

MONITOR

Next Meeting
Tuesday, February 12 - Brighton Library
Why Software Sucks (and What You an Do About It)

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Electronic Mail (e-mail)

by Dale Atchison

Tampa Bay Computer Society

We all use it. It's one of the reasons most of us bought a computer in the first place, so we could share jokes, music files, and pictures of the grandchildren, depending on our age, with friends and family. But, how many of us know how to use e-mail courteously, safely, and efficiently?

Think for a minute how annoyed you get when you receive an e-mail message that requires you to 'drill down' through half a dozen or more attachments to get to the actual message, be it text or pictures. Then think just a little harder, and remember that you usually just click on Forward to send that monstrosity on to your own mailing

list—they'll see every layer you did, plus one more! ouch!



certainly not someone whose e-mail address you should be sending on to your mailing list. But you probably

And how many e-mail addresses have you seen of people who received the message before you? They're most likely friends of friends of friends, but six or seven generations down in the forwarding morass, and there's little chance they're someone you know, and

do, did, and will, if you just click on Forward. In this article, I'm going to try and lay out a safe, courteous, and efficient plan for sending e-mail. There's nothing you can do to fix how poorly your friends and family handle the stuff they send you, but you can at least keep from adding to the mess, and set a good example at the same time.

1. Text Vs. Html.

First and foremost, there is seldom a good reason to send HTML e-mail. That's e-mail that lets you choose the size, color, and font of your e-mail text, as well as embed pictures and sound in a message. When that's something you just have to do for the message to make sense, or just to express the feeling or idea you were sending it for in the first place, go ahead and use HTML, but most of the time, e-mail should be sent in plain text format. Text messages are a tiny fraction of the size of HTML messages, meaning they upload from your computer and download to the recipients' computers in a fraction of the time - your friends who still have dial-up will thank you for not bogging down their downloads.

- Sending in HTML just so you can use 'smileys' is just plain wrong! I know one or two people who actually like receiving all those stupid grinning graphical characters; I ask them politely to refrain from sending any to me. Both Hotmail and Incredimail allow you to send e-mail without HTML codes; sorry, but I can't give any further guidance than, "look for it," because I don't use either program. (By the way, if you're using Incredimail, you're taking a chance with all your personal data—some of us think it's spyware.)
- When you want to embed pictures in a message, and the placement and order matters, you don't get a choice. Use HTML, but make sure the end result will be worth the annoyance and extra download time to the people you're sending to. The same reasoning applies if you want to attach an HTML 'signature' file: it won't display properly at the end of a plain text e-mail, so if the signature is worth the hassle, use HTML for the message, as well. (of course, you could always attach the HTML signature file to the end of a plain text e-mail (see paragraph 6.), and you'd get the best of both worlds-small message size, with the attendant fast upload and download times, and just one double-click necessary for the recipient to see your HTML masterpiece at the end.)
- For most of us, it's a good idea to set Plain Text as the default mail sending format. Here's how to

do it from within outlook Express: Tools » options » Send » in the Mail Sending Format area, click the Plain Text 'radio button'. Click the HTML Settings button, put a check mark next to Send Pictures With Messages, and remove the check mark next to Indent Message on Reply; click OK. Click the Plain Text Settings button, remove the check mark next to Indent the original Text, then click OK, then OK again to save all changes.

- And if someone sends you an HTML e-mail, and you feel the need to respond to it, please remember to change the Format to Plain Text- they might have had a legitimate reason to send you a large file, but there's no good reason to send the same large file back to them just to say "Thanks, that was funny." While in the Reply window, click on Format » Plain Text to lose the embedded pictures, sounds, colors, and fonts. And anytime you reply to a message, HTML or not, only include as much of the original message as absolutely necessary to remind the person why you're replying.

2. Layers of Attachments.

No matter how many layers you have to drill through to get to a message, when you forward it, the actual message (text or HTML) should be the only thing the recipient sees. Using outlook Express, this is very easy: don't click Forward while looking at the top layer of the message, but wait until you're looking at the last layer, the actual message; clicking Forward at this point should open a new message window with ONLY the 'meat' of the message displayed.

If you're using AOL, CompuServe, YahooMail, or one of the other web-based e-mail clients, it's only a little more complicated:

- Don't click on Forward, please! No one wants to get all the names of those before you who received this message.

Instead, while viewing the meat of the message you want to send on to others, highlight everything you want to forward by left-clicking just to the left of the first word or picture, holding the mouse button down, and dragging to just right of the last word or picture.

- Right-click anywhere in the highlighted area, and left-click Copy.
- Open a New Message, right-click in the blank message body, and left-click Paste.
- Send that message to your friends and family trying not to send it to the person who sent it to you - that denotes a whole new set of problems

that I can't help you with.

- (Most of the web-based clients don't give you the option of 'inline text' for forwarding - it's Send As Attachment or no deal —another reason to use a PoP3 client like outlook Express, Outlook, Eudora, or Thunderbird.)

3. Addresses, keep them safe.

You have been trusted with the e-mail addresses of your friends and family. Please don't betray that trust by sharing the address with the world. You may only send a message on to one or two trusted correspondents, but you have no way of knowing how many they will send it to, and so on, and so on. How many generations down the road before your maiden Aunt's e-mail address appears in the Inbox of someone who makes his living ripping off seniors? How many times will a message be forwarded before your daughter's or niece's address shows up where a pedophile can use it to pretend he's a trusted friend of a trusted friend? This sounds paranoid—it isn't. Hide every e-mail address you use from every other e-mail address you use, by putting all recipients' addresses in the BCC: line; no one but the author of the message ever sees those addresses - they're not even hidden in the headers that an administrator at the receiving end can look at. The administrator at your ISP (the sending end) can probably see them, but he or she sees everything you do online, anyway—you gotta trust somebody. If your e-mail client won't allow you to send a message with no address in the To: line, address it to yourself, with all the real recipients safely hidden in the BCC: line. In outlook Express, the BCC: line isn't displayed by default. You can make it show up by clicking on the To: button in a message (just left of the To: address line), selecting an address from your Address Book, and clicking on the BCC: button to add the address.

- The only time it is appropriate to have a 'pile' of addresses all visible to all recipients, either in the To: or the Cc: lines, is when you know they all know each other, you're pretty sure none of them would object to your sharing the address with any of the rest of them, and the message is of a nature that leaves you very sure there would be no reason for anyone to forward it.
- If you receive a message with other people's e-mail addresses visible, remove them all before sending the message on. There's no sense in compounding someone else's error by forwarding the message 'as is'. So what if one or two people might receive a message twice because you or a

friend 'downline' didn't see that they'd already gotten it? That's a small price to pay for protecting your loved ones from predators. If they see a duplicate message show up, and recognize the Subject: line, they can erase it just as easily before they read it as they could afterward.

4. The Subject Line.

Which brings me to the next topic: Always Type Something Descriptive in the Subject Line. It's only common courtesy. When your friend who never cleans out his Inbox wants to find the message you sent him about your new Fender Stratocaster, it will help immensely if the Subject: line includes the word "Stratocaster".

- "News From the Bellsouth Portal" or such is never adequate; news about what? If your Subject: line was filled in automatically by an online script (meaning you pressed a "share this with a friend" button), change it manually rather than adding to it—a super-long subject line will be ignored by most folks.
- And please remove all those Fw: and/or Re: prefixes on the Subject: line! They're just clutter. If you're actually replying to a message, it's okay to have one (and only one) Re: before the Subject: line; likewise, if this is a legitimate Fw: (someone sent me this, and I think you should see it, too), one and only one Fw: can appear before the actual subject. Jokes, pictures, online stories, and such should usually just have the subject, no Re: and no Fw: . Makes for a cleaner message list in the recipient's Inbox.

