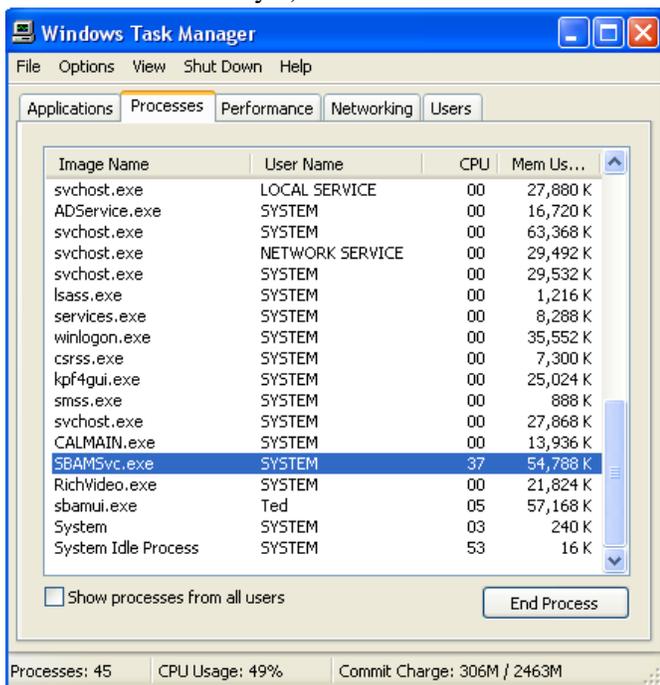


Figure 2 from the Windows XP Task Manager shows that CPU usage fluctuated around 37%.

In both systems I was able to perform normal tasks such as Web browsing while scans were running. There was a barely perceptible lag in performance. I also used my word processor on Vista to prepare this document while running a test scan. I could not detect

any performance change. On the Vista computer I was able to view video clips with no stuttering or pauses. The videos were not full screen but occupied perhaps 20 to 25 % of the total screen similar to U-Tube clips. I didn't try videos on the Win XP computer. Sunbelt suggests that scanning should be delayed if computation intensive programs are going to be run.

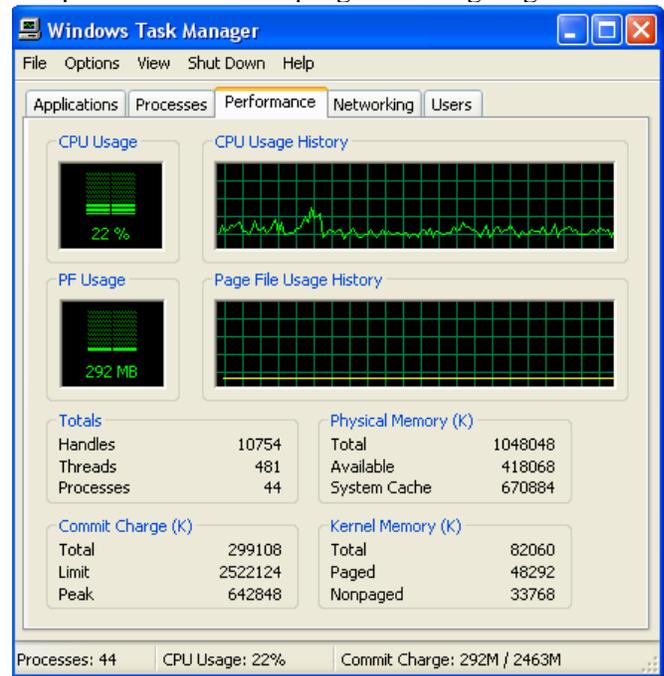


Figure 3 shows that while scanning, CPU usage had little fluctuation. It happened to be just 22 % at the moment I captured this screen, where Figure 2 happened to record 37 % at that moment.

VIPRE has a feature that I personally have not seen in other anti-virus programs. If you put the computer in SLEEP mode, VIPRE will wake up the computer at the time saved in the scheduler, run a scan, and then optionally turn off the computer after completing the scan. There does not seem to be an option to resume sleep, but I suspect that I can make some setting changes in the screen saver to put the computer to sleep after X minutes of inactivity. I haven't tried this yet, because often a screen saver looks for mouse or keyboard activity, and seeing none kicks into the screen saver, even though the CPU and hard drive may be churning.

