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How to Watch Television on Your Computer

by Bob Rankin

TV tuner adapter The Internet has taken over the entertainment industry to such a degree that now in order to survive even television networks have to have an online presence. This is good news for anyone with a computer and an Internet connection, as now you can watch television on your computer. Whether you are interested in playing your favorite episodes from a specific series or watching live feeds from your favorite television channel, it is now all made possible by relatively simple to use technology.

Tuning in Over-the-Air Television Broadcasts

There are several different ways in which you can tune in to your favorite shows on your computer. The first method is to install a TV tuner adapter on your computer. This will effectively turn your computer into a television set and personal video recorder. This can be done using a TV tuner card that plugs into an internal PCI slot, or with an external USB based TV tuner adapter. To install the external TV tuner, generally all you have to do is plug it into an open USB port and install the software that came with it.



The installation of an internal TV tuner card is a little more complicated. First, you'll need to shutdown and disconnect your computer from its power source. Then you will need to open up the system unit case. This will give you access to your PCI slots on the motherboard. Find a PCI slot that is unused and slide the TV tuner card into the slot, then secure the card by screwing it into place. Now close up the case, reconnect the power and boot up your computer. Install the software that came with your internal TV tuner card.

The final step after installing your TV tuner adapter (either internal or external) is to connect your television antenna, cable, or satellite feed into the coaxial cable port on your TV tuner card. Now you can fire up the software, tune in live television broadcasts, and watch them on your computer screen. The TV tuner software will allow you to change the channel or record a show on your hard drive. Some even allow you to pause the show and come back to it later.

Important Note: Make sure the TV tuner you purchase can handle *digital* signals, if you plan to watch over-the-air television broadcasts. You may also want to consider a tuner that can receive HDTV (high definition) broadcasts. See [Free HDTV on Your PC](#) for more info on that. Check the specs carefully before you buy your tuner, to make sure it can receive digital and (if desired) HDTV signals.

Watching "Canned" Shows on Free Online TV Sites

Another way you can watch television on your computer is to log onto one of the many free online TV sites and click on a show that you want to watch. Generally these sites will offer free memberships, however, you don't always have to sign up for an account to view the shows hosted by the site. In order to play the television shows on your computer you will need to have a current version of Adobe Flash Player, usually Adobe Flash Player 9 or newer. A couple of the sites that offer free television shows online are Joost and Hulu.

Network TV Websites

Online TV Shows In addition to websites that offer a collection of television episodes that you can watch online, most of the larger television networks also have websites that offer you viewing opportunities. These include live streaming feeds for news, network programming and "canned" shows from selected series that are shown on the

network. For example, the TBS website offers canned episodes from Seinfeld and My Boys that you can watch anytime you want.

In order to watch a canned episode or a live episode you will generally need to download the software for the video player used by the site. ABC's website, for example, uses a special video player that you will need to download, while TBS and NBC use a Flash Player that doesn't usually require you to download software. Once your computer has the right player installed all you have to do is click on the program you want to watch and it will load. Many players allow you to play, stop, pause, rewind and fast forward, just like a DVD player.

Beware the Free Satellite TV Scam

Everything I've read about this type of thing tells me it's a scam, or at least a waste of money. The software you get for your forty bucks is nothing more than a menu of free online television broadcasts. Most of the stations listed are foreign, and the list contains many entries that are obsolete or do not work.

If you're considering buying a software package named "PC Satellite TV," "Satellite TV Elite," "Satellite TV on PC," "Satellite TV for PC 2008 Elite Edition," "TV on PC Elite," "Digital TV 4 PC" or anything similar ... they are *all the same* type of scamware. You will pay \$40 and in return you'll get a crappy software



program that does *not* deliver what it promises. You *will not* get any premium or pay-per-view channels for free. The only thing these packages offer is links to online video sites that you could find for free with a quick search on Google or Yahoo.

Sorry, but there's no way to turn your PC into a satellite dish and get free HBO or MTV. But there is some good news. You CAN use your internet-connected computer to tune into a huge number of free television broadcasts. You can watch SOME programs from the BBC News, Comedy Central, Discovery Channel, ESPN, and other broadcasts from around the world.

I suggest that you first go to the official website of the TV station or broadcast that you'd like to watch and look for a link to view live or recent broadcasts.

Exposing the "free satellite tv on pc" scam has not made me popular with some people. Many times I've received emails from people saying that I'm a liar, that I must be "really old fashioned" or "a Direct TV executive." Others post comments here with a glowing review of some Satellite TV software and a link to buy. But *every time*, it's the exact same scamware, being sold through an affiliate link. My advice here is only meant to protect people who might otherwise be tempted to waste their money and fall for this scam.

As I said before, these programs will NOT give you access to anything that's not already freely available on the Web. What this software provides (when it actually works) is little more than a searchable list of websites that offer streaming video. You can find the same information yourself with a search engine query. It's *only* dishonest people, who stand to profit from ignorance, that continue to push this scam. Don't fall for it.

From TOURBUS Vol 14, Number 19, 17 Jun 2009. Subscribe at <InternetTourbus.com>.

"Bing!" - The Rest of The Story!

by Bob Kelly

A few weeks ago, as part of its ongoing effort to make a dent in Google's search-engine dominance, Microsoft announced that, following a very long and costly process, it had chosen a new name for its own search engine. According to an article in *Business Week* (June 15, 2009), the new name, "Bing," is intended "to capture the sound effect of a lightbulb moment."

The name was not chosen lightly. The firm which was hired to select it came up with an initial list of more than 2,000 possibilities, which was then narrowed to about 600. At that point, two trademark lawyers and 20 linguists took over, with about 50 names making the cut. From that list, Microsoft chose eight, which it submitted to focus groups, and ultimately selected "Bing."

According to one Microsoft official, the name "came close to the 'aha' sound in many languages, and one branding expert was quoted as saying "It's short, appealing, memorable, active."

So far (six months later), so good. Then, some bloggers began to take note of the new name and had an "aha" moment of their own, which became, as the late Paul Harvey might have said, "the rest of the story." For it seems that the new name of Microsoft's search engine, B-I-N-G, is an acronym for "But It's Not Google." A "lightbulb moment" indeed, but certainly not the one Microsoft envisioned.

From the July 2009 issue of The Kellygram, and used with permission. www.wordcrafters.info

Media Notes

by Bill Pettitt

Hello, once again. I'm glad to be with you this month of July. The first item in this month's column will probably be amended before you even get to read it. Look for an extension of the time limit.

Best Buy Memo on Windows 7 Outlines Upgrade Pricing

Windows Vista users won't have to pay much to upgrade to Windows 7 which is slated to ship October 22.

Upgrades to Windows Home Premium, which includes improvements to Vista's sluggish-yet-pretty Aero Interface as well as multitouch features, will set Vista users back just \$49.99, according a leaked Best Buy memo posted by Engadget. Updates to Windows 7 Professional, targeted at business users, will cost \$99.99.

The Best Buy "presell" deal will start June 26 and run 16 days through July 11. Other retailers will offer the promotional pricing as well, the memo states. It's unclear, however, whether the upgrade prices will continue beyond the promo period.

While Vista users can order Windows 7 this summer, they won't get the OS until the October launch.

Compared to current upgrade prices for Vista, the Windows 7 deals are relatively cheap. Online retailer Newegg, for instance, sells the Vista Home Premium SP1 Upgrade for \$123, and the Vista Business SP1 Upgrade for \$188.

Best Buy's memo also took a shot at the much-maligned Vista by saying that Windows 7 is much more than simply a "Vista that works." Given the positive previews and high hopes placed on Win 7's shoulders, let's hope the memo is right.

