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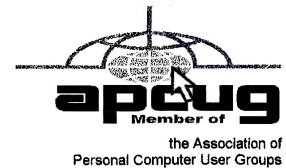
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Next Meeting
Tuesday, December 8
Computer Jeopardy

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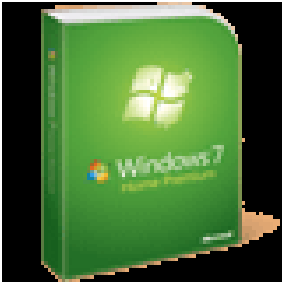
Use Caution When Upgrading to Windows 7

by Ira Wilsker

A few weeks ago I wrote a column about how to determine if your computer could be satisfactorily upgraded to Windows 7. I mentioned Microsoft's Windows 7 Upgrade Advisor, and Windows 7 Compatibility Center, which should be run prior to any installation in order to determine hardware and software compatibility with Windows 7. I ran both of those utilities on my three-month-old Vista Home Premium 64 machine, and found that my hardware was compatible with Windows 7, and that some of my software needed to be updated, which I did. Rerunning both Microsoft utilities after making the recommended changes indicated that my computer hardware and software should run on Windows 7, and

that no listed incompatibilities remained. With peace of mind that I should have no problems upgrading to Windows 7, I eagerly awaited the free upgrade discs that I had ordered under Microsoft's and my manufacturer's "Free Upgrade to Windows 7" offer for eligible computers.

A few days after Microsoft's much promoted rollout of Windows 7, my upgrade discs arrived in the mail. The envelope actually contained two DVDs, one the manufacturer's "Upgrade Advisor," the other Microsoft's "Windows 7 Home Premium Upgrade" complete with hologram and product key. Also in the envelope was a poster sized, multi-lingual, instruction sheet with detailed upgrade instructions. Knowing from past experience on my older computers (XP to Vista), it may take several hours to complete the upgrade I waited until the weekend when I might have the time to dedicate to the upgrade.



One of my most frequently used computing expressions is "Backup! Backup!, and Backup!." Prior to installing Windows 7, I made a set of Vista recovery DVDs, and a redundant backup of all of my critical data files. I can not understate the critical importance of this backup process, and that it is absolutely imperative to have a good current backup. If you have the software and media to make an image backup, which is a digital image of your entire hard drive that can be restored in the event of catastrophic failure, do it. This could be very useful, as it can restore the operating system, data, and all programs if necessary. The fact that I do have good backups may be my savior. I was heartened by the fact that the computer magazines and blogs were heavy with stories of successful upgrades and the high level of preliminary satisfaction that users had with their new Windows 7 upgrades.

After ensuring that I had good backups, I then proceeded to follow the upgrade instructions provided with my discs, and first ran the manufacturer's "Upgrade Advisor." It also ran the Windows 7 Upgrade Advisor (no problems found), and installed some updated Windows 7 drivers for the factory hardware. When completed, I was instructed to insert the Windows 7 Upgrade DVD.

The Windows 7 Upgrade DVD ran for a while and detected some factory installed software, mostly games and a few obsolete Microsoft utilities, that I was instructed to uninstall. The computer then rebooted back to my Vista Home Premium 64, and the list of items to uninstall appeared in a file on my desktop. I used my Revo Uninstaller, and uninstalled those items being sure to do a complete uninstall including any fragments and leftover registry entries.

I then restarted the computer and re-ran the Windows 7 Upgrade setup, as directed. The computer ran for several hours, as I occasionally monitored its progress. There were no difficulties or anomalies so far, and as things were now running smoothly, I felt assured that I would shortly have the new Windows 7 Home Premium 64 installed on my computer. After running for nearly six hours, and completing an indicated 72% of the upgrade process, a window popped up which said that the install could not continue as my hard drive was full. That struck me as very odd, and a sense of disbelief came over me, as I knew that I had well over 500 gigs of available hard drive space prior to the upgrade! I was instructed by the upgrade software to restart my computer, and that my Vista would then be restored. Other than the annoyance of wasting six hours of my life on a failed upgrade, along with a modicum of disgust, I removed the Windows 7 DVD from the drive, and rebooted the computer. This is when things went terribly wrong.

During the reboot process, I was greeted with a black window with white print that offered two options; repair Windows 7, or restore my Vista. I selected the restore option, and the computer booted into Windows 7 (not Vista), and as it was loading a popup appeared that said, "The computer restarted unexpectedly or encountered an unexpected error," and instructed

me to reboot. I rebooted, selected the restore function, and the same popup error appeared. I rebooted again, but this time selected the "Repair Windows 7" option, and the system loaded identically as before. I selected a variety of the Windows 7 repair options, ran them, rebooted, and the same error appeared. I put the Windows 7 Upgrade DVD in the drive, and ran the setup again, only to be greeted with the same error at the same place in the process. I tried over a dozen permutations of rebooting and selecting options, including a variety of repair options off of the Windows 7 repair menu, but always had the same error when rebooting. This became an infinite loop. Despite Microsoft's claims that Vista would be restored if the upgrade failed, the system would not restore my Vista, and the Windows 7 failed to install. Now I was left with a useless computer that would not load anything. I did finally boot off of a Linux CD, and saw that my files all appeared to be intact. With some difficulty, I was able to then boot off of my Spinrite CD, and did a thorough hard drive check; my hard drive was intact and undamaged.

Next, with growing frustration approaching anger, I went online with my trusty old XP computer (the same one that I am using to type this). I went to the Microsoft Windows 7 support forums, and found that I was far from alone. The Windows 7 forum "Install, Upgrade, Activate" had over 6,000 threads, and almost 25,000 messages. One forum, "Windows 7 - Upgrade Unsuccessful -Reboot Loop" had a post from Michael, a Microsoft support engineer. It says, "Hello, For those who have attempted to perform an upgrade to Windows 7 and encounter a reboot loop, Microsoft is aware of this issue and is currently being investigated." It then provided a link to another forum, but at least I had some assurance that Microsoft was aware of the problem with the "Microsoft is aware of this issue" statement. That forum then linked to another forum, with the same title "Windows 7 - Upgrade Unsuccessful - Reboot Loop." That forum, which Microsoft "locked" (closed to new posts) has dozens of posts similar to mine, where users are complaining about the infinite loop reboot problem, and the failure to restore Vista. It appears that there may be two distinct and different issues involving the loop problem. Several dozen of the posts all indicated that their computer locked up at 62% of the install process, and many of them had purchased the student upgrade to Windows 7, and downloaded the upgrade. For these unhappy users, Microsoft has offered an updated download file for them to use to reinstall Windows 7. Many other users, me included, had an authentic Microsoft Upgrade DVD which we used for the install, and all of us encountered the same problem. Microsoft posted a few suggestions on possible fixes, but from the user responses, these have not been successful. It was immaterial if the user was updating a desktop computer like mine, or a laptop, the failure was the same. Some of the users were so frustrated that they chose to do a full install, rather than an upgrade, which did indeed work, but it wiped out all of their programs and data files which would have been preserved had the upgrade install worked as promised. It is of little solace to me and thousands of other users with crippled computers that the vast majority of those performing upgrades completed them successfully. I guess that we were just the unlucky few.

It is not just the Vista Home Premium users that have encountered this problem, but users of other editions as well. In the Microsoft forums "Vista x64 Ultimate to Windows 7 Ultimate upgrade failing" an IT professional who was upgrading several computers encountered a similar problem with the Ultimate upgrade.

Several of the computer magazines and independent support forums have had readers complain with the identical issues, and inquiries to Microsoft have resulted in a "we are aware of the problem and we are working to find a solution." Some of the independent support boards also have members trying to find a solution, but so far none have been found that can either restore our computers to the way they were prior to the upgrade (Vista), or allow the Windows

7 upgrade to complete.

The one saving grace is that I do have a Vista backup so I can be up and running again on my newer computer, but according to the Microsoft forums, many users did not create a backup prior to installing the Windows 7 Upgrade. Unless Microsoft comes up with a fix, these users will likely lose all of their programs and files, and unsatisfactory outcome. Once again, this demonstrates that it is absolutely imperative to have and maintain a contemporary backup of all critical data files, and preferably an image backup which can restore the computer to an earlier state complete with all programs and files.