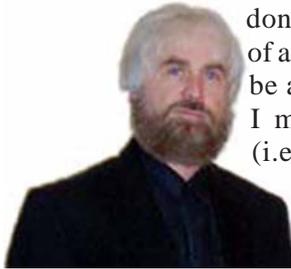
I have both computers set to scan at 1:00 AM daily. This is the default, and later I may rearrange the schedule to perhaps run only once or twice per week. I will definitely reduce the schedule for the Win XP computer since I don't use it as much as the Vista machine.

In all, I'm quite satisfied with the program, and would recommend it to anyone who is looking for a combined spyware – antivirus program. I like it much better than any of the others I have used over the years, including Norton and McAfee. It may not be a totally fair comparison, because program versions change over time, but at least that is my opinion. ■

Computer Performance Considerations

By Gary Bentley, Editor, SouthWest International Personal Computer Club (TX) *Throughput*,
April 2009, www.swipcc.org, bentley.gary@gmail.com

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When I evaluate what might be done to maximize the performance of a computer system, whether that be a system already in use or one I might be specifying for order (i.e., specifying the hardware with a particular level of performance in mind for the intended application) I look at several key factors.

The most critical factor is how much system RAM is available (if you are ordering a new system then you can also order faster RAM and be cognizant of addressing issues). I will state flatly that, all factors being equal, the more RAM available, the faster your computer system will operate. In the same vein, if you want to make full use of that system RAM, get an external graphics card with its own RAM so you don't force your system to share RAM with the video display. If you are specifying a new computer, get the fastest FSB (front side bus) speed you can afford with the microprocessor and then match the RAM bus speed to take advantage of that high bus speed. Don't let a computer maker fool you with a low system price while handing off old slow RAM to you when the motherboard and processor would support faster bus speed RAM. New systems will always use DDR RAM, so that should not be a consideration (and older systems will not be able to use it). Don't be confused by discussions of virtual memory and page files. If you have a large amount of RAM (1 GB or more with Windows XP—3 or 4 GB with Vista, the OS memory hog of all time), your system will rarely need to page out process memory onto the hard drive paging file. You can check that in Task Manager (hit CTRL SHIFT ESC or CTRL ALT DEL or right click the Task Bar and select Task Manager) by looking at the Performance tab and the Physical Memory Total in conjunction with the Commit Charge. The Physical Memory Total is the amount of RAM you have in your system. The Commit Charge is the total memory allocated to programs and the operating system. If the Commit Charge (Total or Peak) doesn't exceed the amount of RAM, then the hard drive pagefile is rarely if ever being used and your system should be running at full RAM speed without hard drive performance issues (except when loading the OS and starting an application, etc.). You can also use Performance Monitor (Start, Administrative Tools, Performance)

and look at the Memory, Pages Output/Sec parameter. Even if the amount of committed memory exceeds available RAM, if the actual Pages Output/ Sec is low or zero most of the time (quoting Microsoft) there is no significant performance problem related to available RAM. I doubt there would be any reason for the typical home user to require a 64 bit computer in order to utilize sufficient RAM.

The second most critical factor is the performance of the hard drive, i.e., the amount of utilization of your hard drive (present or anticipated for the application), the speed at which the drive platters rotate, and the speed of the interface to your hard drive. You never want to reach 50% of capacity of your hard drive. The more data you have on a hard drive the farther the disk drive read/write head has to move inward on the spinning platter to get to the data (on the average). This increases the seek time, the time required for the read/write head to position itself over the desired concentric data track on the spinning disk platter. So, use a hard drive with sufficient storage that you do not exceed 40% or so of the storage capacity (high performance server hard drives often are destocked or short stroked, i.e., limited to 40% or less so as to keep the data on the outer edge of the platters where it can be quickly reached). Once the read/write head reaches a track then the rotational speed of the platter comes into play, introducing latency, the time required for the desired sector of the track to rotate into position beneath the head. How do you reduce latency? Get a hard drive that spins as fast as you can afford. Most desktop hard drives now spin at 7200 RPM (don't let them slip you a 5400 RPM drive on your desktop or your laptop!). If your drive has a slower RPM, you can increase performance by purchasing a 7200 RPM drive. Note that high performance server drives spin at 10,000 and 15,000 RPM, but those drives are expensive. If you are evaluating a replacement drive (or specifying the hard drive in a new system), look at the access time parameter for the drive. This will generally be around 11 milliseconds for 7200 RPM desktop PC ATA/SATA drives. The access time will include seek time and rotational latency. As for the type of interface, ATA drives (which peaked at around 133 MB/sec interface performance, setting aside internal data rate of around 60 MB/s and PCI bus rate considerations) are no longer offered, so you will see SATA (serial ATA) drives in a new computer. I wouldn't bother attempting to replace an ATA drive in an old PC with a SATA drive. You would need a SATA controller card as well as SATA drive and you might as well just