Best Buy will also start a “Technology Guarantee” program whereby customers who purchase a PC that runs Vista Home Premium, Business, or Ultimate between June 26 and the Win 7 launch will get a free Windows 7 upgrade.

Personally, I think Microsoft should extend the discount Win 7 upgrades beyond July 11. The low prices would mean more sales to Vista users, and the move would be good PR for Redmond, which has suffered through months of embarrassing—and deserved—Vista bashing. By the way, I received an email from Microsoft on June 26th, confirming this offer. Merchants included were Best Buy, Amazon, New Egg, Office Depot, Fryes, Tiger Direct, and of course, the Microsoft Store.

What Are the Five Best Things About Vista SP2?

Here are the five reasons you might consider moving to Vista SP2.

1) Most of us don’t have Blu-Ray write drives, but if you do, Vista SP2 supports it. I used a OWC Mercury Pro Blu-ray drive. This drive is usually used by Mac video-heads, but it worked fine with Vista SP2 as well.

2) Vista SP2 also now supports Bluetooth v2.1 and has more stable Wi-Fi protocol. In particular, this shows up, I found, that Vista is much better at resuming a Wi-Fi connection after going to sleep. If you’re having Wi-Fi trouble with your Vista laptop, this is reason enough to give SP2 a try.

3) Service Pack Clean-up Tool. This is a new program that you can use to automatically delete old versions of system files. Since I’ve known any number of Windows system glitches over the year to be traced back to out-of-date DLLs (Dynamic Link Library) and the like, this addition makes a lot of sense.

But, and this is a big but, I’ve also known Windows programs to fail because they needed some of those old system files to work correctly. So, before cleaning up your old files, make sure you have a complete back-up of your system. After all, who cares how up-to-date your system is if your favorite program is dead in the water?

4) Extended FAT File System. This is a proprietary file system, it’s designed for Flash memory, and its most noteworthy features are that it can handle extremely large files and, compared to Windows’ usual NTFS, it takes up very little disk overhead. If you’re using SSD (solid state drives), it may be worth a try.

5) More efficient system resource use. In general, I found that Windows SP2 used less system resources and seemed to run a tad faster. That’s as fine as far as it goes, but Vista is still a resource hog when compared to either Windows 7 or XP and it’s also still slower than both. If, for some reason, you really want to use Vista instead of Microsoft’s other Windows offerings, you’ll appreciate these improvements.

So, in short, Vista SP2 is not a great improvement- over what has come before. Still, if you’re locked into Vista, you’ll find upgrading to SP2 worth your time. I just wouldn’t be in any hurry to do it though; SP2’s improvements aren’t that great.

Morro screenshots reportedly leaked; will it be cloud-based?

On June 16th, a Windows enthusiast blog posted what it says are leaked screenshots of Microsoft’s upcoming free security software, code-named “Microsoft Security Essentials,” which was offered on June 23rd.

The Neowin.net blog has three screenshots that it says it obtained from an anonymous source. The software is reportedly being tested internally at Microsoft.

Meanwhile, CNET News’ sister site ZDNet is reporting that Morro will be almost

entirely cloud-based.

“Instead of scanning every file or network packet as they arrive into the computer from the Web or an external device, it creates a virtual tunnel between your incoming internet pipe at the back of your computer to a Morro data center, which scans every byte and packet for malware,” writes Zack Whittaker on the iGeneration blog.

Microsoft announced last November that it was discontinuing the subscription-based Windows Live OneCare consumer security suite in favor of a free offering that protects against viruses, spyware, rootkits, and Trojans, but lacks some non-security features OneCare had like automated PC tuneup and printer sharing.

Microsoft said at the time that the new offering would be available in the second half of 2009. Windows Live OneCare will continue to be sold for Windows XP and Vista via retailers through June 30, 2009 (nearly \$50 per year for up to three PCs), and direct sales will be gradually phased out as Morro becomes available.

Morro, which will be available for download over the Internet, will work on Windows XP, Windows Vista, and the upcoming Windows 7.

Microsoft Security Essentials, as this new offering is now called was released June 23rd in beta form. Although Microsoft was vague about a final ship date—saying only that it would wrap up sometime this year—it was crystal clear that it will deny the program to PCs running counterfeit copies of Windows.

One of its most interesting features is what Microsoft calls “Dynamic Signature Service,” a back-and-forth communications link between a Security Essentials-equipped PC and Microsoft’s servers.

If Security Essentials detects something suspicious, whether code or behavior, but can’t pin either to a specific piece of malware, the software “phones home” to Microsoft servers to relay a short burst of information.

“If it sees something new, like a new binary, the client queries the back end,” Packer said. “The server can then ask for a sample, which the client sends as a hash.” At that point, if Microsoft has created a signature for the threat, that signature is immediately pushed to the PC. Security Essentials will ask the user’s permission before sending a sample, Packer noted.

Security Essentials is the first Microsoft anti-malware product to use Dynamic Signature, and the feature will be added early next year to the enterprise-grade Forefront line. “We actually identify [the things that trigger a ‘phone home’] fairly loosely,” Packer said. “We have a list of known good software, of course, but outside that, if a program is doing things like hooking Autostart points in the registry, or trying to kill other processes, Essential will query the servers.”

Normally, signature updates are sent to Security Essentials daily via the Microsoft Update service, a superset of the better-known Windows Update.

The public beta of Security Essentials was available June 23 in the U.S., Brazil and Israel, with China to be added to the list later this year. It will run on Windows XP SP2 or later, Windows Vista, Windows 7 Beta and Windows 7 Release Candidate.

To download it when you read this, steer to this Microsoft site: http://www.microsoft.com/security_essentials

Microsoft’s latest XP Announcement

June 18, 2009: “Windows 7 Professional and Ultimate customers will have the option to downgrade to Windows XP Professional from PCs that ship within 18 months

following the general availability of Windows 7 or until the release of a Windows 7 service pack, whichever is sooner, and if a service pack is developed,” a company spokeswoman said in an e-mail.

Microsoft also slipped in a reminder about XP’s limited lifespan in its e-mailed announcement. “Windows XP is currently in the extended support phase and Microsoft encourages customers to migrate to either Windows Vista or Windows 7 as soon as possible,” the spokeswoman said yesterday.

As per its lifecycle policy, Microsoft will officially retire Windows XP, halting all patch development, including security updates, in April 2014

Free Windows 7 won’t last forever

Microsoft has been pretty generous in letting folks play around with Windows 7 for free. But it has put some time limits on that generosity.

Those who want to try out the release candidate of Windows 7 only have until August 15 to download the code. After that date, you can still install a copy you have downloaded (and even get additional product keys), but most folks won’t be able to get the code from Microsoft’s Web site.

For those who have a spare machine to try out Windows 7, it’s worth a try- I have been using it for months now and find the release candidate stable enough to use as my everyday machine. It’s a particularly nice option for Mac users who have wanted to try Windows on their Mac but haven’t wanted to steal a copy from work or fork over the money to be legit.

A separate deadline is looming for those still running the beta version, as opposed to the release candidate. Starting July 1, that software will start shutting down every other hour. (Here’s the place to insert your best anti-Windows joke. I’ll get you started: “Why, that makes it just like Windows ME.”)

In any case, to avoid that nastiness, one should move from the beta version to the release candidate version in the next seven days or so. In addition to the shutdowns that start July 1, the beta software will expire completely on August 1.

Similarly, the release candidate also won’t last forever. Microsoft says it is set to expire on June 1, 2010, with the bi-hourly shutdowns starting March 1. And, Microsoft also says that those moving from the release candidate to the final version of Windows 7 will have to do a fresh install, so be prepared for that, *as well*.