5. Clean it up.

If you receive a message full of >>>>>> symbols, remove them before passing it on. The instructions in paragraph 1. will prevent you from adding another > or two, but why not go the 'extra mile' and remove the earlier senders' mistakes by removing them all? There is a program called E-mailStripper that will do this for you [Also StripMail which is free and easy to use. -Ed.], but I just use Notepad (In Win 98 or ME, you'll need to use WordPad - the Replace function didn't exist in Notepad until Win 2000.) Here's how, using Notepad (WordPad commands are the same, except for the obvious difference of calling the other program):

- While viewing and want to clean up and forward, click on the Forward button.
- Press Ctrl-A on your keyboard) or click Edit » Select All in the menu) to highlight the entire message.

- Right-click any place within the highlighted area, and left-click Cut.
- Click on Start » Run » Notepad » OK.
- Right-click anywhere on the blank page, and left-click Paste. There's your text.
- While the text is still highlighted (if you lose the highlighting, just press Ctrl-A on your keyboard to get it back), press Ctrl-H.
- In the Find What: field of the Find and Replace dialog box, type a > symbol, followed by the largest number of empty spaces you can see in the highlighted text; leave the Replace With: field blank, and click Replace All.
- After the replacements have been made, click once at the right-hand end of the Find What: field, press the Backspace key, then click Replace All again.
- Repeat this process, reducing the length of the Find What: string by one character at a time, until there's no text left in the Find What: field.
- Click the Cancel button in the Find and Replace dialog box to close it.
- Click Edit » Select All » Cut to put the cleaned-up text 'on the clipboard'.
- Right-click back in your blank e-mail message, and left-click Paste. You should be left with a cleaned-up version of the original e-mail message, ready to address and Send.

I realize these explanations seems long and probably convoluted, but it took much longer to tell you than it takes to do; once you've done it once or twice, all the actions become automatic, and each message takes just a few seconds to clean up.

Cleaning up an HTML message is a little bit different. Instead of >> marks, some HTML messages that have been improperly forwarded have a series of blue vertical bars at the left-hand side of the screen. (We already set your copy of outlook Express to not add to this mess back in paragraph 1.) Remove the bars thusly:

- Left-click just to the left of the first character or picture in the html message that you want to forward, and hold the button down while you drag the mouse cursor to just right of the last character or picture that you want. You should now have a large highlighted area just to the right of the last vertical blue bar on the left.
- Right-click anywhere in the highlighted area, and left-click Copy.
- open a New Message window by clicking on Create Mail.
- Right-click in the blank message window, and

left-click Paste. There's your original message, minus all the blue bars and extra addresses.

- Address the message (see paragraph 3.), add an appropriate Subject: line (see paragraph 4.), and click Send.



6. Attachments.

You can attach any file to an e-mail message. (Some ISP's may not let your recipients receive executable files; if you know that to be the case, ZIP your .exe files and other exe-

cutables before attaching them.) Pictures attached to a plain text e-mail will appear just below the text in most e-mail clients. You won't see it while composing the message, but if you look at the message in your outbox before sending it, it will (hopefully) look just like it will when your friends receive it. Attach a file by clicking on the Attach button in a New Message window, navigating to the file(s) you want to attach, and clicking the Attach button in the Insert Attachment dialog box; you can attach more than one file at a time, just highlight all the files you want to attach using the Shift or Control keys, or by drawing a box around a group of files in the dialog box.

- If you attach files you created on your computer, be sure the people you're sending to have the necessary programs to open the files installed on their computers. Everyone has WordPad or its Mac equivalent; convert any Word documents to Word for Windows Version 6 using the Save As command from the Word menu so they can see your work. Also a Word file for a Mac recipient should be saved as an RTF (rich text format) file. Programs like Photoshop and Print Shop use their own file formats by default, but if you'll check their menus, you'll find you can export any files you've created as JPEG or PDF files—again, everyone can read those.
- Sometimes, you'll see a picture in an incoming e-mail, but it will show up as a red X when you try and forward it. This can happen for any of several reasons, but one of the most likely is that you're using some sort of SpamBlocker software that won't let you forward 'web-pix': pictures that were never actually in the e-mail you received, but live somewhere out on the Internet where a link in your e-mail can retrieve and display them on command. Web-pix are sometimes harmless, but they are also sometimes used by spammers to target you for unwanted and annoying commercial e-mail.

- Forward these pictures (if you must) by right-clicking the picture in your original received e-mail, selecting Save Picture As... and saving the picture on your desktop. Then, when you're editing the New or Forwarded Message, highlight each of the red Xs in turn, and click on Insert » Picture in the menu; click on Browse, choose the saved picture from your desktop, and click open. Once you've sent the message, you can delete all the temporarily-stored pictures from your desktop.
- Occasionally, you'll receive an attachment you can't open. If it's a proprietary file format like .psp or .psd, write the person who sent it to you and ask them to send you a .jpeg or .pdf of the attachment. If the file attachment says it is an .eml file, save it to your desktop, and double-click to open in outlook Express (this is usually only a problem for people who are reading mail online, but the mail was sent from an Outlook Express user using the PoP3 protocol. You don't have to understand that last bit, just take my word for it).
- If the attachment says it's a .txt file, but Notepad shows gibberish characters when you double-click it, try saving it to your desktop, changing the extension to .eml, and double-click so outlook Express can open what is most likely an html e-mail. If double-clicking doesn't cause Outlook Express to open, try highlighting the saved file, holding down the Shift key on your keyboard while you right-click the highlighted file, and choosing open With; select outlook Express from the drop-down list that appears. If outlook Express isn't in the drop-down list, it's probably not installed on your computer. Go to Control Panel » Add/Remove Programs » Windows Setup (or Add/Remove Windows Components) and select Outlook Express; click OK and follow the prompts to install it.

7. Hoaxes

You're going to receive e-mail messages nearly every day telling you about some heinous or heroic thing done by someone you'd never have expected it from. Please go to Snopes.com and check it out before sending it on. 99% of the time, these stories are at least exaggerations, if not outright lies. (Jane Fonda did visit North Vietnam during the war, but there's no evidence she got anyone beaten or killed by betraying them to their captors.) Please don't add to the Internet clutter by propagating lies and half-truths. Just type a few pertinent words from the

e-mail you received into the Search box at Snopes, and they'll give you a list of current stories on the Web on that subject, and tell you how much (if any) of it is true.

8. File Size.

I routinely receive huge video and audio files from people I really like, but I don't have time to wait for the downloads, even at DSL speed, and I sure don't have the hard drive space to store every movie floating around out there. I delete them from the Verizon e-mail server before they're ever downloaded to my computer. Make sure you have a very good reason for sending any e-mail larger than half a megabyte (500kb). If in doubt, err on the side of courtesy: send a link to the online copy of the original file in a plain text e-mail, say in the Subject: line that it's a movie or audio link (give the subject of the clip here, too), and say in the message body how large the file is, even if it's just in relative terms - "it takes three to four minutes to download, but it was worth it," or words to that effect.

Media Notes

by Bill Petitt

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Farewell Vista, Hello XP

How to make the switch back and deal with the gnarly problem of transferring your Vista e-mail, contacts, and user data back to the old standby operating system

After you have been exploring Windows Vista for about six months, you might decide that, you liked it.