purchase a new computer. The current SATA interface rate is 3 Gbps (the initial SATA interface was 1.5 Gbps), i.e., 3 gigabits per second. That translates to approximately 300 MB/sec. However, the actual rate that the read head can read the data off the spinning platter of the drive is closer to 100 MB/sec (the internal data rate). You therefore can benefit by having a drive with a large cache memory, where a large amount of data has been read internally by the hard drive before the interface is accessed, at which time the interface can burst perform at the full interface speed of 3 Gbps/300 MB/sec. I note that even the expensive server grade SCSI and SAS drives have about that same external interface transfer rate, i.e., 300 – 320 MB/sec, so their increased performance is coming directly from the high rotational speeds (10 – 15 K) and fast seeks, giving access times of 3 – 5 ms vs. 11 ms or so for desktop SATA drives. Defragmenting your drive regularly will help keep the drive operating at peak efficiency.

A less critical factor is the speed of the microprocessor itself (FSB considerations aside as

they relate to RAM access speed). A faster microprocessor or a dual or quad core processor will allow applications, their processes and threads to execute faster (to actually run the microprocessor instructions of which a program is composed) once the instructions and data reach the microprocessor.

So, if you have processing intensive applications like video or music (studio) production and editing (or scientific number crunching), faster and more core processors will speed things up considerably, but only if you have plenty of RAM and a high performance hard drive.

Mr. Bentley studied electrical engineering at the University of Texas, began working in the electronics industry in 1978 with GTE Network Systems (Lenkurt), then software engineering with various startups in the 1980's, designing and implementing, among other things, pre-Internet email communications systems multitasking on Intel platforms and MSDOS PC's. 1984 - 1986. Gary now provides Information Technology consulting services in the El Paso, Texas and Las Cruces, New Mexico areas. Gary has edited and contributed articles to the award-winning Southwest International Personal Computer Club monthly magazine, "Throughput", since December, 2003.



Word Processing Choices from A-Z (really)

By John White a member of the ICON PCUG, New York, From The ICON Graphic, Newsletter of ICON PC User Group, Inc., December 2008 Edition, www.iconpcug.org, editor@iconpcug.org

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download: <http://www.abiword.com/>] The latest version is 2.6.2.

Part 1: From A to M

Besides the venerable Microsoft Word and WordPerfect, an array of word-processing applications—both cheap and free—is vast and growing rapidly. Some are freestanding singletons to install on the hard disk. Some serve in a suite of apps including a spreadsheet to run live via the Internet. Most online versions I viewed still manifest hurdles to leap before they reach maturity. Two installable versions of MS-Office alternatives, however, rival the Gates products in impressive ways.

Abiword

Although Microsoft's "Wordpad" performs at least half of the writing tasks most of us do, Abiword is installed on my four Windows computers. It will do 98% of what I ask of a word wrangler. Placing a tiny icon on the Quick Launch menu just to the right of the Start button provides this fast-loading, capable program in easy reach. The native file format, .abw, works equally in Abi's versions for Linux and Mac OS X, but there is also an easy drop-down option to save in .doc, .rtf, .txt, .html, .xhtml, and other formats. Abi is a favorite alternate of some of ICON's leaders. [Free

Buzzword

Adobe's offering, self-described as "The First Real Word Processor for the Web" even though it's not, requires [1] a sign-up and password [2] and says "We're sorry, JavaScript must be enabled in order to use Buzzword." I'm sorry, too. If a program requires JavaScript, ActiveX, Flash, or Internet Explorer, I can live without it. The world is dangerous enough without them, and my life is already too exciting. Ah, so little time and so many other choices! If someone is willing to deal with it, please try it and give us your reaction to Buzzword. [Free download required: <http://www.buzzword.com>]

Flysuite

This one promotes itself as an online alternative to Word and Excel that focuses on document collaboration. When I went to their Web site, my Comodo firewall filled the lower right quarter of the screen with warnings about "blocked URLs," an all time record. That sounded too much an attack of potential bad guys and I stopped right there. Any braver soul care to report on Flysuite? [Free: <http://www.flysuite.com>]

[Word Processing Choices cont. on page 20](#)

Google Docs beta

A new offline version exists but in an even earlier beta stage: Despite my awe for the quality and variety of many offerings from Google, Docs beta online doesn't make the list. It seems to drive a middle lane between "lightweight" and "lame."