Most users who have installed the upgrade editions of Windows 7 to compatible computers had great success, but for the few, maybe thousands, of us who had a catastrophic failure during the upgrade process, we are not happy campers. Can I recommend the Windows 7 Upgrade to users with compatible computers? Generally yes, as the benefits of Windows 7 appear to outweigh the foibles of Vista, but I will only make that recommendation with one proviso; be absolutely certain to have a good backup before attempting the upgrade. I am thankful that I have a good backup. If someone wants to do a clean install, meaning that they are installing Windows 7 to an empty or reformatted hard drive that is fine, as there have been very few problems with a clean install reported in the forums.

I will continue to monitor the Microsoft support forums hoping for a satisfactory resolution of this problem. In the meantime, remember, "Backup! Backup!, Backup!"

Websites:

<http://social.answers.microsoft.com/Forums/en-US/category/windows7>

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-7/get/upgrade-advisor.aspx>

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/compatibility/windows-7/en-us/default.aspx>

Networking For Dummies (Part 1)

by Ron Hirsch

Boca Raton Computer Society, FL

Introduction

This is part one of a two-part article on this topic. Now, before anyone feels that I'm out of line for referring to someone as a dummy, I want to make it clear that I was the networking dummy in question, for many years.

While I build and repair my own computers, and have written considerable software, I was always very weak on networking. However, lately I've graduated from dummy school, thanks to some good hardware and software, and more experiences with my home network.

I thought I'd share my old, and new experiences, with you, as they have come from many years of frustrating activities, associated with my home wireless network.

This article will not go into the complete aspect of all types of networks, but is limited to home networks, which are what many of you already have, or are possibly contemplating having in the near future.

Home Network Purposes

Allowing multiple computers to share the internet, is the usual purpose of a home network. My Internet Service Provider (ISP) is Comcast.

Most homes use either the local cable company, which is Comcast here in Boca Raton, or a DSL (digital sub-scriber line) from the landline phone company (AT&T here in Boca).

A secondary purpose can be accessing stored files on other computers on the network, or sharing devices such as printers installed on other computers.

Wireless Routers

Most home networks use a wireless router. This is a unit which allows multiple devices (usually computers) to be plugged into it, and also provides a wireless signal which broadcasts in all directions, so that computers which have a wireless adapter (either via an internal card, or a USB plug-in wireless adapter) can connect to the Internet

My Networking Task & Troubles Back In 2002

First, here's a commentary of what occurred, some years back, in my first brush with home networking.

I decided that I wanted a wireless network, as I had two computers, and I wanted both to have access to the Internet. Since it would have been very inconvenient to run an ethernet cable from my main computer's router to the second computer, I opted for a router with wireless capability.

Main Computer Set up

I purchased a Linksys wireless router, since Linksys was one of the biggest names in this product area, then I installed the router, and connected my main computer via an ethernet cable, which uses RJ-45 connectors. These connectors look like the connectors on telephones, but they are larger. I connected my Adelphia computer mo-dem to my new router, and just assumed that all would work right away. Of course, nothing worked to start off.

There was no installation CD disc, but there were many pages of manual instructions on what one had to do to set things up. The complexity of the instructions was mind boggling, so I called Linksys support—which was in the Philippines.

Tech support worked by rote. They followed various sets of instructions, and most of the support staff really was not that capable. I also called Adelphia tech support, finding someone “network knowledgeable” there was also quite difficult.

After several days of back and forth calls, and speaking to quite a number of different persons, I finally got my main computer (which was hard wired to the router) online and working properly with my Internet connection.

Second Computer Set up

Next came getting my #2 computer connected to the router, via the wireless capability. I had bought a Linksys USB wireless adapter. It also had nothing much in the way of information on how to use it, and no install CD.

I connected the wireless adapter to machine #2, and guess what - nothing happened. So, it was back onto Linksys tech support. I must have spent eight to ten hours fumbling around, while talking to Linksys support. We tried everything, but we could not get the second computer to connect to the Internet.

Finally, the Linksys tech support person advised me that he could only suggest one final step. There was a free program available on the Internet, called “Boingo”—some name! He gave me the URL to that page, which was not a Linksys page. He suggested that I download and install it, and it would get my wireless adapter connected up, so I did, and amazingly 5 minutes later, I realized success.

So why couldn't Linksys have some similar software included with the wireless adapter?

Task Not Quite Finished Yet

I noted that when my #2 computer finally made it on line, that the received wireless signal was quite weak. Out of a possible 5 bars of signal strength, it hopped back and forth between one and none, so I did some investigating, and learned that the large distance between my wireless router, and the #2 computer was right at the max usable distance. Checking around,

I found, on the Linksys site, a “booster amp”, that was designed to work with my router. There were even four recessed holes on the top of my router, to hold the four feet of the booster amp.

So I bought this amp, and finally the install went smoothly. Since it was nothing but an amplifier, there were no settings or adjustments. It did improve the signal strength slightly, and I now had a solid one bar reading. This was good enough to maintain Internet connectivity, but did give me a very slow connection.

So after about 10 days of stumbling around, I finally got my system working.

This picture is what the router and booster look like. The picture is actually the new router, with the old booster on top of it. The new and old routers are virtually identical in size.

Moving Ahead In Time

In mid April 2009, I suddenly started having problems with my main computer’s Internet access, and then my wireless computers’ access.

After reviewing the symptoms, and running a few checks, I became convinced that my Linksys router had developed a problem. Because of its age (7 years), and the fact that it was an older 802.11b model, I decided that the simplest approach was just to get a new router. And, if I stayed with the Linksys WRT54GL, which was an 802.11G unit, I could have the faster speed of the G series. And, the new router would accommodate my old booster, since it had the same mating holes to mount the booster.

Extended Network

By this point in time, I had my main desktop computer hard wired to the router, and two other desktops and a laptop wirelessly connected to the router. And yes, as I added computers 3 and 4 some years back, all things did not go smoothly. My laptop was the easiest. When I got it in 2004, it already had a wireless adapter built in. When I turned it on, it immediately found the wireless network, and was connected.

The #3 desktop also had a built in wireless card, but getting it online was a struggle, similar to the first wire-less connection. Finally, I did get it working, without having to resort to BOINGO.

Coming in Part 2

In part 2 of “Networking for Dummies,” I’ll relate my experiences in installing the new Linksys router, and then getting all four machines running smoothly there. I was dreading going through what I’d been through in the past.

This was a night and day difference from my first experiences in 2002. The router came with an installation CD. And it installed the router and my main computer, “as smooth as silk.”

When I started on the installs of the three wireless computers, there were a few hiccups. But I then went on line, to check out a program called “Network Magic.” It was touted as being the way to go when installing and configuring networks. They offered a free 7 day trial, which allows the user to install the software on up to eight computers, and let Network Magic do all the work for you.

Since Network Magic was created by Cisco, and Cisco now owns Linksys, if you were using a Linksys router, most of the important software features would continue working forever, at no cost to the user.

If you did not have a Linksys router, you could buy the lesser standard (up to 3 computers), or the Pro version (up to 8 computers), for \$29.99 and \$39.99 respectively.

Conclusion

This is the end of part 1 of “Networking for Dummies”. Next month, the second part of this will cover in-stalling my new router, and getting all 4 computers online, and talking to each

other. This was indeed a real eye-opener for me. I was most happy to see that the setup and configuration had gone from a terrifying experience to a “walk-in-the-park.”

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Genealogy Online-Using the Internet's Tools to “Dig Up” Your Family Tree

by Terri Neary
ICON PCUG, Inc., NY

Everyone has their own ideas about how computers and the internet can help them the most. For me, it is my genealogy project. I am trying to find out who my family were, what they did, where they lived, and even how they lived. I would like to confirm or disprove several family stories and be able to give the generations after me a sense of where they came from. Trying to do this without a computer and the internet would be the equivalent of using a horse and buggy in the 21st century. But searching for your family history can be an expensive project. There are many ways to cut down the cost.

Now one of the easiest websites to search is www.Ancestry.com. However, this can be a pricy option unless you know of a library with a subscription to it. Personally I travel to the Bethpage Library to use theirs. The databases available on this site range from the basic Social Security Death Index, which gives you the option of writing to the appropriate department to get a photocopy of the original application, to the Federal Censuses, to Passenger Lists coming from multiple locations to multiple ports in the United States and over a thousand different databases in the United States alone.