Vista's new navigation features will probably grow on you. Vista's appearance has it all over standard XP, and there are tons of usability features that beckon—after you turn off the incredibly annoying User Account Control that constantly bugs you when you want to install programs or tweak things.

For example, you might love being able to shut down with one click; you might like the junk filtering in Windows Mail (Vista's upgraded version of Outlook Express); and you might appreciate the way you can easily drag User folders (formerly My Documents) to a new location so you can consolidate them with other data that you regularly back up.

For example, you might love being able to shut down with one click; you might like the junk filtering in Windows Mail (Vista's upgraded version of Outlook Express); and you might appreciate the way you can easily drag User folders (formerly My Documents) to a new location so you can consolidate them

with other data that you regularly back up.

Annoyances Will Probably

Drive You Backwards

Unfortunately, small time-wasting annoyances in Vista cropped up almost immediately. Auto-complete of e-mail addresses in Windows Mail works only with the 29 most recently used contacts (you might have hundreds), and overall the program is slow. The Search Indexer had an irritating tendency to start when I watched an HD DVD, and despite of the absence of multimedia files in a folder, those folders showed useless columns for Artists, Tags, and Ratings. As irksome as these things were, you might consider them livable. A friend discovered that his sound card's drivers for ASIO (a high-performance audio standard for recording musical instruments and vocals) didn't work well under Vista that the balance tipped irretrievably him towards "downgrading" to XP.

The beta ASIO drivers may have been spotty, it may have been a system configuration problem, it may have been him--Vista is actually reputed to be much better for Pro audio--but he decided that it was time to revert to good old stable XP with its mature driver support.

After about a year, that's what I decided to do on my main machine.

How About Dual Booting?

You might consider leaving Vista installed, installing XP, and then dual-booting using a boot manager that hides the OS not in use. Some users have experienced the failure of Acronis's Boot Manager and of OSLBoot (included with the OEM version of Vista) and that's frustrating. I also lost a Vista installation that I had been dual booting to -- just another example of this type of failure.

If you conclude that you really don't want Vista around anymore and decide to overwrite it. Here's how to do it.

First Steps

The first step to reverting to XP is to save your Vista data, the subtleties of which I'll get into later. After backing up the pertinent data, you should use something like Acronis's True Image or Norton Ghost to make a backup of the entire Vista partition in case you forgot to copy something. This little fail-safe procedure has saved my tukus on more than one occasion.

Next, move your program data (your documents, images, and other files) to a safe location--that is, to a drive that won't be overwritten by your new XP

installation.

What about applications? Alas, the tricks I describe below can't be used for migrating apps from Vista to XP. That step you must take after XP is installed, and, sadly, you'll have to reinstall your programs one-by-one to be certain they'll work right.

Moving Data



When you're ready to do it (not yet!), moving program data to Windows XP is easy enough. Instead of XP's My Documents, Vista stores data in a User folder that will bear the name of the cur-

rent user and contains subfolders for documents, pictures, videos, contacts, and so on. Vista allows you to relocate these folders by simply dragging them to a new location. So, before you overwrite Vista with XP, do the following:

1. Copy or relocate (right-button drag and select Move) your User folder or folders to a partition or drive that won't be overwritten--for example, the D: drive. Keep in mind that every user on the computer will have their own folder, so you need to relocate or copy all of them. And don't forget the Public folder.
2. If you've been using programs that allow it, export data to a safe place for later import when you've reinstalled XP. More on this later.
3. Once you've installed XP, either drag the user folders back to XP's My Documents, point My Documents to the folders' new location using Properties, Target, Move, or simply access the data where it resides.
4. Import your exported data back into your third-party apps after you've reinstalled them.

There is data hidden in your User folders that you may or may not need (the default e-mail repository, for example, is here). To see it, open your User folder, select Folder and Search Options from the Organize menu, select the View tab, and make sure Show hidden files and folders is selected.

Close the dialog box, and you'll see a folder called AppData; it can't be moved like the other User subfolders. Open it, browse it, and if you see anything you might need, copy it to a safe place. (You

could skip this step and grab it later if you discover you need anything, since it will have been copied when you made your backup image. But copying it this way makes it easier to access.)

Don't install XP yet! You're nearly there, but a few more details must be dealt with.

The Mail Mess

In my case, transferring the data I'd accrued using Vista's native apps back to my XP apps was the real problem. You will have used Vista nonstop for however long you have had it. Just copy it back? That's not so easy, as Microsoft decided to revamp (not for the better in my opinion) the way Vista and Windows Mail stores messages and contacts.

Where Outlook Express stored messages in database files and contact information in the single-file Windows Address Book, Vista and Mail store every e-mail and contact as a separate file--a more versatile approach but also considerably less efficient and inadvertently responsible for the auto-complete bug I mentioned up front. In addition, it makes Windows Mail very slow compared with Outlook Express.

Vista Mail's address export function worked fine for the contacts. Before reinstalling XP I exported to both vCards and a .csv (Comma Separated Values) file, which is basically a text file with one record per line and each bit of information separated by a comma.

While vCards seemed like a good idea at first, Outlook Express's vCard import function lets you add only one at a time, and if you drag and drop multiple vCards into the program window, you still have to click the OK button for every card. With hundreds of e-mail addresses to copy, I soured on that path to carpal tunnel in short order.

CSV import was much faster, and with the exception of a couple of odd characters in the First Name field, the Mail and Outlook Express fields matched up perfectly, so I was able to restock the Windows Address Book in XP in about 30 seconds.

Two Ways to Import E-Mail into XP

Finding an easy way to move my e-mail back into XP proved more difficult. Outlook Express's import function won't import Vista Mail's .eml messages

wholesale. The following method is simple and suffices--if you have a taste for the tedious.

You can save Vista Mail's messages to a safe place and then drag them directly into the Outlook Express window. But if you have a lot of sorted e-mail, you must manually recreate your folder structure--which is where the tedium commences. Here's the step-by-step:

1. In Vista, save your e-mail repository to a safe place on another partition or drive before you install or overwrite Vista with XP. Find the repository in: C:\Users\Username\AppData\Local\Microsoft\WindowsMail\Local Folders (Username is your user name). You can redirect the repository to another location by using the Tools, Options, Advanced, Maintenance, Store Folder function, or you can export in Mail format to another location. I recommend the latter (or both).
2. After you've installed XP, open Outlook Express, open an Explorer window pointed to the safe location you copied the .eml files to, select them, then drag and drop them to the folder in OE where you want them. As I mentioned, you must recreate the folders yourself.

The above method works, but you, like me, might have dozens of folders that you might have sorted e-mail or have archived for particular projects, so I really, really wanted a better way. Since I had Office 2007 with Outlook (any recent version of Office Outlook will do), I hit on the idea of importing the messages into Outlook from Mail under Vista, then transferring them back from Outlook to Outlook Express in XP. It's a slightly convoluted process, but it requires no tedious labor and works like a charm. The procedure goes thusly:

1. In Vista, use Outlook 2007's Data Management dialog box to create a new.pst data file, make it your default, and then import the messages (not addresses) from Mail. Make sure you save the resulting .pst file to a separate partition that won't be overwritten when you reinstall XP.
2. In XP, install Outlook and use it to open the .pst file you created in Vista and make it the default.
3. Fire up Outlook Express, choose Import, and select the Outlook option; you should now be good to go.

If you're wondering why I don't use Office Outlook for my e-mail, I have two reasons: First, Outlook Express is simple, it's extremely efficient, and I'm used to it. The other reason is that the Office version of Outlook allows only one set of contacts. And yes,

I tried installing Outlook Express on Vista, but all the OE self-installers I possessed bailed after notifying me that a newer version (Windows Mail) was already installed.