I see no reason to use it yet instead of Abiword or even Wordpad to create a new file. Any other users care to point out advantages too subtle for me to spot? To get there, enter your Gmail account name and password. Click on NEW>Document (or spreadsheet, presentation, or folder) and go to work. Don't look for rulers, tabs, or even clues about WordArt, mail merge or even clues how to send the document as an email or attachment. A limited selection of insertable "special characters" offers barebones Wingdings but not Monotype Sorts or any other favorite character sources. You can insert other special characters if you know their Unicode numbers. Oddly enough, the insertable "Asian" character set includes angle brackets, printer dingbats, Western math symbols, plus cm, kg, km, and copyright (c). You may still have to wangle an "invitation" to Gmail if Google is still playing hard-to-get with this powerful email/storage service. Free: <http://docs.google.com>.

Microsoft Works

Older versions required hop-skip-and-jump trips through menus to reach an otherwise inviting word processor with usable templates for home and school use. Works 8.5 came on my laptop a year ago, but some Vista machines reportedly include version 9 of Works employing a full version of MSWord although the MS Web site was somewhat vague about this. Version 8.5's word processor looks like Word Lite. It includes the ability to open its own .wps format and its .wpt templates (nice) as well as Word and other formats such as .rtf, .txt, .csv, and .html. Forget about .xml, .odf, or MS-Office 2007's own .docx. Works offers a friendly and capable database, a spreadsheet, calendar, and dictionary as well. Version 8.5 is under \$10 at <http://store.purplus.net/miwo85.html>.

Mindomo

As a preliminary for individual or group writing, this program calling itself an "Online Mind Mapping Process" offers a free visual organizer to clarify and plan the writing process. Your turn: <http://www.mindomo.com/>.

Part 2: From N to Z

Notepad

The built-in Windows plain-text editor makes a type minimalist HTML editor with clean unformatted code. Not all users know there are font and word-wrap options available. To check it those capabilities, go to Start>Accessories>Notepad>Format.

OpenOffice Writer

This article is being written with version 2.4. It retains a few minor quirks and inconveniences compared with MS-Word 2000, XP, or 2003 plus some decided advantages. For example, if the squiggly red line under correctly spelled terms (missing from its dictionaries) bothers you, UNclick the ABC button on the top of the screen—the one with a wavy red line. At any point, click its mate (ABC above a blue check mark) and manually check spelling. However, there is not button for the thesaurus. Call it up instead with Control-F7. You can also check in Czech or Nepali as well as more common tongues. The default language list supplies three flavors of English and three of German but none of French or Spanish. More 79 other language dictionaries are downloadable or under development. I switch between OpenOffice ("Writer" or "switer.exe") and Word, depending on the task. OOW saves keystrokes by remembering recently typed words and inserting them in white letters amid blue bands after one types just a few of the word's letters. To accept its suggestion after starting a word, tap ENTER and keep typing. To ignore it instead, just type on. Users of Excel will recognize and appreciate this option. OpenOffice outdoes Word in WYSIWYG cropping of inserted pictures. For a long time OO has offered in the File menu "Export as PDF" as one choice at file-saving time. A menu button also offers the same feature. It rapidly creates and saves the file directly instead of sending it to a printer menu as Adobe's expensive version requires.

Logically enough, page formatting choices are found in the (TA-DA!!!) Format drop-down menu instead of the File menu. I especially like the "E-mail as Microsoft Word" button on my customized toolbar. I'll use that one in a few minutes to send this file to Ira.