10 Firefox extensions you can’t live without

Whether you want to speed access to the Web sites you regularly visit, keep better tabs on your tabs, or protect your system from potentially dangerous active content, there’s a Firefox extension ready to help you out. Jack Wallen shares his list of favorite time-saving, browser-enhancing add-ons.

One of the nicest aspects of Firefox is the ability to add extensions. And there are plenty to choose from. Some do little more than alter the aesthetics. But you’ll find others out there that you can’t browse without. No matter what your purpose in browsing, there is a killer-app extension just waiting for you. Let’s take a look at my top 10 extensions.

#1: Morning Coffee

This extension allows you to set a group of Web sites that will open (each in its own tab) with the click of a button. This will save you from having to roam through your

bookmarks (while drinking that first cup of wake-me-up in the morning) to view your favorite sites. And you don't have to limit yourself to personal browsing, either. I also use this extension to open up all the Web-based admin tools for sites I administer. You can even set sites up to open only on certain days (or every day). So news junkies or overworked administrators rejoice: This extension will make your browsing life a little easier.

#2: NoScript

This is one of the best tools for making sure your browsing experience is secure. With NoScript, you can disable active content from any site you don't trust. Unless you configure it to allow JavaScript, Java, and other executable scripting to run from a site, NoScript will completely block the script, keeping you browser safe from known and unknown exploits. And don't think because you are using Firefox in Linux that you're perfectly safe! Use this extension regardless of platform.

#3: ColorfulTabs

If you're like me, you generally have a LOT of tabs open in Firefox. Sometimes this isn't a problem. But there are times when the tabs can get a bit overwhelming and need a bit of organization. To help with this, ColorfulTabs gives each open tab a different color, making it easier to distinguish between them. With this simple extension, you can color-code tabs either randomly or according to URL. You can also set tabs to fade. Another fun feature is that you can set a background image for tabs.

#4: BBCode

This helpful extension adds BBCode, HTML, and XHTML symbols and formatting to the context menu. BBCode also allows you to add up to 10 custom tags to your menu. This extension shows itself when you're in a forum and you right-click a text area where you can select the tag you want to add from the menu. This extension will make your forum work quite a bit easier, as well as faster.

#5: Buggybar

This extension is invaluable to Bugzilla power users. With this extension, you will have a Bugzilla Chrome sidebar available which will readily show all bugs that relate to a bug list you have created. As of version 0.2, Buggybar works with all instances of Bugzilla.

#6: Clear Cache Button

I don't know about you, but I always set up my browsers to clear their cache at exit. But what about those times you want to clear the cache but not exit the browser? Instead of navigating through the menu structure, you can add this simple extension. It provides a button that gives you complete cache clearing with a single click.

#7: Timefracker

Okay, this is not really a tool that will aid or better your browsing experience. In fact, this little extension will remind you how much time you spend browsing. I have found this little gem useful in a number of circumstances. Whether you are in need of a quick five-minute break from number crunching or you just need to know how much time you spend on a specific Web site, TimeTracker will keep track of how long you browse. What is nice about this is that the tool times across sessions. So when you close the browser, the timer stops, and when you open the browser back up, the timer starts again. You can reset the timer by right-clicking the status bar timer and selecting Reset.

#8: iMacros

This extension automates pretty much anything you do in Firefox. From opening up sites to filling out forms and even administration work—you can automate it with iMacros. The iMacros extension has a sidebar that shows favorite macros. It also has a record feature that allows you to create macros by simply clicking Record, going through the motions of the macro to be created, and clicking Save. These macros can be as complex as you need them to be. When you want to run them, you simply navigate to the macro in the iMacros sidebar and click the Play button. The only downfall I have found with this tool is that you can't assign key combinations to run macros. Other than that, this extension is a must-have for power browsers.

#9: Fasterfox

This extension does one thing: It makes Firefox load pages faster. Speed of page loading can be increased by allowing simultaneous connections and prefetching. This extension is currently in the experimental stage because of the release of Firefox 3. To install it, you have to log into a Firefox account to download. The extension is worth the hassle. The speed increase is noticeable.

#10: BlogRovR

We all read blogs. From my TechRepublic and Open Source blog to the countless other blogs available, we all read them daily. And this takes time. Instead of wasting time going to the blogs, let this handy extension fetch them for you. You do have to sign up for an account using this extension (they promise they won't spam you) and you will be asked to install another sidebar (Stickies), which is not necessary. Once you have this installed, you just enter the blog URL, and BlogRovR will begin fetching the information for you. Warning: If you have NoScript installed, you have to allow the BlogRovR page to run scripts or it won't be able to fetch pages for you.

Fake e-mails to patch Outlook lead to malware

All Windows users need to be aware that Microsoft never links to downloads in its e-mail messages, but always requires a visit to a security bulletin landing page to download a patch.

If you receive an e-mail containing a link promising to upgrade Microsoft Outlook or Outlook Express, you should simply delete the message to avoid being nailed by a Trojan horse.

Many Microsoft customers have recently received these fake e-mails. The scams have focused on a supposed upgrade for Outlook and Outlook Express—e-mail clients widely used in businesses.

It's been discovered that a high number of these e-mails have reached people's inboxes, somehow evading the usual junk-mail filters.

These fake Outlook patch alerts have affected PC users worldwide. I even found a post from a Microsoft forum in China asking about the e-mail's validity. As the Sophos blog explains, if you follow the instructions in the bogus message, it results in your running nasty hacker code.

Actual security bulletin notices from Microsoft are quite dull. They never include direct links to the downloadable patch. Instead, they require you to go to a bulletin landing page. Most importantly, they're always signed with a PGP signature. (See Figure 1).

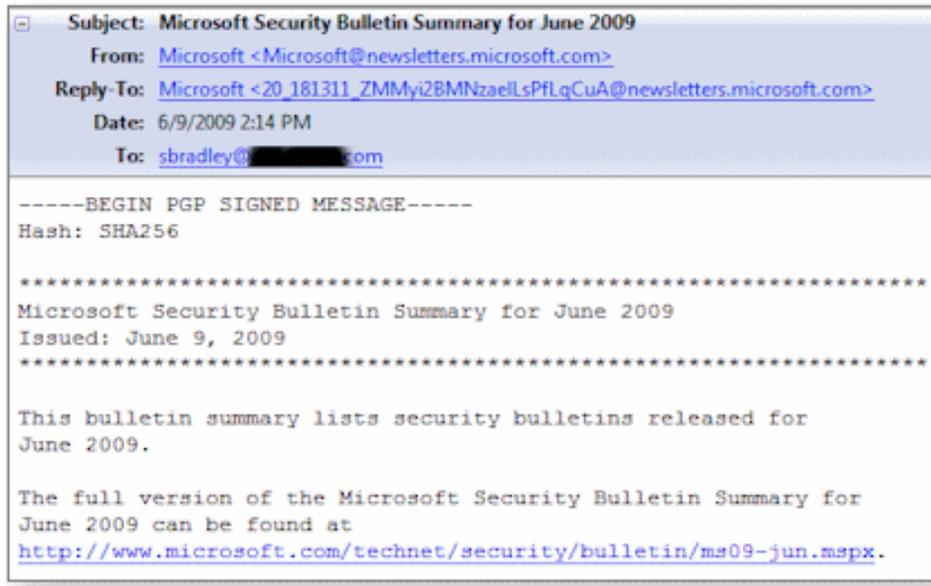


Figure 1. Microsoft's security-bulletin e-mails are always identified as PGP SIGNED.

When in doubt, always download patches directly from the Microsoft download site. Even considering the recent problems with update notifications that don't always appear in Windows as expected.

The 4th is fast approaching so I had better wind this piece up. See you again in September.