Time for Your XP Install

After all of that prep, installing XP over Vista is, in itself, not too difficult: Boot with your XP installation disc and install XP, overwriting Vista. And just make sure to select the partition that Vista is on and follow the prompts.

As I've said, there's not a lot you can do about migrating your applications back. If you were using two separate PCs, you could use Windows Easy Transfer or a similarly capable commercial product. I didn't consider that option, because I wanted a lean, clean OS with an uncluttered Registry.

The solution is to reinstall your apps—which is a pain, but it's the best way to go.

Am I happy I moved back to XP? Very much so. The time I save by using Outlook Express instead of Vista's Windows Mail is worth the switch by itself. Personally, I think Microsoft spent too much time, when it was developing Vista, in fixing stuff that wasn't broken and breaking stuff that worked. I'll take another look at Vista after SP1 ships, but I don't think I'll be switching again for a while.

If you'd like to try Vista before removing XP, or if you're using Vista and would like to take a stroll down memory lane to see just how efficient the older OS is, download VMware Server or Virtual PC 2007 for free and try them in a virtual machine.

Passwords 101

by Carla S. Cawfield
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"Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't after you"

—Joseph Heller, Catch 22

Joseph Heller should have had this quote password-protected, because it was later used by Kurt Cobain of Nirvana. I have been using computers all my life, and the Internet since it was made available to the public. So over the years, I have set up jillions of accounts that required a password. Creating passwords is easy; it's remembering them that can be hard. Here are some tips on effective and simple password maintenance.

Rule #1

Do not share your personal passwords with

anyone. This includes spouses, kids, and co-workers.

Plan and Organize.

Before you ever set up any passwords, think about it. Your problem will be in remembering tens to hundreds of passwords assigned to different accounts. You may not always be at your own personal computer(s) where Cookies will fill-in the password each time you access a program. Some pre-planning will come in handy. (If you already have lots of accounts with passwords you can't remember or maintain, a password tune-up is needed. You can re-assign new well-thought-out passwords to existing accounts, using the following tips).

Get Cryptic.

Rather than just grabbing a password on the fly, get creative. You can help manage the complexity of passwords if you think deeply about old memories or data that you have not shared with anyone. This is way beyond the security questions asked at various sites, i.e., questions like family birthdays/anniversaries, your mother's maiden name, your first pet's name, your favorite color. Forget all those. Rather, consider combinations of partial words and numbers that have meaning only to you. (See basic tips below for specifics.) Doodle with them, create anagrams, see if you can come up with a few that are cryptic to anyone else, but easy for you to remember. If you design them carefully, a few passwords may last you for years.

Security.

Accounts and programs fall into various levels of security:

Highest Security—your personal computer, email accounts, online banking, personal web pages, eBay/PayPal, ATMs, etc. This is extremely valuable, sensitive or personal data, the loss or corruption of which would be catastrophic. See Rule #1. These accounts deserve your most careful attention. The flip side of password protection is *Back up Your Data!* If someone does hack into your accounts, having your data backed-up and stored outside of your computer is a life-saver.

Medium Security—online photo storage sites, travel search engines, birthday greeting programs. If someone broke into these accounts, they might post or retrieve vacation or other embarrassing photos, but not much terrible damage can occur, unless you are Rob Lowe, Paris Hilton, or Alec Baldwin.

Low security—sites include online recipes, weather info, television listings, newspaper sites, and such. Why these sites even want your email address and for you to log in is only for their own data mining and marketing purposes. You are not uploading anything, they are merely public retrieval sites. Tip: Save yourself some hassles and create a junk “throw-down” email address for these types of sites, such as anonymous@hal-pc.org. (HAL-PC /HALNet members can have more than one email address at no extra charge.)

“I’m re-encoding this message every ten seconds, so have your system keep up with us.”

David Bassom, Babylon 5

Rule #2

Do not share your personal passwords with anyone. Sound familiar? If you truly cannot commit to memory your most important passwords, as an absolute last resort, record them and hide them somewhere very private and known only to you.

Create passwords that are difficult to hack (see basic tips), but that you can recall in an instant, without writing them down somewhere. Contrary to some “experts” advice, I am not an advocate of writing passwords down where other persons have access to your computer, either at home or at work.

It is okay to repeat yourself. You CAN use the same password over and over on different accounts. But be careful. If someone hacks your passwords somewhere, if you have been careless about how you repeated yourself, they will have access to your highest security accounts. Use unrelated passwords at the highest security level. For the medium and low security accounts, the same passwords may be okay.

Rule #3

Do not share your personal passwords with anyone. This includes email requests you may get from your bank, eBay, PayPal, etc. telling you to reply to the message and create a new password (these are almost always fake emails from scam artists). No legitimate business will *ever* send you a solicitation email asking you for your password. Did you get the message?

Rule #4

Now go break Rules #1 through 3, but only after you are dead. I recommend you record your passwords or secret location thereof in your Last Will and Testament. The executor of your estate will need to access your records in order to settle your affairs.

Include locations of paper files, electronic files, online data sites, and necessary related passwords. Rather than have this info actually typed into your signed Will copy, just create an attachment page that you can update as the file/password information changes from time to time.

Three can keep a secret if two are dead.

–Benjamin Franklin

Good, Bad, & Ugly

Good password example—8U 3r Y6ng

Bad password example—hotstuff

Ugly password example—*&@%

Best Basic Do's & Don't's:

1. Do back up all of your data and store it on removable media, away from your computer.
2. Do use at least eight characters. The more than eight, the better.
3. Do use a combination of upper and lowercase letters and spaces.
4. Do use a combination of letters and numbers.
5. Do make sure your final password is a messed-up jumble of characters.
6. Do make sure your final password makes absolutely no sense to anyone else.
7. Do not use any real or fictional names or dictionary words (this includes all languages!)
8. Do not use obvious dates, birthdays, anniversaries, etc.
9. Do not use public or semi-public personal data, such as house numbers, social security numbers, phone numbers, ages, etc.

For a lot of specific do's and don't's (if you want to read really loooong articles about passwords), here are some helpful websites:

http://geodsoft.com/howto/password/password_advice.htm

<http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security/privacy/password.mspx?pf=true>

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Is Skipping OK, okay?

Q. When I change settings, at the bottom of the screen it has the OK and APPLY buttons. I always

click APPLY, then OK, but when I skip APPLY and just click OK, it seems to do exactly the same thing. Can I save a step and just click OK without clicking APPLY?

A. Depending what you're doing, there may be a valid reason to use APPLY versus OK, or both in concert, so let's take a look at what each button does: APPLY saves any changes you make without closing the dialog box or window. So you would click APPLY and not click OK if you make changes and need to make additional changes on the same screen. Clicking OK saves any changes and closes the dialog box, so you would click OK if you're making one change and then want to exit.

Most people click APPLY > OK out of habit, as a two-step operation to save and exit, but technically, it's not always necessary—again, depending what you're doing at the time.

Q. I've been to the AVG Web site, but I can't find the free version you're always talking about. They must have it pretty well hidden. Can you point me to it, Mr. M?

A. The free version of AVG AntiVirus continues to be my favorite anti-virus program. It automatically updates daily, has a scheduler so you can run full system scans in the middle of the night, and you can't beat the price. Most vendors do tend to hide their freebies, and the good folks at AVG are no exception, but you'll find the free version located at <http://tinyurl.com/yo9npk>. A paid version is also available, and you'll find a features comparison of the free versus paid versions on the site, as well.

