The Rochester Computer Society, Inc.

MONITOR

Vol. 27, No. 11

November 2009

Next Meeting
Tuesday, November 10
Gifts and Gadgets for the Holidays

Contents

apcug
Member of
the Association of
Personal Computer User Groups

How Do I Print to a File Instead of a Printer?

"Often I compose a letter in Word, then paste the text into an email. But all the formatting (and sometimes images) are lost when my friends view it. Can I somehow capture in a file, exactly what WOULD appear on the printed page, then send that instead?"

by Bob Rankin

I understand this frustration, since I deal with many people around the globe who have a variety of email software, word processing and operating systems. A beautifully formatted document such as a birthday greeting; business proposal; term paper; etc., *should* appear to the reader exactly as the author prepared it.

It's a work of art, after all. Sometimes, precise reproduction from author to reader is essential, as with blueprints. Generally, people print on paper what they want to be read precisely. But there are problems with paper printing.

First, it takes paper, which is not cheap. Ink or laser toner is even more expensive, not to mention the new hot-dye printers for photographs. You always run out of one thing or another when you get to the 98th page of a 100 page document, too. That means a trip to the office supply store, and suffering if what you need is out of stock. Then you have to get the paper to the reader(s).

You could just attach and email the original Word document, spreadsheet, etc. But that doesn't guarantee that it will be rendered correctly on the receiving side. Due to differences in software, application versions, available fonts, and other factors, it could end up looking much different than you intended. If you have a PC, and your friend has a Mac or Linux computer, the odds are even worse.

If you could scan each printed page, and save it as an image file, that would solve the problem, albeit with a lot of extra hassle. So how do you EASILY get that precision "printing" in a data file that can be emailed? Fortunately, there are several ways, all of them free.

Image Writer and PDF Format

For Microsoft Office users, there is a "printer" driver called Microsoft Document Image Writer. It was installed by default when you installed MS Office. Just select Print in any Office application, click on the pulldown menu arrow in the Printer Name field, and select Microsoft Document Image Writer as the printer for this particular job. Then click OK to print. Instead of sending the data to your default printer, it will be saved in an image file.

Image Writer will use the existing document file name, but you have an opportunity to change that if you wish. You can also change the default TIFF image format to the MDI (Microsoft Document Imaging) compressed format.

The problem with both Image Writer formats is that they are monochrome only, and no more than 300 dpi. For full color, higher resolution "printed" files, you can use the Portable Document Format (PDF) standard invented by Adobe Corp. There are other advantages to using the PDF format, too.

First, the readers to whom you wish to send "printed" files may not use Microsoft Office, or even Windows. PDF is a universal standard that virtually any operating system can read with some viewer program or another. Second, many PDF printer drivers let you set a password on the PDF file you create. You can communicate this password to the intended recipients separately from the email transmitting the file. Now only people who have the password can view the PDF file, a nice security feature.

Bullzip Free PDF Printer Driver <http://www.bullzip.com/products/pdf/info .php> is a good example of this breed. It also supports printing to image formats including BMP, JPG, etc.

PDFCreator <http://sourceforge.net/projects/pdfcreator/> is an open source (free) addon, and users say it works just as well as the $700 Adobe Acrobat suite for simply creating PDF files from other documents.

Print to a file, email it, and save a copy to your hard drive. That sounds much easier, cheaper, and more environmentally responsible than paper, postage, and file cabinets, doesn't it?

From the 20 October 2009 issue of TOURBUS. *To subscribe go to http://internettourbus.com/tickets.html*

Things You Can Do with That Flash Drive

by Ira Wilsker

Ira Wilsker is an APCUG Director, Columnist for The Examiner*, Beaumont, TX and Radio Talk Show Host.*

With the demise of the floppy disk, and the approaching demise of the CD disc for data purposes, the USB flash drive has become the de facto method of saving and transporting files between computers. These small USB drives are known by a variety of monikers, such as flash drive, pen drive, pin drive, and thumb drive. Since their introduction a few years ago, their capacity has increased, and their prices have plunged. They are readily available in the big box stores, discount stores, club stores, and online. The most recent ones I purchased for the holidays were 8 gig size (almost the equivalent of the data stored on 2 standard DVD discs, about a dozen CD discs, or about 5700 floppy disks), and cost under $15 each. In the after-Christmas sales, some 8 gig flash drives were advertised for $9 each (after rebate). This amount of nonvolatile storage for the price was inconceivable just a few years ago.

I thought I was getting a bargain a few years ago when I bought my first flash drive, a 64mb Lexar, for$49, and now a drive with about 64times that capacity is about one fourth the price! I have co-workers and students who wear their flash drives on cords around their necks, where they are referred to as "geek beads." Most of us use the drive simply for portable storage, the ability to carry files around with us, but in reality these flash drives can do much more than to simply be used for storage.