Each of these databases can give you information regarding your immediate line of family members as well as their siblings. Every little tidbit can help you to find more out and help to confirm or deny family stories. By searching their World War I Draft Registration Cards, I discovered that my grandfather, who died before I got to know him, was born in Hungary on the 24th of January in 1896. In addition, I learned that he was considered ineligible for the draft, not because he was an alien residing in NJ, but because he was missing the first joint of his third finger on his right hand. This small piece of information appears to help back up the stories I have heard of him losing this finger while a butcher at his brother's shop, though it does not confirm it.

Another site that can be expensive to use is www.heritagequestonline.com. However many libraries are paying for access to this site so it can be easily employed if you can locate which library near you that has access. Farmingdale allows you to log on from your home computer so it makes it even easier to use. Through this site you can search though the censuses, the Periodical Source Index for genealogical publications and many thousands of books for information on your missing relatives.

One of my favorite sites is one that actually connects you to multiple sites, some free and others not. It is run by Stephen P. Morse in San Francisco. His site, www.stevemorse.org, is designed for ease of use. The home page lists multiple databases including records from Ellis Island, Castle Garden in NY, Passenger records from New Orleans, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, as well as census records from the US, Canada, and Britain, in addition to Vital records and other assorted information that make it easier to locate that elusive relative. Steve

Morse has designed his own search engines for each of the sites he lists that are easier to use than then the search engines on the actual sites.

Using his Ellis Island search engine, I was able to find an aunt that came to the US in November of 1922. I had been unable to find my grandfather coming into the country, even though I was sure he was born in Europe, but with the information from the passenger lists, I determined that his first name must have been altered. When using most of the Morse site's search engines, you can limit the information you give them to search; for example you can put an "E" in for all spellings of what we spell as Elizabeth. My aunt's name was listed as Erszebet and it indicated she was going to live with her brother Malzas—a bad spelling of Mathias. With this information I will be able to track down additional information on his entry into the country.

Another site that is very good for searching vital records is run by the Church of Latter Day Saints, www.familysearch.org. They are updating their site to include records from Ohio court records to Florida state enumerations. I actually find that I have the most luck using the computers available at a Family History Center, such as the one in Plainview. Using their records, you can obtain copies of actual birth certificates for relatives without having to pay the high fees that the actual source would charge you. They will charge you for copies, but it is usually much less than you than you would pay otherwise.

In addition, there are members who will actually help you to determine where the records are held. The one thing I will mention is that the members will not try to convert you to their religion. They are only there to help you with your research.

A site that is maintained locally with many records is www.italiengen.org. They include databases for naturalizations and vital records for New York City as well as Nassau and Suffolk counties. These records are constantly being updated and are not limited to only those of Italian descent. They include on their site a form for obtaining actual copies of the records from the NYC Archives. I have found a great grandparent's death certificate number on this site and by using the Family History center obtained a copy of the actual certificate. It lists the cause of death as influenza on June 2, 1918 which appears to confirm another story that he had died in the flu epidemic of 1917 (which actually lasted several years).

Then as much as people think that going to cemeteries is for visiting immediate relatives graves, there is a great deal of information available if you can locate where your ancestors are buried. One of the easiest sites for this is www.findagrave.com. You can search this list by surnames, birth and/or death dates as well as location of the cemetery. You can also browse cemeteries for people who might be relatives of yours.

If you find one relative, it can be advantageous to actually visit the grave. Headstones often list multiple people, some of whom you may not recognize, and frequently families purchase graves near to each other. You might find an aunt or uncle just by looking at the next headstone. It used to be the custom that you would take rubbings (with charcoal) in order to keep the record of what the headstone indicates, but with digital cameras you can get better images of the headstone of interest as well as those neighboring yours for much less work. If you don't find your family on Find a grave you should try www.interment.net. Even though this site has fewer records than the other, it has multiple special collections you can search covering flooded cemeteries, California mission graveyards and Veteran's cemeteries.

Finally a site that most of us use on a daily basis, www.google.com, is a haven for a large amount of information. I recently began using this site to search out information about my relatives. While I have not yet been successful, the NEWS section of Google links you to articles in multiple newspapers around the world. By entering a name you can find articles from the very current to archives pre-dating 1910. The articles come from major newspapers

as well as some smaller ones and can give you an idea of what was occurring at the time of your ancestor's life. Comparing what you find or know about your family with what was going on in the world at the time can give you a real sense of what their lives were like. Google News can help you to locate information about the "black sheep" of your family by possibly showing you the newspaper articles indicating what helped to make them the "black sheep."

By researching your family, you can find out your history. You may be able to solve some family mysteries and prove your family stories. You can locate information about the possible murderer or embezzler as well as the great aunts and uncles who died in World War I. Since life is changing so quickly in this era of computers it helps us keep some things in perspective as you realize your great-grandfather came into the country with only \$10.00 in his pocket and no job waiting for him. Or that the census record indicates that the apartment your parents were born in had a rent of \$24.00 per month. Not all the information you want is available online but the search for what is, makes it fun.

From the August 2009 issue of ICON Graphic, newsletter of the ICON PC Users Group on Long Island. 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 (editor(at)iconpcug.org).

Media Notes

by Bill Petitt

Over the past few months I have been talking about Windows 7 and how much I like it. You might assume that I want the whole world to upgrade when Windows 7 rolls out. But I've lived long enough to know that what's best for me isn't necessarily what's best for everybody else. So when my friends and relatives ask me whether they should run and out buy Windows 7 and put it on their computers, my answer is "it depends."

For those who are currently running Vista, it's easier to give advice. If you can afford it, do it. Almost everyone I know who has gone from Vista to Windows 7 has been thrilled with the switch. If your computer will run Vista, it will almost certainly run Windows 7 (and it will probably run it faster and better). There will be some interface changes to get used to, but almost all of them are for the better. And as long as you have Service Pack 1 or higher installed, you can do an in-place upgrade and not even have to reinstall your applications.

However, for those who have stayed with XP, the answer to the question is more complex. In one way, you have a more compelling reason to upgrade: security. Whereas Vista already had many of the most important security features that Windows 7 has, XP doesn't. These include User Account Control, protected mode for Internet Explorer, and, as has been reported on numerous occasions, overall fewer security vulnerabilities found at each point in Vista's lifespan than for the equivalent period for XP.

However, if you diligently apply the service packs and patches as they're released and take normal precautions (make sure you have a firewall properly configured, anti-virus and anti-malware software installed, don't visit web sites that are likely to have malicious code - such as hacker sites, porn sites, and illegal music and software download sites—and don't open email attachments or click on links in messages from people you don't know and trust), XP is a reasonably secure OS for the average home user.

Although mainstream support for the operating system has ended, Microsoft will continue to issue security updates under its extended support policy until early 2014. So you have over four years before you have to worry about XP becoming unsafe to use. So, setting security aside, should XP users all jump ship now and "move on up?"

One of the biggest problems in upgrading for those who are currently running XP and don't want to buy a new computer is that, well, you can't. That is, you can't do an in-place upgrade

from XP to Windows 7. That leaves you three basic choices:

1. You can take the safest route (if you have enough disk space and it's partitioned) by installing Windows 7 as a second, dual booting operating system alongside XP. This gives you the opportunity to "ease into" the new operating system and build your Windows 7 empire slowly, confident in the knowledge that you can boot back into your old instance of XP whenever you want.
2. If you're the brave and adventurous type, you can wipe out XP completely and install a clean copy of Windows 7, using the Easy Transfer feature to save your settings so you won't have to reconfigure everything from scratch (but you will have to reinstall all your apps and you'll probably need to do it quickly, since you won't be able to just go back to XP when you need something that's not installed).
3. If you have plenty of time and money on your hands, you can do a multi-step upgrade. First you upgrade XP to Vista SP1 and then you upgrade Vista to Windows
4. This allows you to keep all your applications intact, but it requires that you buy a copy of Vista if you don't already have one, and it takes a bit of time (although arguably no more than reinstalling all the programs if you have a lot of them). You may run into application compatibility snags, though.

Before you opt for any of the above, though, you first need to consider whether your hardware is up to the task of supporting Windows 7. If you've had your XP computer for many years, you may not be able to find Win7 drivers for some of its components. That's one reason I'm telling those who are happy enough with XP to go slowly in considering an upgrade. If you're not the techie type who actually enjoys the process of getting things to work, the transition is likely to go more smoothly if you just wait until you buy a new computer and get one with Windows 7 pre-installed. That way, you'll be assured that everything is compatible.