Q. Can you explain the difference between "Read Only," "Hidden," and "Archive" options for files?

A. When you right-click a file and select Properties, near the bottom of the Properties dialog box you'll see the Attributes section. The items you refer to are three check-box flags or what are called file attributes that describe various characteristics of a file. Technically, it's a bit more complicated than that, but for our purposes, and so my head doesn't explode, I'm going to keep this as simple as possible.

The Read-Only attribute, as its name implies, causes a file to be "read-only," meaning that you can view it, but you cannot edit or delete it.

The Hidden attribute causes a file to be invisible under certain circumstances, such as when lists of files are displayed or when there's a full moon. For example, there are certain files within Windows that most of us have no business using, so those are typically hidden. No good can come from most of us tinkering with hidden files, so to protect us from

ourselves, Microsoft designates certain files as "hidden." System files are generally hidden files, as are files that are critical to the performance and operation of Windows.

The Archive attribute was created by Microsoft to allow developers to quickly determine whether a file requires a backup (archive) copy. The Archive attribute is established whenever an existing file is either overwritten or modified. The idea, in general, is to signal a backup program that a certain file needs to be backed up. A backup program may not know to save a new or modified file without the addition of the Archive attribute.

Mr. Modem's DME (Don't Miss 'Em)

Sites of the Month

APA Help Center

At varying times, many people experience some form of depression, anxiety, or other psychological challenge(s). The American Psychological Association's Web site provides useful links to help us learn about dealing with anxiety and stress, practice techniques for healing our bodies with our minds, and when additional assistance is warranted, locate a therapist.

<http://tinyurl.com/3yljbu>

Worst Jobs in History

The Web site behind the U.K. television show "The Worst Jobs in History," which explores the most miserable professions of the past 2000 years. If you think you've got it rough, think of laborers during the free-spirited Middle Ages or the swinging Victorian era. Good times, indeed. Each job is described in humorous and occasionally shocking detail. Fuller, Bog-Iron Hunter, Wattle-and-Daub Applier—they're all here.

<http://tinyurl.com/2tmf5c>

Virtual Vaudeville

Take an entertaining trip back to the 19th Century, where the past meets the future thanks to the convergence of nostalgia and technology. There are many fun features on the site, the highlight of which is the Virtual Vaudeville Live Performance Simulation System. Sounds like a party to me! Learn all about the development and production of this concept, which preserves online live theater for future generations to experience and enjoy.

www.virtualvaudeville.com

Treat yourself to a subscription to Mr. Modem's award-winning, weekly computer-help newsletter! Helpful PC tips, great Web sites and personal, plain-English

answers to your questions by email! To view a sample issue or subscribe, visit www.MrModem.com.

OpenOffice.org—How Suite It Is

(An Introduction)

by Herbert Wong, Jr.

North Orange County PC Users Group

You need new software for your new computer. The list price for a full version of Microsoft Office Professional 2007 is \$500 and an upgrade in a couple of years will cost another \$300. That \$800 DVD is \$200 more than what you paid for your entire computer, monitor, keyboard, mouse, speakers, and Windows Vista!

There has to be a better way! There is, it's called OpenOffice.org 2, and it is free because it's open source (based on Sun Microsystems StarOffice). OpenOffice.org (currently version 2.3) components are Writer, Calc, Base, Draw, Impress, and Math.

It is available in versions for all of the major operating systems such as Windows, Macintosh, Linux, Unix, etc. There are many native language versions (including Albanian, Afrikaans, Arabic, Armenian, Azeri, Basque, Bengali, Bosnian, Breton, Bulgarian, Burmese, Catalan, Chinese, Czech, Croatian, Danish, Dutch, Dzongkha, etc.) as well.

OpenOffice.org uses the new international standard for documents, OpenDocument format (based on XML). This allows any OpenDocument compliant software to edit your files. You can, also, directly save documents as PDF (Portable Document Format) files with the built-in converter.

Writer

Writer is a full featured word processor. You can create anything from simple notes to complex documents with table of contents, indexes, diagrams, mathematical formulas, text frames, linking, bibliographical references, tables, illustrations, etc.

The answer to your first question is yes. OpenOffice.org Writer can read Microsoft Word documents and save documents in Microsoft Word format to exchange with lemmings. Documents can be directly connected to email software or exported as HTML for web pages.

Wizards simplify creation of a Letter, Fax, Agenda, Presentation, Web Page, Document Converter, Euro Converter, Address Data Source, etc. AutoComplete suggests words (at least ten letters long) as you type.

There are even simple tools to help your adjustment to OpenOffice.org. "What's This?" is an optional

toolbar icon (an arrow pointing to a question mark) that will provide extended help-boxes when moving the mouse-cursor over the toolbar icons. This allows standard short toolbar icon labels (ex. - "gallery") to be the default and extended help (ex. - "Opens the Gallery, where you can select graphics and sounds to insert into your document") can easily be obtained when needed. Another option is to turn on the extended help-bubbles as the default.

Calc

Calc is an easy to use all-purpose spreadsheet. You can create anything from simple tables to complex spreadsheets suitable for professional data miners or number crunchers.

Wizards and templates simplify creation of advanced functions. Scenario Manager automates "what if" analysis. Design-Themes and Styles-And-Formatting improve the appearance of cells.

The answer to your first question is yes. OpenOffice.org Calc can read Microsoft Excel documents and save documents in Microsoft Excel format to exchange with lemmings.

Base

Base is a new addition to the OpenOffice.org 2 suite. It is a database that allows you to use your own database or Base's HSQL database engine (storing data in XML files) to create and modify tables, forms, queries, and reports.

Wizards (ex. - Report and Form Wizards), Design Views, and SQL Views simplify the creation and manipulation of databases.

"For more advanced requirements, BASE supports many popular databases database natively (Adabas D, ADO, Microsoft Access, MySQL), or any database through industry-standard ODBC and JDBC drivers. It also supports any LDAP compliant address book, as well as common formats such as Microsoft Outlook, Microsoft Windows, and Mozilla."

Draw

Draw is a versatile application that creates graphics and diagrams. Draw supports various functions for texture, perspective, transparency, lighting effects, 3D object creation, etc.

You can easily create flowcharts, organizational charts, network diagrams, and the like with Smart Connectors.

All common graphics formats (ex. - BMP, GIF, JPEG, PNG, TIFF, and WMF) can be imported. Draw files can be used to create .SWF (Flash) files with the built-in converter.

Impress

Impress is a slide-show presentation program (like Microsoft PowerPoint). Animated slides, 2D/3D fonts, diagramming tools, etc. help create interesting presentations.

The answer to your first question is yes. Open Office.org Impress can read Microsoft PowerPoint files and save documents in Microsoft PowerPoint format to exchange with lemmings. Impress files can be used to create .swf (Flash) files with the built-in converter.

Math

Math is an equation editor that allows complex formulas to be embedded as objects in Writer, Calc, and Impress.

Conclusion

As you can see, OpenOffice.org 2 is a full set of office productivity applications. No, it is not Microsoft Word, WordStar, NotePad, Corel WordPerfect, or any other program that you have every used. It is a powerful, useful, and continuously evolving tool that is suitable for nearly everyone.

OpenOffice.org 2 is free to try, free to own, and free to upgrade. Save your \$800 to buy your entire next computer and to give a donation to the OpenOffice.org Project as well! If I could only remember that URL...

From the December 2007 issue of Orange Bytes, newsletter of the North Orange County Computer Club.