Most of the USB flash drives on the market today comply with the USB 2.0 standard for high-speed transfer, while there still area few inexpensive, low capacity drives that are of the slower USB 1.1speed standard, or only about 3% of the speed of the USB 2.0 drives. From a practical viewpoint, the user will not notice any significant difference in speed if small files are saved and read, but will notice a difference if large files are used. There are some other standards for USB flash drives that many users may find beneficial, if their flash drives have the capabilities. Users of Microsoft Vista (Home Basic, Home Premium, Business, and Ultimate versions) may find it advantageous to purchase flash drives that are labeled as (http://www.microsoft.com/windows /windows-vista/features/readyboost.aspx).

According to Microsoft, "Windows Vista introduces Windows ReadyBoost, a new concept in adding memory to a system. You can use nonvolatile flash memory, such as that on a universal serial bus (USB) flash drive, to improve performance without having to add additional memory "under the hood." If the drive is compatible with the Ready Boost standard, some of the flash memory in the drive can effectively and temporarily be added to the RAM (memory) installed in the computer, with an improvement on performance.

If the Vista user with a compatible flash drive right clicks on the flash drive letter displayed under "My Computer" or Windows Explorer, and then left clicks on Properties - ReadyBoost, Vista will recommend how much of the available memory on the drive can be effectively and safely utilized by Vista. Other data stored on the ReadyBoost drive is protected from damage, and will not be harmed if the drive is used as a ReadyBoost drive. Because of the higher performance requirements, ReadyBoost compatible flash drives are slightly more expensive than standard drives, but are often the least expensive way to add memory to a Vista computer.

Another useful feature often found on a USB flash drive is known as "U3" (http://u3.sandisk.com/download /Download_no.asp). Drives that are U3 compatible are labeled as such. A U3 powered flash drive allows the user to carry special versions of hundreds of programs on the flash drive that can be run directly from the flash drive without being installed on the computer. This is an effective way to carry the actual software the user is familiar with, and run it on other computers. When unplugged from the computer, U3 leaves no data or other information on the computer that was used. Some of the popular programs that come in U3 formats are the Firefox browser, Skype telephone, McAfee Antivirus (about $15), RoboForm Password Manager, Open Office (the comprehensive suite of office software including a Microsoft compatible word processor, spreadsheet, presentation program, database, and more, free), Thunderbird e-mail client, and dozens of games.

Most U3 drives come preinstalled with password protection and a "U3 Launchpad" which is a menu-driven directory of the software on the U3 drive.

For those of us who have standard non-U3 drives, there is now an alternative that provides for the same functionality. This alternative to U3 that will run on almost all contemporary flash drives is called "Portable Apps," and

can be found online at, http://portableapps.com. According to the Portable Apps website, "A portable app is a computer program that you can carry around with you on a portable device and use on any Windows computer."

When your USB flash drive, portable hard drive, iPod or other portable device is plugged in, you have access to your software and personal data just as you would on your own PC. And when you unplug the device, none of your personal data is left behind." Dozens of portable apps are available, including the Firefox browser, OpenOffice office suite, antivirus software, games, password managers, and many other pieces of software. The Portable App Suite is totally free, and does not contain any spyware or adware. In addition to the bundled suite, there are many other programs available, almost all free, which will run as portable apps.

The Portable App website keeps a running tally of new software that is available, including new releases and versions, as well as beta (pre-release) software. A simple click will install the selected software on the flash drive. Now that many of us are routinely carrying flash drives, it is nice to know that they may be capable of doing much more for us than just transport data.

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 (Iwilsker (at) apcug.ne).

Media Notes

by Bill Petitt
Southeast Virginia Computer Group

I'm putting this article together the week before I head up to New Hampshire and New York. Today Microsoft releases its new baby - Windows 7. So far, it looks like they have done a much better job of getting it ready than they did for Vista. I know I'm much happier with it.

How to prevent CAPS LOCK frustration in XP

I occasionally get mail from people who are frustrated because, due to their keyboard layouts or their own typing style, they are constantly hitting the CAPS LOCK key without intending to do so. If you never use it and it just gets in your way, you can disable it. You can manually edit the registry to disable it or you can download a .reg file to do so automatically:

http://www.wxpnews.com/1YMWKW/090901-Caps-Lock

If you don't want to disable it, another solution to the problem is to turn on Toggle Keys:

Click Start | Control Panel

In Classic View, click Accessibility Options.

In the dialog box, click the Keyboard tab.

Click the ToggleKeys box to check it.

Now when you hit CAPS LOCK, you'll hear a beep so you won't go blithely on typing in all caps. When you hear the beep, just hit CAPS LOCK again to go back to normal lowercase typing. Note that ToggleKeys also sounds a beep when you hit Scroll Lock or Num Lock.