Want to opt out of tracking cookies? Here's where to go.
http://networkadvertising.org/managing/opt_out.asp

Stop Password Masking by Jakob Nielsen

Summary:

Usability suffers when users type in passwords and the only feedback they get is a row of bullets. Typically, masking passwords doesn't even increase security, but it does cost you business due to login failures.

It's time to show most passwords in clear text as users type them. Providing feedback and visualizing the system's status have always been among the most basic usability principles. Showing undifferentiated bullets while users enter complex codes definitely fails to comply.

Most websites (and many other applications) mask passwords as users type them, and thereby theoretically prevent miscreants from looking over users' shoulders. Of course, a truly skilled criminal can simply look at the keyboard and note which keys are being pressed. So, password masking doesn't even protect fully against snoopers.

More importantly, there's usually nobody looking over your shoulder when you log in to a website. It's just you, sitting all alone in your office, suffering reduced usability to protect against a non-issue.

The Costs of Masking

Password masking has proven to be a particularly nasty usability problem in our testing of mobile devices, where typing is difficult and typos are common. But the problem exists for desktop users as well.

When you make it hard for users to enter passwords you create two problems—one of which actually lowers security:

1. Users make more errors when they can't see what they're typing while filling in a form. They therefore feel less confident. This double degradation of the user experience means that people are more likely to give up and never log in to your site at all, leading to lost business. (Or, in the case of intranets, increased support calls.)
2. The more uncertain users feel about typing passwords, the more likely they are to (a) employ overly simple passwords and/or (b) copy-paste passwords from a file on their computer. Both behaviors lead to a true loss of security.

Yes, users are sometimes truly at risk of having bystanders spy on their passwords, such as when they're using an Internet café. It's therefore worth offering them a checkbox to have their passwords masked; for high-risk applications, such as bank accounts, you might even check this box by default. In cases where there's a tension between security and usability, sometimes security should win.

In most cases, however, users will appreciate getting clear-text feedback as they enter passwords. Your business will increase, and security will even improve a tiny bit as well.

Abandon Legacy Design

Password masking has become common for no reasons other than (a) it's easy to do, and (b) it was the default in the Web's early days. In this respect, it's similar to another usability problem—having Reset buttons on forms, which is also something that should die.

Generally, I recommend adhering to conventions. Do what users expect, and they can concentrate their brainpower on understanding your products and offers instead of struggling with the user interface.

But password masking and Reset buttons are not something users actively seek out. Losing these features won't cause confusion, nor will their replacements: the new features will simply be clear text (in the first case) and a blank area where the destroy-my-work button used to be (in the second).

This is very different from removing something users look for or introducing something they don't understand.

Let's clean up the Web's cobwebs and remove stuff that's there only because it's always been there.

Sign up for newsletter that will notify you of new Alertboxes. Website: <http://www.useit.com>

Dozens of Free Utilities from Camtech

by Ira Wilsker

APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio Show Host

I will admit that I am a junkie when it comes to free utilities. I enjoy trying new software, especially if it is legitimate freeware from a reliable source. Occasionally I have a special need for a utility, and there are a few places that I typically check to see if such a freeware utility is available. One of those websites is Camtech2000 (camtech2000.net).

Camtech2000 has dozens of freeware utilities available, many of which will run on most versions of Windows, from Windows 95 to Vista. The Camtech2000 download page is broken down into categories, such as desktop enhancements, assorted games, screen savers, desktop themes, internet related, utilities, and system related. The website is very easy to navigate; clicking on the name of a program will bring up a program specific webpage with information on the selected program, often including screenshots demonstrating how the program functions. Clicking on the “DL” on the right side of the listing downloads the program. According to Camtech2000, “Camtech Freeware is developed for free personal use and is NOT supported by Banners, Adware or Malware of any type!” For those desiring to support Camtech2000, a PayPal link is provided for donations. My personal choice (and recommendation) is to make a donation to Camtech2000 via PayPal whenever I download a program that I find useful, and intend to use on a periodic basis. Some of the utilities displayed are free to download and fully functional for a limited period of time, but request a fee to register the programs for continued use. In my experience, I have always found Camtech2000 software very intuitive and easy use, requiring no special skill or knowledge.

In the category “Desktop Enhancements” are 16 programs that can be used to customize the users’ desktop or Internet Explorer. With these desktop enhancements, the user can easily customize the appearance of folders, create MP3 play lists, create and manage desktop icons, change the appearance of the desktop and toolbar wallpaper, and create customized logos to display on Internet Explorer rather than the default Microsoft logo. For those who like to customize the appearance of Windows, and would like features not otherwise included in Windows, some of these utilities would be appropriate, as well as fun to play with.

I am typically too busy to play games on my computer, but I do know that a lot of users enjoy simple but entertaining games to pass the time. Camtech2000 offers five games free for the taking. Gamers can play darts, or manipulate squares in an obvious knockoff known as “Cubik’s Rube”. Word Finder is a common word game for those wishing to practice their observational skills and gamblers may appreciate “Camtech Slots” which has some of the excitement of a slot machine, without actually losing money to the “one armed bandit”.

While they are functionally obsolete, many computer users still like to use screen savers. In the early days of computing, it was somewhat common to burn-in an image on the CRT if it was displayed too long. While typically unlikely with a modern monitor and video card, burn-in is still theoretically possible, and this is where screen savers are of use. (For the record, I do not use a screen saver on any computer that I use, and choose to turn the computer off if I am not going to use it for any reasonable length of time). Camtech2000 offers an even dozen screen savers offering a variety of shapes,

colors, images, music, and other visual treats. I have seen the Camtech Space screensaver in use, and it is very attractive as it changes between a series of astronomical images. For those who like and use screen savers, and would like some variety, these may be a worthwhile addition to their collections.

I have made some use of the "Internet Related" utilities, of which Camtech2000 offers 30 titles. The one that I have used the most is Password Reveal Pro 2.0, which displays the hidden passwords in programs that display a password as "*****". Loading Password Reveal Pro 2.0 and dragging the lock image over the asterisks displays the underlying password. Another neat utility that I have used on some of the web pages I have created or edited is RedirectEm, which generates a small script file to be placed on a webpage that automatically connects the user to another webpage. This is especially helpful when the new webpage has a different address than the old page. You may have noticed that some email users have fancy signatures at the bottom of their emails; it is very easy to create your own professional looking email signatures using Camtech2000's Signatures 2.0. With this program the user can create custom email signatures with a choice of colors, fonts, and graphics. Additional graphics, both static and animated are included with the program. Another especially helpful and possibly even profitable program is Multi-Stock Browser, which can display stock quotes and charts. While the basic version of Multi-Stock Browser is free, a registered version is \$20.

Camtech2000 offers 45 miscellaneous utilities which can be used for such tasks as cleaning up startup files to creating and storing passwords. I just had the occasion to use UnlockMe, a utility to unlock files which may have been used by another program. Many users complain about how slow the computer boots, and seems to run slower than it did in the past. This problem may be quickly and easily resolved by cleaning up the startup files by using Ultimate Startup Manager. This program displays all seven places that contain startup information, not just the three sources displayed by some competing programs. While the program is free, a registered version is \$20. With 45 utilities available in this category, most users will likely find something useful here.

There are nine system related utilities available including a System Restore Control, XP Repair Install, RegKey Backup, MemCheck Pro, CT Attrib (file attributes), and a Visual Basic Runtime Library. I used CT Attrib to manage a troublesome folder on my hard drive, and it worked admirably.