Do Your Drivers Need Updating?

by Bill Allen

North Orange County PC Users Group

Have you installed new programs or peripherals recently? Seeing strange actions by your printer or display screen? Multimedia acting weird? You may need to update your computer drivers. Drivers are the software programs that interface peripherals with your operating system, including even certain “peripherals” located on your motherboard. While Windows includes drivers for most peripherals, they may not be the most current ones you need. That, plus degradation of your drivers during computer use, means you may need new drivers. For example, using the free scan provided by driveragent.com I counted over fifty drivers on my PC, ten of which needed critical updating.

There are a number of free driver scans on the Internet at such sites as www.driveragent.com mentioned above, driverguide.com, and at Driver Headquarters (www.drivershq.com) specifically for

upgrading from Windows XP to Windows Vista. Interestingly, three other driver websites each sent me to driveragent.com for scanning and repairing my PC. It's not hard to see why—the Touchstone Software Corporation product at driveragent.com is simple, quick, and easy to understand. I decided to spring for the subscription fee (\$30 for a one-year membership) to clean up my PC.

It was a simple four step process: (1) run the scan to identify the deficient drivers shown with big red “X”s. (I had about ten, including four for USB alone.); (2) the driver tabulation shows not only the state of each driver, but also any ready uploads, if available, as little floppy disk icons; (3) just click the floppy icon and download the file which will be in either “.exe” or “.zip” format; (4) finally, install each file just as you do any application program. It took me less than a half an hour to download and install the drivers I needed. Once that was completed I ran the scan step again to verify I had updated all the drivers possible. It showed no red “X”s this time.

For more information on driver updating from people who know more about the subject than I do, try: <http://www.cyberwalker.net/article/449>. I learned I not only needed updated drivers, but I also needed guidance in which ones I should replace, where the drivers are made available (hopefully for free), and how to install them. Driveragent.com made the job simple, easy and quick. You will find keeping your drivers up to date, while important, can be relatively easy to do.

From the December 2007 issue of Orange Bytes, newsletter of the North Orange County Computer Club.

Exploring Windows Explorer

by Jim Sanders

North Orange County Computer Club

Everyone using *Windows XP* uses *Windows Explorer* all the time. Some use it in what I consider the true form. Some, because you use it under the title of ‘My Computer.’ And all of us when we are using *Internet Explorer*, because *Windows Explorer* is an integral part of *Internet Explorer*. I continue to be surprised at how many people do not know that you can right click on the start button and go directly to *Windows Explorer*. I prefer that to the ‘My Computer’ path because it brings up *Windows Explorer* with the left hand pane of the window displaying the tree structure of the files. It surprises me that many people who use the ‘My Computer’ path don’t know that they can bring up the tree pane by clicking on the folder button in the

taskbar.

Something that is almost as sad, is how many people live with the default settings of *Windows Explorer*. One of the first things that I do with a new installation of *Windows AT*, is to open *Windows Explorer*, go to the 'View' menu and click on 'Details.' The next step is to open the 'Tools' menu, and click on 'Folder Options.' When the 'Folder Options' window opens click 'View, then on 'Display the full path in the title bar' to place a checkmark in the box, click on 'Show hidden files and folders' to put the bullet on that line, click on 'Hide extensions for known file types' to remove the checkmark. Personally, I think Microsoft did new users, in particular, a major disservice by having the last item set by default. The resulting confusion of having two or more files with the same name, and not differentiated by the file extension, causes a fair amount of distress in users that are not sure which file to choose. I like to see the protected operating system files but you may be more comfortable leaving them hidden. The last item to check is show 'Control Panel in My Computer.' Then click on 'Apply,' wait for it to finish, then click on "Apply to all Folders,' then click on 'OK' and you're done.

As a result of the above actions, the right hand window pane will now have four columns: Name, Size, Height, and Date Modified. The sort will be set to alphabetical by name, numbers and special characters first, then A to Z. If you want the sort to be Z to A, click on 'Name' at the top of the 'Name' column. If you want the sort to be by 'Size,' click on 'Size' at the top of the 'Size' column and *Windows Explorer* will sort the folder by File Size, smallest file first. To reverse the order, and place the largest file at the top of the list, click on 'Size' again. The same procedure works with the 'Type' column and the 'Date Modified' column. There is a faint divider bar between each of the columns located in the horizontal bar where the names of the columns are located. One of the easiest ones to find is one space to the right of the column headed 'Size.' If you move the mouse cursor to that area you should see a double headed arrow appear. If you then click and hold the left mouse button, you can adjust the width of the edge of the columns. The width of the 'Name' column is often too narrow to show the complete file name. Having the complete path displayed in the address bar is often useful when you need to copy and paste that path into other applications.

When you have a lot of files in a folder, there is a navigation shortcut in the 'Name' column that too few people seem to know about. When you first open a folder, the display will show any other folders (or what

should really be called subdirectories) within that folder followed by files, starting with the letter 'A.' If you need to get to a file that starts with a letter T,' you might have to scroll through several hundred files to get there. There is a faster way. Click on the first file in the folder to highlight it. then type the first letter of the file that you wish to find, in this example the display would immediately jump to the first file that starts with the letter 'T.' If you know what you are searching for, and can type quickly, you can follow the first letter with the second letter of the name and it will take you to that point instead.

I think initially setting all folders on a hard disk to the detail view is the best starting point and is best suited for the majority of folders. *Windows XP* allows you to customize the view of each and every folder and will remember what settings you assigned to a given folder. For instance, for folders that contain photos it is often more useful if the thumbnail view or the film strip view, is chosen, so that you can see what each picture actually is. The advantage of the thumbnail view is that you can find images quicker than in the filmstrip view. The advantage of the filmstrip view is that you get a line of thumbnails across the bottom of the pane and a larger view of whichever thumbnail is highlighted. There are also mouse click arrow's that allow you to view the next or previous image. Don't forget that you can right click on any of the thumbnails and bring up a whole new menu of things that you can do with the image.

Everybody should learn how to do file housekeeping on their computer disk.

Everybody should learn how to do file housekeeping on their computer disk. Being able to move files from one folder to another, to copy files from one folder to another, to create new folders, and several other functions along those lines can help you keep your data organized. It should be noted that most of these functions can be accomplished in more than one fashion. For instance, if you wished to copy a file from folder A to folder B, you would first select the file by left clicking on it which will cause it to be highlighted. You could then open the 'Edit' menu by clicking on Edit,' then click on 'Copy,' then click on the destination folder, then click on 'Paste' in the edit menu. A copy of the file will appear in that folder. Alternately, you could use some of the keyboard shortcuts.

You could highlight the file, press and hold down the Ctrl key and then tap the 'C' key. This will copy the file to the temporary holding bin called 'clipboard.' You would then highlight the destination folder, press and hold down the control key, then tap the 'V' key

which will paste the file from the clipboard to the folder you highlighted. Another method is called 'Drag and Drop.' In this method you move the mouse cursor over the file you wish to copy, left click and hold the mouse button, move the mouse to drag a ghost image of the file over the top of the destination folder and then release the left mouse button. There are many more features to cover but this is all the room I have for now. We will do more later.

This article has been provided to APCUG by the author solely for publication by APCUG member groups.

From the DealsGuy

by Bob (The Cheapskate) Click
Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

I've used FedEx twice and it was a complete disaster. The first time, a few months ago, they delivered the packages I sent my son to the wrong house, which was actually unoccupied, but the tracking said it was delivered. Luckily he found them three days later when checking that house (he owns it).