After all, you'll already have enough to do, getting used to the new interface. While the step from Vista to Windows 7 is mostly a matter of discovering cool features that weren't there before, the switch from XP to Windows 7 involves discovering that many of the features you're used to using are gone, and getting used to a completely new way of doing things. Most folks, once they become familiar with it, find that the new interface allows them to do more and navigate around the OS more quickly - but the learning curve can be fairly steep and the difference is so great that some people just can't seem to adapt. Almost every one of the handful of people I've encountered who don't like Windows 7 were comparing it to XP, not to Vista.

When it comes down to it, the choice of operating system is always an individual one. You might have good reasons to upgrade to Windows 7 immediately or you might just like the new features. There's nothing wrong with that. But there's also nothing wrong with waiting a while. If XP does everything you need to do, and your computer is running well, and you have no particular hankering to be on the cutting edge, you can save some money (as well as the time you would spend doing the upgrade and learning the new OS) by sticking with the tried and true until you do have a reason to change. In fact, a recent survey performed by an electronics retailer showed that about half of PC users plan to take a "wait and see" approach.

Seven perfectly legal ways to get Windows 7 cheap (or even free)

Only suckers pay retail.

If you've read any reviews of Windows 7, you've seen references to its price list, which ranges from \$120 for a Home Premium upgrade to \$320 for a fully licensed copy of Windows 7 Ultimate.

Well, guess what? You don't have to pay that much. Most people have much better options

available, if you know where to look. As I've detailed here, the best deals go to PC manufacturers, which you benefit from if you buy a new PC.

But there are plenty of other discounts available as well. In this post, I've researched deals in three separate categories: upgrade offers available to anyone, special deals just for students, and subscriptions intended for technical professionals and developers.

Most of the details I include here apply to Windows customers in the United States, but some offers are also available in other countries. Where possible, I have tried to track down those details and include the names of countries where equivalent offers exist.

My goal in this post is to point you to deals that customers legitimately qualify for. I am not trying to encourage attempts by anyone to get away with something you're not entitled to. If there are restrictions for a specific offer, I've noted them here.

Ready to get started? Pick a category and go.

Up to 55% off: Windows Anytime Upgrade

Expires: Never

Who's eligible: Anyone running Windows 7 Starter, Home Basic, Home Premium, or Professional

If you custom-build a new PC, you can choose the exact Windows 7 edition you want on it. OEMs get the best pricing, so this is usually your best option. But if you purchase a preconfigured PC from an online or local retailer, you get whatever edition of Windows they chose to install on it, typically Windows 7 Home Premium for consumer PCs. Outside of the U.S., Western Europe, and other developed markets, you might get Home Basic, and on a netbook you can get the wimpy Starter edition.

Purchasing a full retail upgrade is one option, but the Anytime Upgrade option can be much cheaper. For instance, a retail upgrade of Windows 7 Professional costs \$199.99. If you have a PC with Windows 7 Home Premium already installed on it, you can buy the Anytime Upgrade option for \$89.95 direct from Microsoft. Likewise, you can go from Windows 7 Home Premium to Ultimate for \$139.95, which is a considerable savings over the \$219.99 retail upgrade price for Ultimate. (The full price list is here at the Microsoft Store http://store.microsoft.com/microsoft/Windows-Windows-7/category/102?WT.mc_id=msccomhpfeature_win7.) Online retailers like Newegg.com offer the same deal for a discount of a few bucks, although you have to wait for a physical box to be shipped.

Up to 58% Off: Windows 7 Home Premium Upgrade Family Pack

Expires: "Limited time offer" with no specific expiration date

Who's eligible: Any multi-PC household (international)

If you have two or more PCs in your home and you want to upgrade them to Windows 7, this deal is for you. This package is only available in a physical box and (according to Microsoft) only for a limited time. It includes two DVDs: one copy each of the 32-bit and 64-bit Windows 7 Home Premium upgrade installation media. You get a single product key that can be activated on up to three different PCs.

In the United States, I found the Family Pack at the Microsoft Store for \$150, but you should be able to pick it up elsewhere for a discount of at least \$10. Even if you only use two of the licenses and thus pay an average of \$75 apiece, this is a big savings over two single upgrade copies at \$120 each. If you use all three upgrades, the cost per machine is \$50 or less.

According to Microsoft, this offer is also available in Japan, Canada, Germany, the UK, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Sweden.

The license says you can install Family Pack upgrades on up to three PCs in the same household, for use by residents of that household. When I asked Microsoft whether it was OK

to use this license in a home business, I was told, officially, “There is no restriction around use of a license for business purposes conducted within the home,” although naturally they recommended Windows 7 Professional for those situations.

Nothing in the license prevents you from mixing and matching the 32-bit and 64-bit versions on up to three PCs in your household. But no, you can’t share licenses with your neighbor or your cousin in Peoria.

Up to 50% Off: Buy a new PC, upgrade your old PC for half off

Expires: January 2, 2010

Who’s eligible: Anyone who buys a new PC with Windows 7 from a participating retailer

Microsoft has publicized this deal on its website, but retailers seem a little shy about promoting it. When you buy a new desktop PC or laptop with Windows 7 included, you can buy a second upgrade copy of Windows 7 for use with another PC at a discount. The estimated price for a copy of Windows 7 Home Premium is \$49.99, Windows 7 Professional is \$99.99, and Windows 7 Ultimate is \$119.99.

According to Microsoft, the following merchants in the United States are participating: Fry’s, Newegg.com, Staples, Office Depot, Costco, Best Buy, Radio Shack, Amazon, Tiger Direct, Walmart, Buy.com, and The Microsoft Store.

If you go to Newegg, you’ll find the offer available as a Combo Deal with individual PCs. So, for example, if you buy a Toshiba Qosmio X505-Q830 you can pick up a second boxed retail upgrade of Windows 7 for \$70-100 off. I didn’t see any mention of the offer in this week’s local ad for Best Buy. Maybe a salesman would offer me this deal if I shopped at a local store.

Amazon.com offered the deal on this page, but I didn’t get any clue or pointer to this offer when I added a new PC to my shopping cart, and the promotional discount wasn’t applied to my order until I was ready to check out.

If you’re planning to buy a new PC anyway, this deal is worth it, but you might have to be persistent to get it.

Up to 85% off: The Windows 7 Academic Offer

Expires: January 3, 2010

Who’s eligible: College/university students (international)

If you are an eligible university student who attends an educational institution in the United States, you can purchase an upgrade edition of Windows 7 Home Premium or Windows 7 Professional for \$29.99. (That’s a huge savings from the regular price of \$119.99 or \$199.99, respectively.) You must be “actively enrolled in at least 0.5 course credit.” Full terms for the U.S. offer are here. Any college or university that gives you a .edu address qualifies, as do the eligible institutions on this list. If you don’t have a qualifying e-mail address, you can still apply by following these instructions http://ms.bluehornet.com/surveys/submit_y_id/en_us_7. To apply in the United States, start http://storemicrosoft.com/microsoft/Windows-Windows-7-category/102?WT.mc_id=sccomhpfeature_win7.

According to Microsoft, similar offers are also available in Japan, Canada, Germany, the UK, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Sweden.

Limitations? The deal is one copy per student. Digital download is fulfilled through Digital River, or you can pay \$13 extra for a physical disk. The offer is non-transferable, but the terms are curiously vague about whether you can sell or give away the software itself. This is not an academic or otherwise restricted license; it is the same upgrade package available via retail outlets.

Free: MSDN Academic Alliance

Expires: No expiration date

Who's eligible: College/university students in technical departments (international)

If you are enrolled in a science, technology, engineering, or math department at an educational institution that belongs to the MSDN Academic Alliance, you can get free software for use in your studies. (There are also similar offers for students in visual, illustration, design, and art departments.) The program also extends to members of IEEE and ACM. The list of available titles originally included Windows 7 Professional, but when word spread of this benefit, both organizations suddenly had a flood of new membership requests, virtually all of them from non-students looking for a freebie. That inspired this announcement from Microsoft's Academic Care blog.

The release of Windows 7 through these subscriptions triggered an unanticipated situation that put the program at risk: We saw signs that non-students were joining ACM and IEEE as student members solely to obtain Windows 7 through MSDN AA. This infringed on the intent of the program and the conditions of the MSDN AA license. As a result, we decided to remove Windows 7 from the association MSDN AA memberships while we evaluate approaches to ensure that the offering is reaching only the target audience: students and educators. While we expect to have a final position on the matter resolved in the near future, we cannot guarantee that Windows 7 will be available through this associations due to the complexity of student enrollment verification.