Camtech2000 has an impressive list of useful utilities available for download. Users of all levels will likely find something useful to download and try. Websites:
<http://camtech2000.net/Pages/Downloads.html>

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For amusement and tips I suggest you subscribe to Steve Bass newsletter *TechBite* <<http://www.techbite.com/>>. The current issue includes solid information about Firefox, a dog that plays basketball, and an ad for rubber cement. What more could anyone ask?

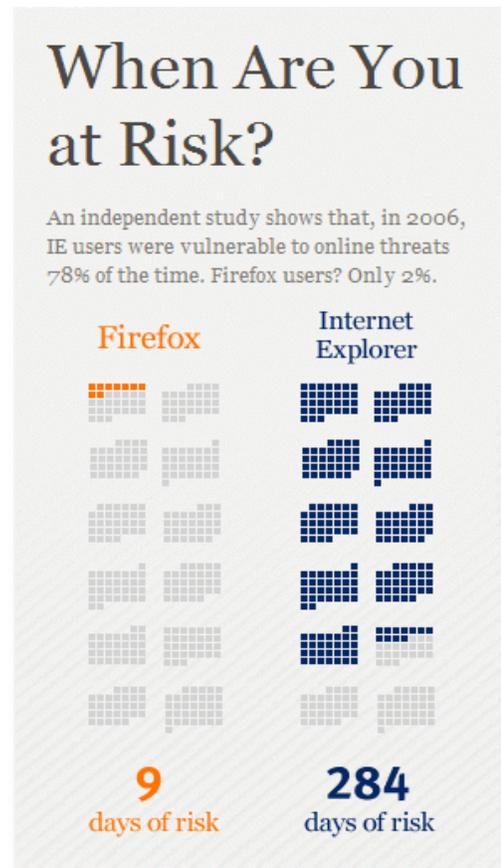
Mozilla Releases Firefox 3.5 Browser

by Ira Wilsker

It is no secret to regular listeners of my weekly radio show (KLVI 560AM 6-7pm Mondays) that I have been a longtime user of the Firefox browser. While Windows may come with Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE) installed and an integral part of the operating system, I and millions of other computer users have chosen to use an alternative browser, such as Firefox, to provide features and security lacking in IE. There has been an active war between browsers for market share for several years, led by IE with its deep pockets capable of carrying on its battle though the use of prodigious commercial advertisement, backed by the financial clout of Microsoft. Firefox, from an open source, non-profit organization, Mozilla, lacks the financial capital to compete in the commercial marketplace, but has developed a loyal and expanding user base based on its quality and features, rather than its advertising. Mozilla's Firefox has been successful at capturing an estimated one-fourth of the browser market from IE, and has spawned competition from other non-Microsoft competitors, such as Google's Chrome, Apple's Safari, Opera, and several other browsers, all of which offer features and benefits lacking in IE. While IE, Chrome, and Safari have substantial financial backing behind their respective promotions, Firefox is forced to compete based on its merits and performance, and not the dollars behind it. Due to the competitive nature of the browser business, and the fact that when Microsoft developed IE and announced that it would be a free browser, despite many millions of dollars in development costs, all of the other major browsers now currently available were also provided for free.

Firefox in its earlier versions has been around for several years, and attracted the interest of the computer press pundits who have recognized the superiority of Firefox over the 800 pound gorilla in the room, Microsoft's IE. What Firefox has lacked in financial capital, it has more than made up with its feisty adherence to innovation and performance. Recently, Mozilla released version 3.5 of Firefox, a substantial update and upgrade to the not-so-old 3.0 series of releases. Over five million copies were downloaded during the first 24 hours of its release. It is available as a free 7.7mb download from getfirefox.com, and available for most contemporary operating systems including XP, Vista, Mac and Linux.

The new version 3.5 of Firefox has some dramatic improvements over the older



"At risk" defined as publicly available exploits with no patch. Source: "Internet Explorer users Unsafe for 284 Days in 2006" Brian Krebs, *Washington Post*, 1/4/2007

versions of Firefox, many of which have increased the performance, features, and security advantages of Firefox over IE, and makes Firefox more competitive with the advanced features of its competing browsers. One notable improvement in 3.5 is its rendering speed, the time it takes to display web pages being downloaded. One example of dramatic speed improvement is in displaying web pages containing Java, a very common form of coding on web pages today. In comparison testing on an XP machine using different versions of Firefox, 3.5 was about twice as fast as version 3, and 10 times faster than version 2. In comparative tests performed by some of the leading computer magazines, Firefox was much faster than IE in loading a variety of web pages. To be fair, Safari and Chrome were also faster than IE 7 and 8 as well, with IE sometimes being very sluggish in loading and displaying websites by comparison. Firefox 3.5 has improved memory management which minimizes memory leakage, and also uses fewer system resources than IE, still another reason for improved performance.

Firefox 3.5 is very feature rich with security and conveniences that makes it a very attractive alternative to IE. One is the “Awesome Bar,” also known as the address bar, where an intelligent wizard makes it easy to locate websites without typing or knowing the URL (internet address). Simply typing a keyword term in the address bar will cause Firefox to instantly reference the browsing history searching and then displaying web addresses with similar keywords, and then interactively searching the web for popular websites with that key word. The Awesome Bar is intelligent in that it learns about your surfing interests in order to make more relevant recommendations. Of course, if you know the web address, just simply type it in as always, but if you have been there before the auto complete feature will display your potential choices as fast as you can type. If a desired web address is displayed by the Awesome Bar, simply click on it to open the page.

Many of us have developed a large collection of favorites and bookmarks. Firefox 3.5 offers an improved version of its “Tags” feature where terms can be added to a bookmark for rapid sorting and display of appropriate links. For example, if I labeled the bookmark for THEEXAMINER.COM with the tag “news” (there is no limit on the number of tags that may be added to any bookmark), and typed “news” in the address bar, the Examiner link would be among the top placements instantly displayed in the address bar for immediate selection. Adding new links to the bookmark list is a simple one click operation; simply click on the star at the right side of the address bar to create a bookmark with the currently displayed website.

One cute feature in Firefox 3.5 that has been continued from the earlier versions is a built in spell checker. When filling in online forms, blogs, Tweets, webmail, or other forms of text, Firefox will check the spelling of words entered in real-time, and underline any misspelled words with a red dotted line. Simply right clicking on the word will display the correctly spelled recommendations, and another mouse click will replace the erroneous word with the correctly spelled term.

Another useful feature is the tabbed browsing. While other browsers, including IE 8, have tabbed browsing, Firefox 3.5 tabs can be dragged and dropped wherever desired. I have been guilty of closing a tab, only finding later in the session that I want to go back to the now closed tab; Firefox saves closed tabs under the History menu as “Recently Closed Tabs,” where a mouse click reopens the closed tab. A similar benefit

is the ability of Firefox to remember where you have been; when closing Firefox, the user is given the choice to remember the open tabs, and automatically reload them the next time Firefox is opened.

Since Firefox is not beholden to any other software company, there is no prejudice in the selection of search engines accessible from the integral search bar. In fact, there are literally hundreds of search options available, many with an integral smart search function that makes recommendations of search terms as they are being typed. The search selection does include not just the typical Google or Yahoo, but also hundreds of other domestic and foreign search engines as well as commercial resources. In addition to Google, Yahoo, and AllTheWeb (my personal favorite), I also have EBay, Amazon, and other shopping sites in my search list where products can be entered in the search box, and the results quickly displayed.

One interesting feature in 3.5, which can be easily selected or disabled at will, is “Location Aware Browsing” where capable websites will provide relevant local information such as restaurants or events based on the current geographical location of the computer. Firefox emphasizes that no personal information is disseminated when using this feature and it can be turned off at will.