Although a paid-for version with telephone help is available as StarOffice (from Sun Microsystems) for under \$70, this free version is supported by a worldwide community of volunteer programmers and forumdwellers. The suite includes equivalent programs for Excel and PowerPoint, a capable database, and a drawing program—all accessible from the File>New menu in OpenOffice Writer. In place of Microsoft Publisher in the premium-priced MS-Office suite, the free open-source Scribus may be satisfactory [<http://www.scribus.net/>]. The native OOW file format, .odt, is widely employed around the world, conforming to the standard used in Europe and other ISO countries. This file type crosses platforms to work in Windows, Linux, and Mac OS X. OOW also opens and saves in .doc, .txt, .rtf, .xml, .html, plus several more formats including Microsoft's .psw [for Pocket Word]. I have had better success with OOW opening and editing older Word documents than with MS-Office 2007. [Free download to install: <http://www.openoffice.org/>]

Thinkfree Online

To me, it's "ThinkLoser." and forget the "free" part. This is/was supposedly a free online suite with an 



optional Premium version. Reputable media mentioned its limited beta offering was as early as December 2006 with cost estimates of \$5 to \$10 a month. Earlier this week (April 15) a Web search at Avant

listed Broderbund as #1 among many download sources, but that link seized up both times I tried it. Reaching Broderbund by a different route, I found the installable (not “online?”) Windows-only version for \$44.⁹⁵ After 20 minutes or more trying to download, register, and fire it up the free one elsewhere on the Web, after email verifications, etc., plus two more crashes—amid various notices about what to do if downloading and installing failed in a variety of ways — I admitted failure and uninstalled it. Just before giving up, I had semi-installed and managed to find a Thinkfree screen claiming this to be the best office suite on earth. If so, earth is in trouble besides just growing warmer. Other screens apparently accessed their word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation software, but never revealed any way to actually create a file using any of those choices! Two teases seemed promising at first — “Search” and collaboration. Since I had not yet created a document, it was no surprise that searching for one proved to be a dead end. With nothing yet in production by me or anyone I know, its collaboration had even less utility. Next, I searched in “Templates,” achieving my only Thinkfree success, sort of. I typed “letter” in the template search box and got five letter templates or something. The first didn’t seem to be a letter template at all, but was a document about how to use Haitian expressions. The other four were in Asian languages using characters I cannot read. To be fair to Thinkfree, I’ve copied and pasted below their exact message and boldfacing. Since I never reached the “Sync Cache” folder they describe, I wish you better luck than mine if you care to try it. No date for the new version or demise of the older one was mentioned. If you have purchased TF Premium, store the receipt with your Enron stock certificates. Microsoft needn’t worry about this competitor. “We will be launching ‘My Office’ and providing a new version of ThinkFree Office. You will no longer be able to use the old version which is called ‘ThinkFree Premium’ as of that time. You will be using our new integrated ThinkFree Online service after installation. Please remove ‘Sync Cache’ folder before you proceed installing the new version of ThinkFree Office. Location and Instructions for removing the sync folder.

- For Windows: **C:\Documents and Settings\account\MyDocuments\TFSync**
- For Mac: **/Users/account/Documents/TFSync**

- For Linux: **/home/account/TFSync**

Wordpad

This little brother of MS-Word comes free with your Windows installation. It opens and saves in Unicode, .rtf, and the older MS-DOS .txt format but not Word’s .doc. It comes with bolding, italics, and underlining of installed Windows fonts in colors, a horizontal ruler with adjustable margins and tabs, and a single bullet style but no numbering button or mail merge. It is a good emergency word processor if the missing features aren’t needed for the project at hand. [Start>Accessories>Wordpad]

WordPerfect X

One can pay the full “retail” price of several hundred dollars, but at <http://www.royaldiscount.com/corel.html> it is \$82⁹⁴. I prefer the “OEM” version for \$18.46 with free shipping for either version. The current X3 suite contains a powerful, customizable word processor compatible with MSOffice. Its Quattro Pro spreadsheet matches Excel quite nicely. A graphics drawing application and Presentations either its native mode or in PowerPoint mode. The word processor offers to work in MS-Word style, native WP X3 style, or older versions back to 5.1. All these apps play nicely with MS formats.