So, here's the bottom line: If you want to join IEEE or ACM, you won't get a free copy of Windows 7. But if you're a student in a technical or design course of studies, you might qualify and you should aggressively pursue your right to this benefit. You can find out whether your school is eligible by searching here. If you're an English or Political Science major or a non-student, you should look elsewhere.

Annual subscription: TechNet Plus

Expires: No expiration date

Who's eligible: Anyone (international)

If you're an IT pro, technical professional, journalist, or hobbyist, Microsoft has a program called TechNet Plus designed to give you access to a wide range of evaluation software for a single annual subscription fee. The price varies by country, and also by whether you're purchasing as an individual or on behalf of an organization. In the United States, the price is \$349 for the first year and \$249 annually for renewals. (Both of those prices are for download-only access; if you want DVDs shipped to you, you'll need to pay a higher price.)

What you get for that price is access to a staggering amount of software, including just about every version of Windows (desktop and server) ever made, along with past and current editions of Microsoft Office, developer tools, servers, and much more. You get multiple activations for most products—typically 10 product keys for every Windows and Office edition. You also get access to premium Microsoft support: two complimentary incidents per year.

The software and accompanying product keys don't expire. So if you decide next year not to renew your subscription, you can continue to use the software and keys you downloaded.

So what's the catch? Read the license agreement carefully! This software is NOT for use as a replacement for licenses on PCs you use at home or work. Here's what the FAQ says:

The license grants installation and use rights to one user only, for evaluation purposes, on any of the user's devices, this may include devices at home. Keep in mind that you may use the evaluation software only to evaluate it. You may not use it in a live operating environment, a staging environment, or with data that has not been sufficiently backed up. You may not use

the evaluation software for software development or in an application development environment.

For technical professionals who evaluate hardware and software professionally, or for hobbyists who want to play around with new technologies, this is a tremendous deal.

Annual subscription: Microsoft Developer Network (MSDN)

Expires: No expiration date

Who's eligible: Anyone (international)

The terms and benefits of an MSDN subscription are generally similar to those offered to TechNet subscribers, with a few crucial differences. The biggest difference is that MSDN is specifically intended for professional software developers. An annual subscription gives you access to a wide range of professional developer tools and pre-release products.

Every MSDN subscription includes access to the latest version of Windows with multiple activations. You can choose from different levels of MSDN subscriptions. The cheapest is the MSDN Operating Systems subscription, which costs \$699 for the first year and \$499 for renewals. It offers full access to Windows, toolkits, and SDKs. Prices go up for other editions: \$999 (\$649 renewal) for an Expression Professional subscription, for example, which is intended for designers and web developers and includes Windows, Office, Expression Studio, and Visual Studio Standard Edition.

Unlike TechNet licenses, which are strictly for evaluation, an MSDN Premium subscription specifically permits you to install and use one copy of the latest edition of Microsoft Office (currently Office Ultimate 2007), Project, SharePoint Designer, Visio Professional, and Office Communicator “for General Business Use ... on one machine for any purpose. The MSDN license agreement is detailed and worth reading in full. There's an excellent summary of your rights as a subscriber here. This paragraph is especially noteworthy:

Many MSDN subscribers use a computer for mixed use—both design, development, testing, and demonstration of your programs (the use allowed under the MSDN Subscription license) and some other use. Using the software in any other way, such as for doing email, playing games, or editing a document is another use and is not covered by the MSDN Subscription license. When this happens, the underlying operating system must also be licensed normally by purchasing a regular copy of Windows such as the one that came with a new OEM PC.

If you're a professional developer or designer who uses Microsoft products, MSDN subscriptions can be a bargain. If you just want cheap access to Windows 7, you have better options.

Well, you might be a little tired of me talking about Windows 7 so I'll end this now. Stay tuned – next month I'll take a look at MS Office 2010.



Silencing Windows

Q. How can I stop the sound I hear when I shut down my computer? I hate that sound, it's so annoying, it makes me want to throw my computer out the window! I'm using Windows XP, if it makes any difference.

A. Go to your Control Panel Sounds (or Sounds and Audio Devices Sounds) tab. You'll see all the various sounds listed, including one for "Exit Windows," so just click any that you don't want to hear and select "None" for the sound to be played. Click Apply OK when you're finished. From this point forward, the only things you'll hear will be the sounds of silence. (I feel a song coming on....)

Q. You've mentioned using MSCONFIG to disable programs that launch at startup, but the MSCONFIG utility doesn't seem to be present on my computer. How can I get it, or is that even possible?

A. Normally, to use MSCONFIG, you would click Start Run type MSCONFIG, press ENTER, then click the Startup tab. If your system doesn't have the MSCONFIG utility

(Microsoft omitted it from Windows 2000 for no apparent reason), or it's not functioning properly when you attempt to launch it, you're not out of luck.

A free utility called the Startup Control Panel ([www.mlin.net /StartupCPL.shtml](http://www.mlin.net/StartupCPL.shtml)) solves that problem. Double-click it after it's been downloaded and you'll be able to see every program that's launching automatically each time you start your computer. To enable an item, place a check mark next to it; to disable it, remove the check mark.

For more information about using MSCONFIG – which every PC user should be aware of—you are cordially invited to read my cleverly titled "MSCONFIG" article at <http://tinyurl.com/yea4tmg>.

Q. When I create Word documents, I sometimes have spelling errors, but I don't always catch them when I go back through a document looking for the red squiggly line that appears under each error. There must be a way to jump right to the errors, isn't there?

A. Yes, there sure is. Look for a little "book" icon on the Status bar, at the bottom of your Word document window. If the icon has an X on it, Word has detected a misspelled word or grammatically challenged sentence. Double-click the book icon to quickly move to the offending text. Right-click the book icon to configure options for spelling and grammar. Hint: The Word Status bar is a little sliver of a bar at the bottom of a Word document, just above the Windows Start button and Taskbar.

Q. I'm trying to print an Excel spreadsheet, but I cannot figure out how to avoid printing the letter and number designations along the top and left side of the sheet. I have tried redefining the print area to no avail. Do you have any suggestions?

A. You can select any print area you wish by highlighting it, but there is a little trick to it beyond that. If you don't want anything but the data on a spreadsheet to appear—no column or row headings or anything else—select the area you want to print, then click File Print Area Set Print Area. That will place a dotted line around your designated area. Click File Print Selection OK and only your selected text will print.

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

Intelligence Tests

Six IQ tests are just a mouse-click away, patiently waiting to torment you. Test No. 1 consists of 33 fill-ins such as "26 L of the A." You would naturally type in "letters of the alphabet." Piece of cake, right? (cackle, cackle) Tests 2 through 5 consist of the same type tests, each one being progressively more difficult. Be prepared to be humbled—very humbled. <http://intelligence-test.net>

Yugster

The concept here is simple: Yugster sells one product a day and when whatever quantity it has to sell is gone, that's it. For example, as I was writing this, yesterday the item of the day was a Plasma and LCD Care-Cleaning kit. At Best Buy, the retail price was \$36, but I could

buy it on Yugster for \$19. Lucky me. Today, the item du jour is an atomic digital clock with wireless weather forecaster for \$25.95, which is 50 percent less than what other retailers are offering this fine item for.

www.yugster.com

ZIPskinny

Get the skinny on any ZIP code. Simply enter your ZIP code to review U. S. Census data and comparisons with neighboring ZIPs. Information provided includes education, household income, occupations, age, sex, racial demographics, as well as some geographical information. It never hurts to know your neighborhood's latitude and longitude.

www.zipskinny.com

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From The DealsGuy

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

Just the Ticket For Dark Restaurants

If you haven't seen (or heard) them, you'd be impressed with "Talking Menus." I saw them at a food show some time ago, but haven't been to a restaurant that uses them. I've been to a few restaurants with a dark ambience and tried everything to see what was on the menu. These talking menus would be the answer, and according to the brochure, they can also tell you the nutritional facts if you are interested. Look them over at <http://www.talkingmenus.com>.

I could have asked them for a discount, but I doubt your budget would have tolerated a \$399 menu for your dinner table at home (from the prices in the booklet they gave me), and I doubt the cook offers multiple selections to choose from. Ask your favorite restaurant if they'll be getting them soon. We don't frequent the dark places much and our favorites, the fast-food places, don't need them. However, my wife has to read the menus behind the counter to me because the print is too small. Have you noticed that on their dollar menus?