One of the top selling points of this free product is the security of the browser. Integral with the browser is an anti-phishing feature which will prominently warn the user if he attempts to connect to a known phishing identity theft site. Firefox also protects against websites containing viruses, Trojans, and malware in their code. Since Firefox runs on top of the operating system, and not as a part of it, Firefox is inherently more secure than IE, and less vulnerable to attack. While no browser is absolutely secure, in penetration testing, Firefox has proven to be more secure than IE. If any serious security vulnerabilities are detected, Firefox is quick to release and distribute software updates, typically much faster than most competing browsers, and almost always faster than IE. Firefox offers an automatic update feature which can download updates as soon as they are released, keeping the browser up to date with the latest security fixes.

Firefox 3.5 is totally adequate as downloaded, and includes abundant features. For those who like to customize their browsing experience, Firefox has compiled a catalog of over 6000 plug-ins and add-ons. I use add-ons for a variety of purposes, including downloading and converting YouTube videos, color coding my tabs, and “IE Tabs” which will run IE only websites that require Active-X from inside Firefox, without loading IE.

I strongly recommend Firefox to everyone. It is easy to install, and will happily coexist with IE and other installed browsers, and not interfere with them. Firefox offers an option during installation to non-destructively copy and import favorites (bookmarks), cookies, passwords, and other information from IE, such that Firefox is ready to run and complete as soon as it is installed. If upgrading from an older version of Firefox, the newer version will perform some housekeeping tasks and install itself over the older version while maintaining all bookmarks, passwords, cookies, and other information.

I use IE for less than 5% of my browsing tasks, choosing to use Firefox for almost all other web browsing. Other than the fact that it is already installed on Windows computers, I sometimes find it hard to understand why so many would still use such

a slow, vulnerable, and insecure browser as IE, when a reasonably secure and fast browser such as Firefox is available for free. Go ahead and download Firefox right now (getfirefox.com). Play with it for a while, experimenting with its myriad of features unavailable on IE. If you like it, go ahead and make it your default browser (I did). If not, either keep it as a secondary browser, or uninstall it (Add/Remove Programs). Once you try Firefox 3.5, I really do not envision many of you wanting to uninstall it, but I can see many more of you choosing Firefox as your primary browser, rather than the cumbersome IE.

Website: <http://www.getfirefox.com>

Driver Query Helps Resolve Driver Problems

by Vinny La Bash

Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., FL

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.

Module Name	Display Name	Description	Driver Type	Start Mode	State	Status	Accept Stop	Accept Pause	Page Number
ACPI	Microsoft ACPI Driver	Microsoft ACPI Driver	Kernel	Boot	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
adp94xx	adp94xx	adp94xx	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
adpahci	adpahci	adpahci	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
adpu160m	adpu160m	adpu160m	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
adpu320	adpu320	adpu320	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
AFD	Ancillary Function Driver for W	Ancillary Function Driver for Win	Kernel	System	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
agpg40	Intel AGP Bus Filter	Intel AGP Bus Filter	Kernel	Manual	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
aic78xx	aic78xx	aic78xx	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
alide	alide	alide	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
amdide	amdide	amdide	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
AmdK8	AMD K8 Processor Driver	AMD K8 Processor Driver	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
arc	arc	arc	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
arcsas	arcsas	arcsas	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
aswFsBlk	aswFsBlk	aswFsBlk	File System	Auto	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
aswMonFit	aswMonFit	aswMonFit	File System	Auto	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
aswRdr	aswRdr	aswRdr	Kernel	System	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
aswSP	avast! Self Protection	avast! Self Protection	Kernel	System	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
aswTdi	avast! Network Shield Support	avast! Network Shield Support	Kernel	System	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
ASyncMac	RAS Asynchronous Media Drive	RAS Asynchronous Media Drive	Kernel	Manual	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
atapi	IDE Channel	IDE Channel	Kernel	Boot	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
bower	Bowser	Bowser	File System	Manual	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	
BrFilLo	Brother USB Mass-Storage Low	Brother USB Mass-Storage Low	Kernel	Manual	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
BrFilUp	Brother USB Mass-Storage Up	Brother USB Mass-Storage Up	Kernel	Manual	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
BrSend	Brother MFC Serial Port Interfa	Brother MFC Serial Port Interfac	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
BrSerWdm	Brother WDM Serial driver	Brother WDM Serial driver	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
BrUsbMdm	Brother MFC USB Fax Only M	Brother MFC USB Fax Only Mo	Kernel	Disabled	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
BrUsbSer	Brother MFC USB Serial WDM	Brother MFC USB Serial WDM	Kernel	Manual	Stopped	OK	FALSE	FALSE	
BlhEnum	Bluetooth Enumerator Service	Bluetooth Enumerator Service	Kernel	Manual	Running	OK	TRUE	FALSE	

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.





AOL: Is There Life Beyond Time Warner?

Q. Is it true that AOL is going out of business or is going to just disappear?

A. Not exactly, but it is important for all AOL users to be aware of what's happening. Last month, Time Warner announced that it will jettison its AOL subsidiary by the end of this year.

Attempting to put a positive spin on the unceremonious dumping of AOL, Jeffrey Bewkes, Time Warner CEO, said (with a straight face), "We believe AOL will have a better opportunity to achieve its full potential as an independent Internet company." Sure it will.

AOL today is a mere shadow of its former self. In 2002, users peaked at nearly 27 million. Currently, AOL has approximately six million subscribers, and this announcement is expected to result in a spike in migration as AOL users flee to greener digital pastures.

If you are currently using AOL, you effectively have two choices: You can stay with AOL and see what happens (last one out, please turn off the lights), or you can join the tens of millions of former AOL users who have moved to other Internet access providers. I'll be providing additional information and updates about this ongoing development in my weekly newsletter (www.MrModem.com).

Q. I received two .PUB files, which I assume are Microsoft Publisher files. I don't have Publisher, and I don't want to buy it, so is there some way I can convert the files into Adobe .PDF format, which I can then open?

A. Yes, .PUB files are Microsoft Publisher files and the good news is that you can easily convert them to the .PDF format by using PDF Online (<http://tinyurl.com/pj22k8>). When you go to the site, select the .PUB file that you want to convert, enter your email address, and click Convert to PDF. The converted file will be emailed to you within minutes.

Q. When I'm using the Google search engine with Internet Explorer on my PC at work, after I type in the first few letters of my search term, a drop-down list appears. If I entered the same information before, I can select it from the list. My computer at home, however, does not provide this drop-down list. How can I get a similar list to appear on that computer?

A. The feature you are referring to is called AutoComplete. To view the settings for AutoComplete, in Internet Explorer, click Tools > Internet Options > Content tab, then the Settings button in the AutoComplete section. Click the check boxes for some or all of the options you want to use. In your case, be sure to select Forms, but you may also want to select Web Addresses, Username and Passwords on Forms, and Prompt to Save Passwords, as well. Click OK twice to save your changes and exit.

Q. I have Windows XP, Outlook Express, and Office 2007. I speak English, but I can only get French in the spell-check. How can I get an English spell-checker?

A. When you install Office 2007, spell checking in Outlook Express works very well—as long as you want to spell-check in French. That’s because Office 2007 initially replaced old files that spell-checked in English, Spanish, and German. According to Microsoft, the new version of these files contained within Office 2007 are incompatible with OE-6. (Isn’t that just peachy?) The easiest way to resolve the problem is to install a third-party Spell Checker for OE (<http://tinyurl.com/k2xcv>). This problem was resolved in a subsequent Office 2007 update.

Mr. Modem’s DME (Don’t Miss ‘Em) Sites of the Month

Congressional Votes

Hosted by washingtonpost.com, here you can browse an extensive database of every vote cast in the U.S. Congress since 1991. You can search by aggregate votes on a given issue or by individual member of Congress to determine if your representative is truly representing you, or if he or she is asleep at the switch. The site is updated several times each day.