I recently sent two more packages to my son's home. I tracked the packages on the Web site and when it showed the packages on the truck for delivery, I called to make sure their gate was open that day. They live a quarter-mile back from the road with a gate at the entrance. The package was not delivered that day, but at 6:46 pm the tracking showed it would be delivered the next day. At 8:30 pm the next night and no change with the Web site tracking, I called FedEx to see why it was not there and was told they had no way to communicate with the driver, but the package would not be delivered that late. My son closed the gate.

FedEx called me the next morning to give an approximate delivery time, but discovered that the delivery was actually made the night before at 9:06 pm. My son hurried to look, but the packages couldn't be found. My son's house is not visible from the gate at night because it's back down the drive, so obviously with the gate closed, the packages were left beside the road, but there is a large sign on the gate with the address and phone number to call. Why can't they communicate with their driver? They said that because I didn't request a signature, I am out of luck. Actually, they are out of luck from now on with my money. I submitted a claim anyway.

Problem Resolved

Last month I mentioned a reader had tried the free Advanced WindowsCare Personal (from my November column), but in order for it to fix the problems, he needed to upgrade to the pay version, so he stopped there. I later received a message from Ira Wilsker telling me it worked fine without upgrading, and that he had demonstrated it to their group. My proofreader also tried it with no upgrade demand, so I downloaded it and it removed what it found without upgrading to the pay version. I don't know where my reader went wrong, but he's going to try it again. Sorry for the mixup.

A Firefox Add-on

iMacros for Firefox was designed to automate online activities within the Firefox web browser. With iMacros, users can create macros to automatically check the same sites every day, remember passwords, complete web forms, and upload or download files, among other activities. They say, "Whatever you do with Firefox, iMacros can automate it." Notable examples include stockbrokers who create macros to extract online stock quotes, shoppers who use them to automatically compare prices at online stores and website owners who use them to get daily downloads of their page rankings.

iMacros for Firefox allows users to share macros and scripts in a way similar to how they share bookmarks on the many social book marking websites. After creating a new macro, users can use just one click to share it with their friends as a link, or by distributing the link via e-mail and social book marking websites. Also, by embedding it in a website or by blog for public access. Script sharing is now so popular that iOpus has even created a special site for script-sharing on <del.icio.us >.

The iMacros for Firefox software is free for personal and commercial use. Users may opt to upgrade to the business version with guaranteed response times and advanced features. Additional information and the software download link are available online at <<http://www.iopus.com /imacros/firefox>>. Alternatively, the software may be downloaded directly from the official Mozilla site for extensions at <<https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon /3863>>.

Help For Your Video File Conversion

Video Mobile Converter v1.0 supports digital video files in the following formats: .AVI (audio video interleave), .asf (advanced systems format), .mov (Quick-Time movie), .mpg/.mpeg/.mp4 (moving pictures

experts group) and .wmv (windows media video). Once you choose a video, Video Mobile Converter loads the video and lets you define how much video to convert. Users also have control over the video and audio quality during the conversion process. Users control the height and width of the video, its frame and bit rate as well as its overall quality. Users also control the sample rate, bit rate and overall quality of the video's converted audio, along with the option of splitting video files during the conversion process enabling very large video files to become smaller and more easily managed.

Lastly, Video Mobile Converter can output the converted video in the following formats: .3GP and .3G2 (for use on 3G network mobile devices that use GSM or CDMA network protocols), .mp4 (for use on mobile devices, such as iPods classic, iPod nano, iPod touch, iPhones, cellular phones and other mobile devices), and .psp (for use on Sony PlayStation Portables).

Video Mobile Converter v1.0 runs under all versions of Microsoft Windows, including Vista and costs \$29.95 (USD) for a single-user license. User group members get a 20% discount. For some reason they didn't respond to my request for the special ordering procedures so, you can e-mail Michael Kaba <mailto:sales@geovid.com>. Could be the because of the holidays. Licensed users are entitled to the fully functional copy of the software, and free updates. Further information, as well as a free, fully functional evaluation copy is available from <www.videomobileconverter.com>. For more information: <www.geovid.com>.

Download link: <[http://www.videomobileconverter.com/download/video mobileconverter.exe](http://www.videomobileconverter.com/download/video%20mobileconverter.exe)> (9.3 MB)

Help For Your Web Site

Our software package, SeoAdministrator, is a popular professional tool for webmasters and SEO specialists. We released a new module called "Site Analyzer" that will be of interest to all webmasters including those who look after personal websites. The new module helps you to keep a website free of errors such as broken links. Regular use of Site Analyzer will ensure that problems are quickly and easily spotted so they can be fixed. Download a free demonstration of our easy-to-use tool from here. <www.seoadministrator.com/seoadministrator.exe>

Site Analyzer, Developed by FlamingoSoft of Vancouver, BC, is designed to automate the vital web management task of monitoring and improving web site performance.

Site Analyzer performs comprehensive scans of a

specified website and alerts web managers to a range of common problems including broken links, faulty image links, errors in HTML code and missing meta tags using a variety of report formats. Site Analyzer can also create sitemaps in both human and machine formats ready for uploading. The link vendor will be able to see which pages are "overloaded" with external links and perhaps suspend link sales on those pages. System Requirements: Windows95/98/ME/2000/XP/Vista

Priced from \$70 (Standard) to \$150 for Expert edition, we are offering this great software to user group members at 50% discount (\$75 instead of usual price of \$150) which includes lifetime support and free upgrades. Use this link <<https://usd.swreg.org/cgi-bin/s.cgi?s=1613&p=1613seo&v=3&d=0&q=1&t=>> for the 50% discount. Check their Website URL for full info. <<http://www.seoadministrator.com/>>

Pacific Business Centre, Att: FlamingoSoft, #101 - 1001 W. Broadway

Suite 381, Vancouver, BC V6H 4E4, Canada

Easier Way To Remove USB Devices

USB Safely Remove enhances the native Safely Remove function in Windows and enables you to remove and unplug any USB removable device in one mouse click or hotkey. It can give correct names to the devices, lets you rename them and find out what application or process is locking the USB device, preventing it from safe removal. It's easy to unplug the wrong one by mistake because many of them have the same name. Unlike the native Windows option, USB Safely Remove shows all USB devices currently plugged into the computer and lets you remove any of them and the program gives correct names to the devices on its menu. The software is primarily aimed at those users who have more than one USB device.

USB Safely Remove 3.2 runs under Windows 2000, XP, 2003, Vista and is available immediately for \$20 (US) from SafelyRemove.com. User Group members can purchase the program at a 25% discount. Use the coupon code: CUG25 on the Buy Now page. Licensed users get unlimited functionality without nag screens, free technical support by e-mail and free lifetime upgrades. More information on the product, as well as a free trial copy is available from <<http://safelyremove.com/ug>>.

Download link: <<http://safelyremove.com/usb/safelyremovesetupug.exe>>

That's it for this month. I'll have more new product announcements on my Web site (most not offering a discount). Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user

group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click <bobclick at bellsouth dot net>. Visit my Web site at <<http://www.dealsguy.com>>

This and That

by Elizabeth B. Wright
Computer Club of Oklahoma City

Have you accessed the WindowsXP “Restore” option to reset your computer to an earlier time? We often need to do this when things go haywire after installing some new software. Fiddling around with old programs or offbeat wares can sometimes land you in hot water operating wise. I found myself in just such a mess not long ago. Fortunately I had made a restore point prior to installing the renegade software, so I was able to use it to get things back to normal. Well, almost.