Tool For Repairing Access Files

I ran this product back in March, but if you missed it at that time, DataNumen is now offering a 20% discount by using the coupon code DATA-E2OI-TWEN when ordering at <http://www.datanumen.com/aar/order.htm>.

This is a better deal than the discount last March which was only 10%. The discount code may also work for ordering their products for repairing Excel and Word; and for the Outlook and Outlook Express files. Check their Web site for descriptions of the products. The version for Access is 2.1, updated from the one in March.

How's Your Battery Doing?

Hewie Poplock of Central Florida Computer Society <http://www.cfcs.org> mentioned this product to the members of his SIG (Special Interest Group) and it sounded to me like something that my readers might be interested in, considering the proliferation of laptop use these days. According to their product page, "BatteryCare is a free utility that gives you much more information about your battery than how much charge you have left for the current session: The app changes power profiles for you when you connect your laptop to a power

source, lets you know how many recharge cycles your battery has left, and more, all for free.” I know my laptop is not accurate about its remaining time, but I have not used it very much while depending entirely on its battery.

It sounds like a handy product, and how could you go wrong if it’s free. However, the developer does appreciate any donations to help keep his work going. Makes sense to me. <<http://batterycare.bkspot.com/en/index.html>>

Having problems reading the screen?

A while back, I read a review of DeskTopZoom written by Bonnie Snyder in Bits of Bytes, newsletter of the Pikes Peak Computer Application Society of Colorado Springs <<http://ppcompas.apcug.org/bb0903.pdf#page=5>>. This product does a good job of giving you options for enlarging parts of your screen for easier reading, or to study something you can’t see very well on a page. It does have a few shortcomings, but all in all, she speaks highly of it, and the price is “nada.” If you would like to find out more, read her article in the above link, or go to <<http://www.softpedia.com/get/Desktop-Enhancements/Other-Desktop-Enhancements/DesktopZoom.shtml>>. There may be improvements since her review was written.

Magnifier You May Already Have!

Let’s say that you sometimes need simple magnification for something. Like me, you may not have known about the screen magnifier in XP. It’s nothing exciting, but simply click “All Programs, then Accessories, then click Accessibility” and you’ll find Magnifier. I tried it and it’s pretty basic, but I’m told that more information about it is on the Microsoft Web site. The article I read said there’s a link for that, but I didn’t see it. On my screen, large text appeared at the top with a large cursor, and while there wasn’t much magnified screen area, I was able to make use of it. Try it; it may be all you need. Clicking “exit” stops it.

1964 Has Finally Arrived

by Bruce Preston

President, West Mountain Systems, Inc., long-term board member of DACS and conducted the Random Access sessions at the General Meetings as well as chaired the Microsoft Access SIG.

One of the ‘Gee-Whiz’ attractions at the 1964 New York World’s Fair was the AT&T Picturephone http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Videophone#AT.26T_Picturephone which people eagerly awaited for availability. And waited. And waited.

For a while I have been using Microsoft’s Live Messenger instant messaging service, and while it supports video, I have never been really happy with it—audio/video quality were marginal. In addition, Windows Live Messenger (and its predecessors, Windows Messenger MSN Messenger) doesn’t support Mac, and our son Scott, who is away at college, prefers a Mac. He suggested that I try Skype instead. I installed it about a month ago and have found it to be easy to use and have much better video and audio quality. The icing on the cake is that for Skype-to-Skype calls, it is 100% free as well.

What you need: To start with, you need a broadband connection - cable or DSL, both work fine. To support voice calling you need a microphone and speakers. If you want video capability, you also need a webcam. For smooth video a USB 2 webcam is recommended. We recently outfitted my wife’s notebook and her sister’s desktop with webcams from MicroCenter.com—inBook WB-7144 HD Webcam 2-pack—two USB 2 webcams with integral microphone, as of this writing the two-pack is \$39.99 + S/H. http://www.microcenter.com/ingle_product_results.phtml?product_id=0308734

It works fine over WiFi (802.11g) at both ends. Windows XP and Windows Vista both recognized the hardware and did not require an installation CD, although the product comes

with a pair of identical CDs with ArcSoft photo editing/cataloging software and drivers for earlier versions of Windows. The base of the camera has three spring-loaded fingers which can grasp the top of a flat screen monitor or notebook.

The Skype software is a straightforward download and install. About the only decision you have to make is whether to install the Google Toolbar (which is installed by default.) I declined—dislike add-on browser toolbars. You need to create and register a Skype name (not your e-mail address) and pick a password (at least 6 characters having at least one digit.) You need to provide a valid e-mail address for use in recovering forgotten password.

For Windows, Skype installs yet another little icon in the system tray down by the clock—but I have found it to be low-impact upon my machine so I have left it active. The image of the icon changes depending upon your computer's status—available for incoming calls, offline, do-not-disturb, etc. The same icons appear next to entries in your contact list showing their availability.

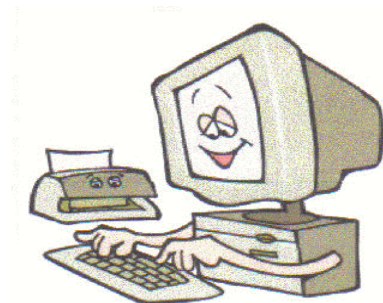
To populate your contact list, you need to provide either the Skype name or e-mail address of the other party. That's about it. Click on an entry in your contact list, select CALL (for a voice only call) or VIDEO CALL (for voice + video) and within about 5 seconds the other end will ring and your correspondent can elect what type of call to accept.

During a video call you have a large image of your correspondent. On a 1024x768 I am going to guess that it is near 800x600. A smaller picture-in-picture image at the lower left displays what your correspondent sees. There is a small window within which you may type text a la instant messaging.

Recently I was having problems with establishing an account on a service, I couldn't make out the CAPTCHA distorted letters. (As some of you know, I am legally blind.) I called Scott planning on asking him to create the account for me. He pointed out that there was a "share my screen" capability in Skype. I did so, he read the characters for me, and I was able to continue. Nice!

As mentioned earlier, Skype-to-Skype calls are free. There is a charge for Skype to other types of telephone service, i.e. landline, cell etc. I haven't needed that. Lastly, some years ago eBay purchased controlling interest in Skype thinking that buyers and sellers would use it during the auction process—questions about items prior to the sale, shipping instructions after, etc. It never took off. Recently eBay sold most of their interest to an investors group led by Mark Andreessen (originator of Netscape) but the founding partners of Skype sued eBay claiming that eBay had violated the contract. That's up in the air, but it is highly improbable that the service will 'go away' It will be interesting to watch the case work its way through the courts.

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by David D. Uffer

Chicago Computer Society, IL

There come times in users' lives when they want to let some experiences out to be shared with others more—or less—fortunate. The intent would be to shepherd toward or warn against having similar experiences. Sort of like a personal *Consumer Reports*. It may be that other users have similar feelings of wanting to share desires, expectations, and outcomes, to share them here for the benefit of other CCS members.

If so, it may be that I can persuade the editors of *Hard-Copy* to collect and publish honest accounts from time to time, accounts with sufficient detail to be verified. If you have joyful or woeful experiences, not opinions, to pass along here, send e-mail accounts to Beata Kernan at admin1@ccs.org for her to transmit to me. Be sure to start the Subject line with “OKK,” from the title above. Remember that she is a sensitive lady of fine breeding who would be put off by raucous or violent comment.

Hail to Nuance, makers of *OmniScan*

That's hail as in hailstorms or hail stones. Maybe kick some gravel their way too. I have recently come from repeated attempts to exercise my gullibility. I am mature enough to recall when optical character recognition was a wonder to behold. One could scan a document—even with an early scanner—and pass the image to one of several OCR programs of the era, each advertising an accuracy rate above 85%. Rates rose and OCR programs dwindled. *OmniScan* swallowed its major competitor becoming preeminent, outstanding in the field. (Gets wet when it rains.)

It is now in Version 17, claiming another step, just short of perfection and ever more options in access and usage. I was hooked again, hoping this upgrade would solve the non-workability problems of my current version. Though many sources are now digital, there are still times when it would be useful to convert text and graphics on paper to digital media. So I tried to order it, first by e-mail, then by phone.

My e-mail responses to their special offer were stymied at the final ordering stage by their repeated untrue judgements of false information from me. Repeated attempts to order by phone reached only the famous “All of our representatives are busy” routine. Exactly the same for Ordering, Customer Service, and Support. Then at the end of their semi-hidden Contact Us option, their Submit command failed to send. I caught on. I was to submit to their impenetrability, unavailable.