<http://tinyurl.com/px7zh9>

Flight Status

This was created for Palm-type, hand-held computers, but I use it as a no-frills, cut-to-the-chase, bare-bones, stop-with-the-hyphens, flight-information center to enhance my going-nowhere-in-a-hurry lifestyle. Here you can quickly obtain flight status, departures and arrivals, flight alerts, airline and airport information, security wait times, and current airport delays. If you prefer the full-frills version, visit www.flightstats.com.

<http://tinyurl.com/y6g7gm>

Universal Leonardo

No, not DiCaprio, the other Leonardo. This unusual site is a celebration of the genius of Leonardo da Vinci’s work. Through a series of linked exhibitions and scientific investigations, new dimensions of the “El Da-Vee”(as he was known in the “hood”) legacy are revealed. From the home page, click Browse, then meander through Paintings, Manuscripts, Inventions, and Drawings. One can easily spend hours on this site, so get comfortable, and it wouldn’t hurt to have a few snacks standing by.

www.universalleonardo.org

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Computer Performance Considerations

by Gary Bentley

editor, SouthWest International Personal Computer Club (TX) Throughput

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 destroyed 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.

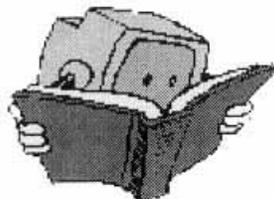
You would need a SATA controller card as well as SATA drive and you might as well just purchase a new computer. The current SATA interface rate is 3 Gbps (the initial SATA interface was 1.5 Gbps), i.e., 3 gigabits per second. That translates to approximately 300 MB/sec. However, the actual rate that 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.

This article has been obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups; all other uses require the permission of the author (bentley.gary (at) gmail.com).



From The DealsGuy

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

I've been writing the DealGuy column for 14 years and have not missed a month, but its time I took a month off, so don't look for the column next month. I need a break and thanks in advance for the opportunity. I'm finding less and less to offer anyway so a break is probably in order.

A while back, I talked about the FACUG spring conference and the attendance of about 140, but I was unable to find out how many user groups were represented. I was able to take a look at the registration recently and it looks like they came from 39 user groups, but remember that there were also several APCUG officers there who listed their own users groups. I'm glad it was successful, but next year's FACUG conference will be really something to look forward to. I'm sure you will read about it, and it looks like the attendance for that one will set a record.

Thanks for your feedback about my comments pertaining to the special setup arrangements for the SAP Sapphire show. So far, readers said they understand the difficulty of taking pictures under such difficult conditions. I don't feel too bad because I have watched the official photographers for some shows get very frustrated trying to get good pictures of the booths they were supposed to photograph.

I'm working on an article about trade show setups, but here is something else to think about. When you walk through the entrance to a trade show, you probably don't pay much attention to that obscure security guard who stands in the background and is checking for badges as you walk by. You probably don't even consider that the person you are walking by sees much more than you realize. I can't say this about "all" the people checking badges, but it is mostly true of the more experienced guards you see. They usually look like they are casually checking for your badge, but here is what really happens with an experienced security guard:

They actually take a mental snapshot of your badge and automatically read the name on it to see if the name matches the gender of the person wearing it (is it a male name if the person is a male), some shows they may look for other traits; they read the year to make sure the person is not using a last year's badge, and they check for color codes that might be on it to allow certain people in only on certain days (sometimes the day of the week is there, but usually only a color bar on the bottom). For some shows there might be other info on the badge. A good guard can also spot a phony badge made with a computer pretty easily because they get used to seeing the right badge. Yes, people try all kinds of tricks to get in free because some shows have very high registration fees.

They also must be diplomatic when they run into a belligerent attendee who doesn't want to be bothered going to registration to obtain a proper badge. Some of them are ready to punch you when you stop them. As you can imagine, diplomacy is a good thing to master. They usually do all this for somewhere around eight or nine dollars per hour, depending on what city you work in.

Since I don't have very good vision, I try to avoid entrance door positions, although I don't mind working at loading docks where you mostly see the same people going in and out while working, and you get so you recognize them when you see them. Since most of those workers wear colored wristbands for ID, they hate to wear them on their

arm so you must look on the wrists, a belt loop (with their shirt hanging over it), or other spots to find it. Often you must ask them to see it if it is not in plain sight. Some convention center employees don't like to wear badges, but again, you get to know them, rather than argue with them. I once worked an entrance to a pharmacist job interview area where I had to watch for an ampersand on the badge someplace. That was a tough one for me. One person somehow got an interview without paying the fee and we were all given the name to watch for; and one guard found that person, who was then interviewed by show management.

Worried About A Web Site's Safety?

A popular warning product for dangerous Web sites is McAfee's "Site Advisor" <<http://www.siteadvisor.com>>. I've read a couple of reviews that were not all that complimentary, but have not tried it myself. Another one that I have not read about either way is Site Hound. When you get there, these products warn you if a Web site is safe to visit. Site Hound is offered by Fire Trust <<http://www.firetrust.com>>. There is a free version, and also a pay version with more features for \$29.95. They also offer MailWasher if you want spam protection and it is a popular product with a one time price. There used to be free updates for life, but it doesn't look like that applies any more. Do your homework if you are interested in either of these. User group member discounts are available for Firetrust products through APCUG <<http://www.apcug.net>>. Your user group must be a member to have access to the Sharepoint page for that information.

Ever Consider a Virtual Cover?

(This is their announcement, but edited)

Insofta Development has unveiled the newest version of Insofta Cover Commander, a tool providing the effective solution to quickly and easily create quality custom-designed three-dimensional virtual boxes for software, e-books, DVDs, manuals, CD-ROMs and screenshots. Version 3.1 delivers a host of improvements.

Enhancements in the latest version of Insofta Cover Commander include support for batch processing from the command line, providing a perfect solution for creating a large number of similar virtual boxes, books, and many more. This is essential for those who create covers and boxes for on-line shops, catalogs and other large projects. The program also allows saving animation in SWF, GIF and AVI format.

The program enables creation of sophisticated and modern cover designs with very few mouse clicks; streamlining workflow. The program allows comprehensive customization of background color and transparency, gradient, shadow and reflection; what's more, the settings can be saved and used later. All the features are delivered in multilingual user interface (English, German, French, Spanish, Japanese, Hungarian and Russian).

Insofta Cover Commander is compatible with Microsoft Windows 98, ME, NT, 2000, XP and Vista, and costs \$48.30 for a single license, entitling a user to 1 year of free updates. Further information on the product, as well as its free trial version, is available from <www.insofta.com/cover-commander>. User group members get a 20% discount by entering the code ICC-RRDJ-DUG in the proper space.

Direct download link:

<www.insofta.com/download/covercommandersetup.exe>

Company website: <www.insofta.com>

Problems?

A while back I mentioned the problem I had not being able to access the memory in my digital picture frame with either of my desktop machines, but I could with my new laptop. Nobody was able to tell me what was wrong, but Bob Balogh, a past president of the Boca Raton Computer Society <<http://www.brcs.org>> , sent me a suggestion for finding the answer <<http://www.blackviper.com/>> and I am sharing his advice with my readers who might have their own problems. I have not had the time to go there to research it yet, but hope to get it done soon. Bob's suggestion is below:

“The above is one of the best sites available for learning about your computer. The section on Windows Configurations, left hand side, is most helpful.” Bob also writes a monthly help column, and has traveled to other user groups in his area to do presentations.”