Zoho

I admit to saving the best for the last. Zoho wins my prize as winner among online word processors. All the integrated application elements of Zoho’s suite employ similar enough interfaces and working styles so that users of Office version through 2003 will either recognize or master them quickly. I wish Microsoft Office 2007 had been designed by Zoho. This suite connects many well presented applications in a style that handles like a nimble sports car instead of a ponderous “featuremobile.” It displays obvious buttons and tools, export/publish options (including PDF), offline options (after one installs Google Gears), a stunning array of accessible and complementary features: spreadsheet, blogger, chat, notebook, planner, mail, database creator and reporter, conferencing, wiki editor, project manager, CRM and contact manager, plus others. Even if “Help” seems a bit elusive, the buttons and menus provide intuitive answers better than traditional, encyclopedia-type help. I found no reference to mail merge, but the other word processing feature set is both complete and readily at hand. Spell check, tables, bulleted lists, tags as folders, comments, and collaboration features seems to be exceptionally friendly. I have just started using this impressive suite, so an in-depth evaluation will have to wait. ■

About John White: *John has taught word processing and spreadsheets for a dozen years at New Horizons (Manhattan), Dowling College, NY Tech, and BOCES.*

Concepts and Tools

By Elizabeth B. Wright, Member, Computer Club of Oklahoma City, www.ccokc.org,
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One day in the near future there will be no computer “beginners” at the adult level. The children born into the world as it is today are exposed to computers from conception. After they are born, many have very sophisticated hands on use of the machines from the minute they can reach out from their parent’s lap and touch the keyboard. There is no mystery to them.

But while there are still older adults who want computer knowledge, someone has to be available to instruct them. And adults do not learn the same way that babies and children learn. Sometimes, when leading a group or teaching a class, it is difficult to explain to students why they need to understand the difference between how a computer or a program works and how to make it actually do something. In my opinion, concepts are far more useful in the long run than specific techniques, especially when dealing with someone using a computer for the first time or who has gone just beyond the basics. But how do you teach a concept?

First, accept the fact that it will take more time in the beginning to teach concepts, but it will save time later on. The real trick is to make the process interesting and easy to understand

The simple fact that a computer is basically thousands of off and on switches, the same as a light switch, seems to be information that many people find irrelevant. But once a student gets some idea of the actual simplicity of the machine, much of the mystery is removed from the learning process.

Second, CONCEPTS, once understood, are usually far easier to remember than techniques. Anyone who “gets the idea” of a computer fundamental can usually find the tools later to accomplish the end result, even if the specific steps are not used often enough to remember them in sequence.

Many first session lesson plans skip computer functionality and plunge straight into using software. As an example, the concept of organizing files on a hard drive seems to be much harder for new users to comprehend than teaching them to open the file manager, aka Windows Explore or some similar program. So many teachers go through the cumbersome task of showing people how to open the file system, only to become bogged down in the steps needed to find a particular file, then later to continually have people complain they have lost a file and firmly believe it has disappeared from their machine. Most new users find it difficult to make the connection between finding a file on the computer and why understanding how to find it is important. It is the instructor’s job to help them make the connection. The CONCEPT of hard drive storage is not easy to absorb, so the instructor must make it easy. Also many new users find it difficult to transfer keystrokes learned on a classroom computer to their own computers at home. The reason for this is that no two computers are exactly alike, so the steps learned on one machine may or may not work on another

one. But if the student comprehends the idea behind digital file storage, the actual keystrokes will begin to make sense, regardless of what computer they are using. In my opinion, rote learning is not the best way to become even moderately proficient on a computer. Real understanding of basic computing processes is vital.

Since many new users have little idea of what hardware is on their own computers, talking about C:\ drives and other drives in relation to specific files means little to them. But a well developed discussion of what basic hardware CAN be on a computer and how it works is not a waste of time, answering questions along the way. Many new users won’t see the value in a technical discussion, so it is important to present hardware demonstrations using common sense terms rather than obscure technical language. It is never necessary to impress new students with what you know, but rather to make the information as easy for them to understand as possible. With practice, a teacher or presenter can develop the dialog necessary to convey essential information and still keep the listeners engaged. Students appreciate being encouraged in the idea that they may not know much to begin with, but they will leave each session armed with useful information and techniques that will build a good basic foundation for them. Biblically we were taught not to build our houses on sand. Why are the pyramids in Egypt still standing? Because underneath all that sand there are foundations built on bedrock. Good computer skills begin the same way.

Nearly all programs are far too comprehensive to be taught in detail to beginners. But if the most basic use of the program (the program’s CONCEPT) can be presented in a way that is useful to students, they will get their feet wet. From there they can then be encouraged to not only attend study groups and advanced classes, but to explore their favorite programs on their own. Again, the difference is between teaching new users the fundamental use of the program itself as opposed to teaching them to use specific program “tools”. Obviously some techniques need to be taught in early sessions, but teaching the use of most tools is best done in intermediate and advanced classes. My experience has been that only when people have a need for or enjoy using any computer software will they continue to explore and expand their knowledge of the program.