I recalled having similar problems seeking their Support for my current version, then giving up. I'd surmise that their staff, if any, is not available to the public (maybe soggy from the rain). Their strengths, if any, must lie elsewhere, probably in advertising. The phrase, “A plague upon them” comes to my mind.

A Couple Kudos to Epson for their Stylus CX7000F

I got this printer-copier-scanner-fax machine to save footprint space and on the sincere, personal recommendation of a salesman at Micro Center, who had recently bought his own and was happy with it. It worked well and reliably for some months, sipping its costly ink cartridges like martinis. It was clearly designed for younger eyes, able to catch its status messages zipping across its narrow display. Older eyes were consigned to trek through its ample manual. Finally it developed misfeeds and balky behavior, neither covered in the manual nor explainable by their ever-helpful support team, located offshore in the Philippines.

On that final, clear call, clear over to Manila, when the young tech rep was no longer able to find assistance in Epson's extensive knowledge base, he set in motion a process which very soon delivered a new CX7000F with instructions on returning the faulty one—all for free. A pleasant surprise. I credit Epson for a pretty good machine and wonderful tech support.

Kudos to Canon for their MX850 All-in-One

Canon seems to do well across the board in the ratings games. It's a dependable choice. My MX850 printer-copier-scanner-fax machine does it all, well, and fast. It has two paper magazines: the usual one angled in back and a second horizontal holder secreted beneath, which can handle two-sided printing. Its 1.5 x 2 inch display is stable, readable, and presents extensive options and instructions so one needs less to read its online manual.

The Canon has five ink cartridges, the usual three colors and a black, all rather small, plus one larger black since most of users' printing is black. Initial hooking up is well-explained and Canon uses instruction sets which are already provided in Windows XP and probably in Vista, for those who tread there; they are also supplied for other operating systems, including Apple's, in a furnished CD.

And then one day, one dreary day as I was struggling with the subtle obscurities of sending faxes with WinFax Pro [and I drop a kick their way too, for non-ease of use], I resumed an aborted attempt to send a test fax and found I was then treading upon an ongoing voice call from elsewhere in the house, a threat to domestic bliss. In panic, my fingers wandered idly over the groups of keys, much as in Sir Arthur Sullivan's immortal song, "The Lost Chord." Nothing stopped the beeping nor would turn it off. But that was it: I pulled the last cord.

Then my marvelous MX850 misbehaved. After a series of off-ons, it settled into a state of reluctant, initially cooperative starts, always turning in less than a minute from any other mode—printer, copier, scanner—into the fax mode, then stalled after a jump and a hiccup. I tried to live with it for awhile by doing starts and quick printing or copying. Unaware that the 1-year warranty was approaching, then at, expiration, I gave up and called Canon.

The live tech support rep, ever gracious, speaking perfect English, and located in a large support facility in Virginia, diagnosed the problem as corrupted memory in the MX850, which was beyond telephonic repair. So he immediately generated an express shipment, free both directions, of an exchange replacement. Upon its arrival, another tech support rep exercised monumental patience and walked me through reinstallation of the machine and its accessories—and as I crawled along the floor, tracing cables and checking proper connections.

My MX850 is once again a marvelous all-in-one, though it still has an appetite for new ink cartridges and displays gentle reminders on my monitor of their current status as their need develops. One of the English definitions of (small "c") "canon" is an accepted principle or rule. From my experience and for me, the capitalized term carries the reputation of highly-rated products backed by enviably impressive support. Though it sounds like a commercial, to me, Canon rules. As does the customer. So it should be.

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The Egg & You: These "eggs" are subversive and fun!

by Charles W. Evans

HAL-PC Org. Houston, TX

Crack one open.

Did you ever marvel at the engineering of an egg? What else makes an egg so

fascinating, you ask? Enjoy these web sites, from real eggs to man-made eggs, including the “care and feeding” of eggs!

1. I hope you don't think computer programmers are dry as bones and boring as cactus. The fact is, sometimes they will just outright surprise you. Buried within many software applications are delightful, little, hidden, amusing tidbits called “Easter Eggs.” Some are ordinary and others will amaze you. Several seasons of “Lost” have eggs. Learn where to find them at: www.eeggs.com.
2. Next time you crack a farm fresh egg, think about the road it traveled from the hen pen to your plate and all the stuff along the way, plus egg safety. Surf to: www.aeb.org.
3. OK, before you read #5 and for those who are chronically egg-chef challenged, the eternal question is now answered here, plus egg selection, separating, poaching (eggs, not deer), etc. Yah, yah, I know, real men don't “separate” eggs, but this site will show you how, for those times when you are alone! Surf to: www.fabulousfoods.com/school/csingred/eggs.html or www.joyofbaking.com/eggs.html.
4. And now for something completely different. Magnificent manmade eggs, courtesy of Mr. Faberge of Russia. Surf to: www.pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld/faberge/fmain.html.
5. The flames of your passion, or whimsy, will explode because there is an egg recipe for all occasions, all tastes and all people. Surf to: www.recipelink.com/rcpeggs.html

I know, I know, enough is enough, but I thought this brief foray would be eggsactly perfect to break the doldrums of working at your computer...and the tedium of thinking about your taxes.

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Top Five Computer Upgrades

by Bob Rankin

So your friends are all getting new computers, but you can't afford one. That doesn't mean you can't breathe some new life into your old boat anchor. Whether your goal is to upgrade without breaking the bank, or just burn through a wad of cash, here are five computer upgrades that you may enjoy, justify as productivity enhancements, even write off as business expenses!

Memory Upgrades

More RAM memory is a good investment, up to a point. An average home user, who does email, web surfing and word processing, can generally stop at 2 GB. If you run multiple programs, do graphics-intensive work with Photoshop or video editing, up to 4 GB of RAM will help enormously. If you do 3D modeling or play high-speed games all day then go up to 8 GB of RAM. A 64-bit operating system requires at least 4 GB of RAM to perform its best.

If you're looking for additional speed, and you can afford to upgrade only one component of your computer, adding RAM will be the most cost-effective thing you can do. You can find two gigs of RAM for under \$50 online. It's not hard to do, either. See my related article Adding Memory to find out how much RAM you have now, what kind you need, where to buy it, and how to install it.



Upgrading Hard Drive Capacity

A bigger hard drive is a good idea if your current one is more than 70 per cent full. Hard drives don't work as hard, and therefore last longer, if they have lots of room in which to spread out data. One of the best performance enhancements you can make is a faster hard drive. One that spins at 7200 rpm will find, read, and write data 33 per cent faster than a standard 5400 rpm drive, and costs very little more.

How much hard drive space should you have? You might be using only 50GB of space on your current drive, but technology and economy of scale have made it silly to buy any drive under 200 gigs. At TigerDirect, for example, an 80GB drive costs \$39, while a 250GB drive is only \$5 more, and 500GB drives go for under \$60. But why stop there? You can get a 1-terabyte drive (1000 gigabytes) for under \$100. External drives, which simply plug into a USB port, are equally affordable, and can expand your storage capacity without having to open the system unit and mess around with wires.

CD/DVD Drive Upgrades

CD and DVD drives are another story. If you mainly read data from optical disks then a faster drive is appealing. But a 54x drive won't do you any good when it comes to burning your own disks. In fact, you may ruin a lot of bland disks if you try to burn faster than 16x. A Blu-ray drive, the very latest and largest capacity optical drive standard, makes a good investment if speed and high capacity are of utmost importance to you, or if you want to watch Blu-ray movies on your computer.

Whatever you choose, be sure it reads and writes CD and DVD formats of all kinds. Expect to pay around \$50 for CD/DVD drive that can read, play and burn.

Replacing Your Video Card

If you do a lot of gaming or watch high-definition video on your computer, a high-performance video card will be a good investment. Many manufacturers cram their video cards full of RAM, which is cheap relative to intelligent graphics technology. More RAM does not mean "faster," necessarily. Research the graphics processor units (GPU) on the market to see which performs best for your needs at any given amount of RAM. The GPU is the key to a good video card.

If you're just looking to replace the low-end graphics card that came pre-installed with your computer, then something in the \$50 price range will do nicely. But make sure you know what type of card to buy before you shop, because they're not all interchangeable. You'll find PCI video cards in older systems, and AGP or PCI Express in newer ones.