I always read Bob's column in their newsletter, *Boca Bits*, and here is something he recommended for their members. Bob likes to keep a monthly calendar on his desktop. This enables him to see the entire month at a glance. The one he suggests also has an array of other features that lets you enter events that are upcoming, etc. It is called Rainlendar Lite, and it's free at <<http://www.snapfiles.com/get/Rainlendar.html>>.

That's it for this month. I'll have some more new product announcements on my Web site that didn't offer discounts. 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>>.

Society News

Help's Half Hour

Tuesday, July 14, 2009

Led by: Carl Schmidtman

Recorded by: Jan Rothfuss

Q: A member is using Vista on his laptop. He cannot get into safe mode. It starts to execute but then stalls and, finally, restarts.

A: One suggestion is to first back up your important files. Then perhaps try to boot off of the restore CD. There is often a repair mode that might discover the problem.

Q: Another member is using Thunderbird email and Firefox as browser. He used to be able to have URL links display in the lower box. The box is no longer there.

A: Check out the view menu and see if there is an option to turn on the bar. It may be buried under the task bar. Maybe you could try shrinking the window a bit and look again.

Q: Using Outlook for email. When exiting, he would like it to go back to homepage in IE. Sometimes it goes to a desktop.

A: It might be that you are closing down the main window instead of just the email.

The IE window may be sitting behind your Outlook and it appears when you close it out. It was also suggested that he try File => Close to see whether he is closing the item or the full application.

Q: When starting up, a member sometimes gets a message about a virus. He can simply close the box.

A: Do not open them or you might really get a virus. It is best to keep your anti-virus scanning up to date. You may want to turn on the pop up blocker to keep the window from appearing. It was suggested that he go to Nick's Security Tango website to get rid of the virus.

Q: Another member's laptop has a microphone and a sound recorder. But he cannot seem to use it. It just gets noise.

A: If you go into the sound control panel, you can verify the input and output levels.

Q: Can a hard disk be copied over to another drive?

A: Yes, by using the program Ghost, it will copy the image over. There can be a restore issue in that it will put everything back. There are a few free programs available. But check out the reviews. It will take a lot of time to back-up over a USB connection.

Q: When using Ghost, can a single file be restored?

A: If you requested the full copy option, you should be able to restore a single item. If you used the option to generate a compacted image, it may be harder. Run the Ghost program and, if you can browse by file, you should be able to bring a file back.

July Planning Meeting

by Sarah Blankenship, Secretary

Steve Staub led the Planning meeting held at Sally Springett's house, July 7rd. Others in attendance were Bob Avery, Arpad Kovacs, Mike Lavelle, Sarah Blankenship, Sally Springett, and Dan Rothfuss.

The June meeting was discussed, and it was agreed that the presentation on mapping software was superb. The audience seemed to greatly enjoy the presentation, and everyone was involved and interested. Steve pointed out that the most successful presentations seem to be when members discuss non-traditional ways that they use their computers.

The newsletter printing will take place on Saturday, July 18th at St. Stevens. Anyone who would like to volunteer is welcome. This month a toner and paper purchase are planned to ensure that full supplies are in place for the newsletter. There are some issues involving the mailing software that was recently purchased, new bulk mailing rules, and other bulk mailing issues. The board is currently exploring ways to alleviate these issues.

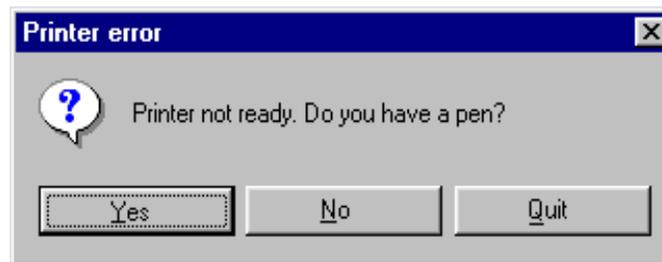
The August meeting is the traditional RCSi picnic meeting. For this year's picnic meeting, the lodge has been reserved for the Brighton Town Park, 777 Westfall Rd. Brighton, NY 14620. If you intend to attend please email Steve to sign up. Each ticket is \$5, and includes several meat-choices. Also, please sign up for a dish to pass. This year, to prevent accidental overages, dishes are based on last name (i.e., A-L: Sign up for salads), and sign up sheets will be available at the July meeting. Silent Fundraising Auction!!! Here are some rules that will accompany the auction. Please note that during the picnic, RCSi will be holding a Silent Auction.

1. Please bring any item(s) to the auction. Please note, the item does not have to be computer related. We will take anything you are willing to put up for auction.
2. Your item will be tax deductible - the tax deduction off will be for the amount the item is valued at, not the amount the item sells for.
3. All proceeds from a successful auction item will go to RCSi.
4. If the item you bring does not sell, you are responsible for taking it out of the park with you. (It doesn't have to go home, but it can't stay there.)

If anyone would like to coordinate/run the Silent Auction, please email or see any Board member to sign up! Welcome, new members. If you are already a member, please be sure that your dues are paid. Please see Steve if your membership is due or overdue. If you pay your dues online, via the PayPal link on the website, please send Steve Staub an email so that he can mark you down as paid; additionally, please include current address and any other relevant information. This will allow Steve to update your newsletter listing to ensure that you receive your newsletters on time and in the right place.

If you are not renewing this year, please tell us why — the board would like to know how we can serve you better. Thank you to all members for being a part of our club! Looking forward to a fun August picnic, and happy summer!

The Lighter Side



Recently, I got a call from someone who turned off his computer whenever he found himself somewhere in Windows he didn't want to be. "I just turn it off when I don't like where I am," he said. Wonder of all wonders, scandisk found a score of lost allocation units and bad sectors.

- * Customer: "Hi, I was wondering if you could fix my laptop. It's under warranty."
- * Tech Support: "What seems to be the trouble with it?"
- * Customer: "My wife got mad and threw it in the pool."

A man purchased a laptop from me. He called about a week later and said that it would no longer boot up. He brought it in, and I discovered that sixteen nicely drilled holes were in the bottom of the case. I asked him about it, and he said the machine was too hot sitting on his lap, so he had drilled these "air holes."

"Could that be the problem?" he asked.

I once had a customer who wanted a light in her computer, similar to a computer

she saw at the house of a friend so she lit a candle and set it inside her tower case.

* Customer: "I need a new modem."

* Tech Support: "What's wrong with your current modem?"

* Customer: "The Internet light is not on."

* Tech Support: "Did you reset your modem recently?"

* Customer: "Yes I did, but what does it have to do with it?"

* Tech Support: "Well, resetting the modem wipes out your configuration profile, so we just need to reconfigure it."

* Customer: "Did you not hear me? The modem is broken, and I demand a replacement now!"

* Tech Support: "The modem is not broken. If you are willing to, we can configure it in about 2 minutes."

* Customer: "I want a new modem!"

* Tech Support: "We can't replace modems over a simple reconfiguration issue. All we have to do--"

CRASH

* Customer: "Now it's broke! Replace the thing!"

* Tech Support: "Ok sir, we cannot replace a modem that you destroyed, and your modem is past warranty, so you'll have to buy a new one anyway."

* Customer: "!*#\$(#@#%!@&#\$\$&*(!@#*\$!@*^!@#\$\$@" (Click.)

I work in a call center for a large cell phone company that sells PDAs with phone functionality. I got a call from a customer who said her stylus had broken. I offered to transfer her to customer care, where they could order her out a pack of styluses. She said no, the phone had gotten "messed up." I asked what was wrong with it, and she said that when the stylus had broken, she'd tried to superglue it back together, then put it back in the slot before the glue had dried, and it got stuck in the phone. So she tried to take it out with a hammer and chisel.