What happened next:

One of my oldest and most valued programs is CorelPaint. Suddenly, after going through the restore procedure, I began getting an error message plus having the program refuse to open when I double clicked on the desktop shortcut icon. This applied to CorelDraw as well. The error message said something about trying to install the program, then it would go through some strange digital machinations before rolling everything back and giving up. Strangely enough though, if I double clicked on a .jpg or .tif file in Explorer, the files would open the program with no difficulty. Several days were spent opening graphic files in this manner when it suddenly dawned on me that perhaps the programs might open from the executable files directly. Sure enough, when I went to them, again in Explorer, they both opened like clockwork. So why did it take me several more days to figure out that the icons on my desktop had some way become corrupted? I don’t want to know the answer to that one.

Anyway, after deleting the icons, new ones were put in place by right clicking on the executable files in Explorer and double clicking the “Send to desktop” option from the menu. Usually the names given icons made in this way are not the best, so they usually get changed to something more useful on my computer. Often part of the name is “shortcut”. Who needs that? It’s fairly simple to change the name. Just click once on the icon, wait long enough so that the computer

doesn’t interpret the next click as a double click, then the icon text will be in “Edit” mode. You may have to experiment with the timing for this since not all “mice” are set for the same response time. The two clicks need to be fairly close together, but not close enough for a double click. Once in “Edit” mode you can type in whatever name that makes better sense to you.

We should all know by now that if there is a curved arrow in the lower left corner of the icon then the icon is a shortcut to the executable file, not the program or file itself. Be very careful. Sometimes there actually are icons for executable programs placed on your desktop when the programs are installed. Those icons will not have the curved arrow. Don’t delete them unless you want to get rid of the program itself. This applies also to other things you might have placed on the desktop yourself, such as graphic or document files. It might be wise to leave those names in their original form. It might also be a good idea to examine the icons on your computer to see how many, if any, *do not* have the curved arrow. Chances are there won’t be many, possibly none. It is helpful to know if there are any that reflect actual programs or files, just to keep yourself informed about your own computer system.

It always pays to figure out what your computer is up to. Since it lives a life separate from yours it is often not possible to tell just what it has been doing in your absence. With the new powerful operating systems, many, many things go on in the background when the machine is powered on, whether you are there or not. Supernerds probably have eliminated many of the automatic actions, but most of us just muddle on, thankful that the computer runs at all.

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Society News

January Meeting Notes

by John McMillan, secretary

Steve opened the meeting announcing that members whose dues are in arrears should see him. The next Planning meeting will be held February 5th at Sally’s house. He pointed out that the new format for the *Monitor*, initiated for 2008, has resulted in lower paper costs and cut our mailing charges almost in half. Printing difficulties that resulted in a black and white cover are thought to have been resolved so a color cover is anticipated.

John McMillan reported that 160 books (less than 1% of the books on hand) have been catalogued. He hopes to have 2 helpers on January 12th when the

work continues.

The Society will meet at the Brighton Library on the 12th of Feb. Mike Lavelle has a commitment from the author of *Why Software Sucks* for a presentation via an internet hookup at that meeting. Mike would welcome thoughts or ideas for future programs.

Carl Schmidtman has planned a meeting for January 19th from 1:30 - 4:00 PM at the Greece Town Library to help people load Linux onto their computers. Although he has a list of possible attendees, he asked for verification to be sure there are enough extension cords available. He recommends that target computers have a separate 10 to 15 GB partition to contain Linux software and related files. Things you need to prepare for and links to helpful information are on the web at www.faultline.com/LinuxInstall.html

After the social break, Arpad apologized for changing the topic from Newsletter Creation to Virtual Computers. This was necessitated when his cell phone containing slides and pictures for the Newsletter presentation was stolen. He did not use slides but demonstrated some of the features of Microsoft's Virtual PC using his laptop and projector.

Software from V M Ware might provide more extensive capabilities but Arpad uses Microsoft's version that is free. It can be downloaded from Microsoft.com by searching the download section for Virtual PC 2007. It has no blocked features like VM Player, which is a free VM product.

Arpad described Virtual PC as a program that emulates hardware and bios to create a separate computer within your computer. The physical computer is called the host while the virtual PC is considered a guest and both can run simultaneously. A guest computer can be set to run in the foreground or the background and if in the background, its priority can be adjusted. Virtual PC software requires about 50 Mb of hard disk space and can run any operating system written for an Intel 286 processor or better. Additional space is required for the guest system and you should have a legal copy to install for emulation. Arpad has emulated Windows operating systems from version 1 through Vista plus Linux, and OS2 Warp on his desktop computer.

Advantages of running virtual machines are that a guest crash will not take down the host. The state of the guest machine can be saved which is an effect like instant hibernation. Arpad felt this was a great way to try Linux. The hard drive from an older machine can be added to an XP machine so DOS programs can be run in a virtual environment. Virtual machines can

be deleted removing all traces of their existence.

Hard drives are also emulated by creating files that are free of restrictions of the host machine. That is the host may be running NTFS but the guest may be using FAT 16, Fat 32 or Linux file definition. File sharing between the host and a guest can be done by dragging and dropping.

The screen resolution of the guest machine can be anything up to the resolution of the host. Higher screen resolution will result in a bigger screen view even if not run at the highest setting. In fact Arpad changed the resolution of the guest to make it easier to see the projected view.

He warned that emulators do not adapt well to gaming or 3D video because currently they do not link directly to graphics cards. Peripherals can be emulated but will not produce external media if they do not exist on the host machine. For example the guest program may use a 3.5 inch floppy but if the host does not have a floppy drive, physical disks can not be read or written.

Newer machines (less than a year old) have processors and mother boards that are designed to run virtual machines by reducing the emulation software overhead in the guest program. Intel or AMD dual core processors with a minimum of 1 GB of RAM are ideally suited for Virtual PC because the host and guest operate at the same speed but on different processors.

Arpad did a great job presenting a highly technical concept. Mere words can not create the visual impression of being there to personally experience the demonstration. Nor will the summarization of an hours presentation include all of the details. For the best results, you should be there.

Lighter Side

Customer: "Hello, yes, my system is crushed!"

Tech Support: "Crushed?"

Customer: "Yes, that is what I said, crushed."

Tech Support: "Oh, your system has crashed..."

Customer: "Yes, I cannot do anything, my mouse will not work, and I can't see anything on the screen. I need it fixed now!"

Tech Support: "Ok, I need some history on this problem. What was the last thing you did before the system crashed?"

Customer: "Well, after I stood on the computer to hang a picture, my machine was crushed."

Tech Support: "Oh, so your system has been *crushed*..."

Tech Support: "Well, let me look up your account

information to make sure we have the correct password.”

Customer: “Ok.”

Tech Support: “Hmmm...let’s re-enter your password.”

Customer: “Ok.”

Tech Support: “All right. Your password is ‘XYZ123.’”

Customer: “Oh, that’s what I have written down, but that’s not what I put in.”

Tech Support: “What did you put in?”

Customer: “FURBY.”

Tech Support: “Why did you do that?”

Customer: “Because I didn’t like yours.”

Customer: “I’m sorry. I think I just deleted the Internet!”

Tech Support: “That’s ok. We have it backed up here on tape somewhere.”

Customer: “I think I broke the Internet!”

Tech Support: “So it was you!”

Customer: (click)

Customer: “I just re-crashed and re-burned my computer, and I need some help getting my Internet to work.”

Tech Support: “You did what now?”

Customer: “I re-crashed and re-burned my computer.”

Tech Support: “Well, maybe that’s why it’s not working. It’s in pieces and on fire.”

Customer: “Huh?”

Tech Support: (sigh)