Upgrade Your Monitor

Personally, I find the biggest productivity bang for the buck in supersizing my display. My office setup features 24-inch dual monitors, but anything is better than the clunky old 15-inch monitor that came with your system. A "large" monitor nowadays is 23 inches or more; and that's where the price jumps, too. Most modern computers and operating systems support dual displays, which can be smaller while adding up to more pixels (displayable space). Some applications just beg for a large monitor—Adobe Dreamweaver; AutoCAD; Photoshop; QuarkXpress and other graphics-intensive things.

But many people find two monitors—or even more—help them partition their open applications and their attention to each group. You can have "work" on one monitor and "other" on a second, i.e., Twitter, weather, stock quotes, sports news, etc. You can also use a digital TV as a computer monitor with an HDMI cable and connector; imagine gaming on a 43" screen! Prices on 22-inch displays have dropped recently, to under \$200. But you can add a

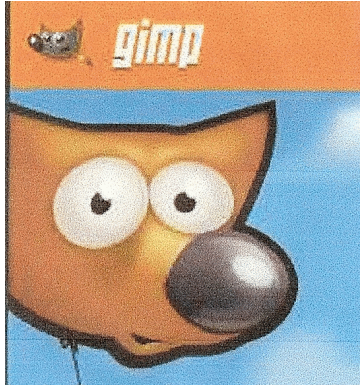
19-incher to your existing setup for a little over \$100. Those slick 30-inch displays you see in the Apple stores will run you \$1799.

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GIMP

by Paul Braget

Olympia Microcomputer Users Group, Olympia, WA



It is awesome what one can do with a camera today. With a camera in hand and a photo manipulation editor/program (application), one could only imagine what may be next on the to-do list. It enlarges our world, especially with open access to various editing tools. One of the tools that will work with multiple platforms (e.g. Windows, Mac, Linux, Unix) is the GIMP.

GIMP (The GNU Image Manipulation Program) is a free software raster graphics editor. Primarily, GIMP is used as a tool for photo manipulations, such as resizing, editing, and cropping photos, combining multiple images, and converting between different image formats.

I was first introduced to this graphical program by a fellow student while working at the resource center (computer lab) at South Puget Sound Community College in 1997. It allowed us to work in the graphic arts field without spending tons of cash.

In the media, this popular application caught the attention of many in the photography field. As a popular application, GIMP is regularly reviewed and criticized, the reviews often targeting the fitness of GIMP for use in professional environments; for example, GIMP is often cited as a replacement for Adobe Photoshop. Even though comparisons to Photoshop are of regular occurrence, the maintainers of GIMP state that GIMP does not aim to replicate Photoshop.

A Google search for “Gimp vs Photoshop” in quotes currently shows 8,750 hits on my Ubuntu Machine (8.04) using the FireFox search option. I’ve been seeing this flame war going on since the turn of the century. A use of a program should not be judged by (flame wars) quantity (or how many sold), but should be utilized for its quality (price vs performance).

Photoshop costs around \$700 these days, and GIMP is free, so of course if cost is a main factor you’re going to swerve towards GIMP. But—and you knew there was a ‘but’ coming—it’s not that simple. Photoshop has two leads over GIMP: (1) patented features, and (2) the interface that everyone is used to. Most especially, GIMP is out of the running for professional print shop editing, thanks to the patent lock on industrial features such as color correction and CMYK. GIMP can emulate these features with work-arounds, or it can get sued, and that’s all there is to it.

A common misperception is that GIMP lacks many more features that Photoshop has. In fact, with the exception of features that depend on patented algorithms, Gimp is 99% on par with Photoshop in capabilities. It’s just that Photoshop users try Gimp, are immediately lost in the different and somewhat baroque interface, and leave in terror. Having the features doesn’t do you much good if you can’t find them!

Oki-doki, now that the comparisons have been made short and sweet, one might ask, “Where can I find this Graphical Image Manipulation Program?” It comes with the Ubuntu operating system as part of a packaged deal. Or the links below will guide you to your favorite operating system platform.

Installers for GIMP on Windows: <http://gimp-win.sourceforge.net/stable.html>

For help in getting started with GIMP, online tutorials abound:

Regular tutorials: <http://www.gimp-tutorials.com/>

Video tutorials: http://sixrevisions.com/graphics-design/gimp_video_tutorials/

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Society News

President's Column

by Steve Staub, President

This month this column should read there's a silver lining in every gray cloud. The Planning meeting was moved from Sally's house to the small room in the Brighton Library. This room holds 2 people comfortably and we put 7 people in it. We always say our meetings are open to all club members. We had a guest Charlotte Baker who became our silver lining. After the meeting she volunteered to help us by being part of a new committee, publicity. She will contact area newspapers letting their readers know where we are meeting. Thanks, Charlotte.

At that meeting we found out we have a second gray cloud over us. We were told we could not use the meeting room in Brighton this month and every room in the area was already booked. Bob Avery found us a place. It's a hard place to find and half of the 22 people in attendance came late. The silver lining came in the form of our treasurer Arpad Kovacs. His presentation of "Gifts and Gadgets" made the night. He presented the latest in computers, phones, and digital cameras. Thanks, Arpad.

We welcome our newest member David Youngman. I want to thank the following members for renewing their membership. Ray Newell, Sarah Blankenship, Robert Best, Charles Rinehart, Charlotte Baker, Hanne Ramsager, and Bill Gagnier.

Members please check the back cover by your address for your expiration date. There are several members who are late in renewing their membership.

November Planning Meeting

by Sarah Blankenship, Secretary

Steve Staub led the Planning meeting held at Brighton Public Library, November 3rd. Others in attendance were Bob Avery, Charlotte Baker, Arpad Kovacs, Sarah Blankenship, Tony Dellelo, and Dan Rothfuss.

The December meeting will feature the annual Jeopardy program, which will have two rounds. The December meeting will take place in the Braman Room of the Penfield Library, 1985 Baird Road. Please feel free to bring desserts or cookies, and coffee will be made available.

Apologies from the Newsletter assembly team are extended to the club members. There were a few reports at the Planning meeting of newsletters that were missing sections, mis-stapled, or busted.

The Board would also like to address a pressing matter with the newsletter. The newsletter can be a very expensive item to produce. It takes a lot of hard work, and many people volunteering, but it is also a financial strain on the club. Steve would like to present computer vendors, region-wide, with the opportunity to purchase advertising space in the newsletter. This would help to reduce the cost to the club for the newsletter as well as free up club funding for other uses.

If you have ideas for future presentations, or you wish to present yourself, talk to Mike Lavelle.

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. Also, if you are not renewing this year, please tell us why—the board would like to know how we can serve you better.

See you at the December meeting, and Happy Holidays!

Help's Half Hour

Led by: Dan Rothfuss

Recorded by: Jan Rothfuss

Q: Any experience with the new Windows 7?

A: Dan shared his very positive experience as he upgraded his two machines from Vista to Windows 7. It is the best operating system that he has used. For \$150 he could update up to three machines. It takes some time to prepare your machine and a bit more to get the system in shape (five hours). But, after that, all has been well. The majority of his Vista-friendly programs work under Windows 7. Yes, he did a full backup before he began. After installation, he now has 10 more gig of hard drive available.

Q: Anyone has experience with an eSATA external hard drive? He will be using the 500 gb drive to store his files.

A: No one had any experience. It is supposed to be faster than a USB model.

Q: Has anyone used Ubuntu?

A: Steve has it installed on his machine but has not really used it. He recommended joining the Linux SIG group on Thursdays.

Q: How can you transfer a PowerPoint presentation to a DVD that can be shown in a DVD player?

A: You should be able to drag and drop the file but would need PowerPoint to display it. A PDF file may work. You could copy the entire file and copy it as a sequence of JPG files. Arpad recommended converting the presentation to a Flash item. If the PowerPoint program is version 2007, there may be an option to create a video.

Q: One member reported that a blank CD is not recognized by his drive. What is wrong? Other disks play just fine.

A: It was suggested that he download one of the free CD burning software programs. It should recognize the blank CD.

The Lighter Side

A friend of mine just bought a new computer and asked me to show him how to download programs off the web. The poor guy is completely clueless with anything computer related. I showed him a couple of the more popular sites and started a download. While waiting, I made the comment about how slow telephone access can be. He stared at the paper sheet icon move between the world and folder icons for a few moments, and then said: "Well if you move the folder closer to the Earth, then the program won't have as far to travel, and it'll download faster." I nearly fell out of my chair.