How long did it take you to figure out that the “d” in d:\ stands for any non-specific “drive” when dealing with program instructions (often installation procedures) and not specifically for the “d” drive on your personal computer? Admit it, there was a time when you didn’t know that. Just think how confusing the term is to new users. There is a concept here if you can find it. ■

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Broadsides

Compiled by Ron Broadhurst, a member of the Space Coast PC Users Group, Inc., FL, The Space Coast PC Journal, June 2009,

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Dear friends,

These ideas are compiled from years of accumulations from various magazines, books, on-line sites and my own personal experience. I claim neither originality nor ownership to any of its contents. My only intent is to share the various "tips," "tricks", & "hints" in hopes of helping & maybe enhancing your computing experiences. They are all intended for anyone who uses a PC. It is for beginners as well as advanced users. Enjoy and use as you will.

Ron Broadhurst

Turn Off Indexing To Speed Up XP

Windows XP keeps a record of all files on the hard disk so when you do a search on the hard drive it is faster. There is a downside to this and because the computer has to index all files, it will slow down normal file commands like open, close, etc. If you do not do a whole lot of searches on your hard drive then you may want to turn this feature off:

- Open My Computer.
- Right-click your hard drive icon and select Properties.
- At the bottom of the window you'll see "Allow indexing service to index this disk for faster searches," uncheck this and click ok.
- A new window will pop up and select Apply to all folders and subfolders.

It will take a minute or two for the changes to take affect but then you should enjoy slightly faster performance.

Correcting System Hang At Startup

If your system hangs about 2 or 3 minutes at startup, where you can't access the Start button or the Taskbar, it may be due to one specific service (Background Intelligent Transfer) running in the background. Microsoft put out a patch for this but it didn't work for me. Here's what you do:

- Click on Start/Run, type 'msconfig', and then click 'OK'.
- Go to the 'Services' tab; find the 'Background Intelligent Transfer' service. Disable it, apply the changes & reboot.

Change The Start Menu Style To Classic

Does the new Windows XP Start menu take up too much space on your desktop? You can easily change the look back to the Windows Classic Start menu by following these steps:

- Right-click the Start button, and then click Properties.
- Click Classic Start menu.

- Click the Customize button to select items to display on the Start menu.

By default, selecting the Classic Start menu also adds the My Documents, My Computer, My Network Places, and Internet Explorer icons to your desktop.

Display your quick Launch Toolbar

- Right-click an empty area on the taskbar, click Toolbars, and then click Quick Launch.
- Easy as that your Quick Launch bar appears.
- To add items to your Quick Launch toolbar, click the icon for the program you want to add, and drag it to the Quick Launch portion of the taskbar.

Keep Your Favorite Programs Near The Top Of The Start Menu

Do you have a favorite program that you frequently use? Elevate its priority on the Start menu by putting it at the top of the list. This ensures that the program will remain on the Start menu and cannot be bumped by other programs, even if you use the others more frequently.

Right-click the link to your favorite program on the Start menu and select Pin to Start Menu. Your program will be moved permanently to the top part of the list, just below your browser and e-mail programs.

Change Out Your Pointers Scheme

Tired of seeing your pointer as an arrow or an hourglass all the time? Windows XP offers a number of alternative pointer schemes, such as Dinosaur, Ocean and Sports:

- Open the Control Panel, double-click Mouse, and select the Pointers tab. (If you start in Category view, select Appearance and Themes, then click Mouse Pointers under "See Also").
- Next to Schemes, click the down arrow and select a scheme to preview its pointers.
- Click OK to apply the scheme to your desktop.

Create A Personal Screen Saver

For a great way to put your digital photos to work, try creating a slide show presentation for use as a screen saver.

- Right-click an empty spot on your desktop, and then click Properties.
- Click the Screen Saver tab.
- In the Screen saver list, click My Pictures Slideshow.
- Click Settings to make any adjustments, such as how often the pictures should change, what size they should be, and whether you'll use transition effects between pictures, and then click OK.

Now your screen saver is a random display of the pictures taken from your My Pictures folder. ■

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