Making Movies Made Easy: Windows Live MovieMaker

Last month, Microsoft's video editing program, Windows Live MovieMaker, came out of beta and is available to the general public to download and use. You might be familiar with the previous version, Windows Movie Maker, but this one has a whole new look and some great new features. It's received some excellent reviews and is being compared favorably to Apple's iMovie: Best of all, it's free. You can install it on Vista or Windows 7, but unfortunately for Windows XP users, it doesn't run on the older operating system. If you'd like to give it a try, you can download it from the Windows Live web site at http://download.live.com/moviemaker

You'll first need to install the Windows Live Installer (if you don't already have it; if you do, just run it; it's called wlsetup-all.exe. It's only 134 MB, so it shouldn't take long to download on a broadband connection. Note that this is the installer for all of the Windows Live programs. You'll need to accept the service agreement, then you'll see a dialog box that shows you which (if any) Windows Live programs you already have installed. If you have the older version of MovieMaker, you should see a message telling you that it will be updated. Uncheck the boxes for any programs that you don't want installed. If you select to have the installer close open programs for you (such as IE and Outlook), it will reopen them after the installation completes.

You'll find the MovieMaker icon in the Windows Live folder in your program files (or, of course, you can just type MovieMaker in the Start/Search box). When you open it up, you'll see a clean interface with a black box in the left pane. You'll also notice that it uses a Ribbon interface somewhat like those in the latest Office programs. You can drag videos or photos into the right (storyboard) pane or click in the pane to browse your folders to find the content you want to add. If you drag a video here, you'll see a frame-by-frame representation.

You can also make a movie/slideshow out of still photos or you can mix photos and video clips. Once you have them lined up the way you want them in the right pane, you can start really having fun. You can add a title page, captions and credits, rotate photos 90 degrees left or right, and add music or other audio to play over the video/slideshow. You can start the music at the beginning, or at the current point you've selected within the storyboard. You can also have the video automatically set to fit to the music.

There are a large number of transitions that you can insert between photos/clips, including fades, shapes, flips, wipes, rolls and so forth. Another cool feature is the "pan and zoom" effect, which is very configurable and makes it look as if the camera is moving from side to side, top to bottom, diagonally, and so forth. You can click the Visual Effects tab and convert to black and white, sepia, pixilated the photo, cycle through the color spectrum, and more.

With the Video Tools, you can split or trim video, set fades, choose a background color or control the video volume. With the Music Tools, you can fade the audio in and out and edit the audio track. With the Text Tools, you can set effects (such as how the text enters), edit the text, change the font and set text transparency. Of course, it's still a consumer-oriented program, and if you want to create professional video, you'll want a more sophisticated program. For example, the Windows Live MovieMaker storyboard doesn't even include a time line.

Lots of file types are supported for importing video, including .AVI (which some cameras use to record), .MOV (used by other cameras and the iPhone), .WTV (the format in which Windows 7's Windows Media Center application records TV programs), MPEG4, MT2, AVCHD and more. Unfortunately, it only saves in one format: .WMV. You can save in 16:9 or 4:3 aspect ratio and in a choice of resolutions.

Perhaps the most high profile new feature is AutoMovie. You choose your video clips and/or photos and click the AutoMovie button, and it will automatically add title page, credits, transitions, and music (you have to select a song). What's missing? The most noticeable thing was the ability to make voiceovers with a microphone connected to your computer. When you've finished making your movie, Windows Live MovieMaker makes it easy for you to publish your masterpiece to YouTube or burn it to DVD.

For a free program, it works well. And for most home users and even some small business use, it has all the features you're likely to need. So if you've always secretly aspired to be a film maker, check it out. I still remember back when adding text and transitions to homemade videos was a tedious, labor-intensive job using reasonably priced consumer tools, and the infamous Video Toaster was way beyond my means, price-wise, so I find the ease of use of this free tool pretty amazing.

Close Encounters of the Problematic Kind: Issues You Might Run Into When You Migrate to Windows 7

Whether you're already running the release candidate, or have no experience at all with Windows 7 but anticipate upgrading when the retail version is released in October, you're probably wondering what to expect in making the transition to the final version. Having installed the final code (RTM) on several machines recently, I can tell you about a few issues you might encounter when you take the plunge.

Of course, the easiest way to upgrade your OS is to buy a new computer that has it preinstalled. But if you have a perfectly good computer already, one that has plenty of processing power and memory, there's no reason to go out and make a big ticket purchase just to get the benefits of the latest operating system. However, there may be a few "gotchas" that you should be prepared for when you install any new OS. And even if you've been running the beta and RC happily, there are a few changes in the final code that might pose problems. And there are also the challenges that you always face with a new installation—but there are ways around some of those that we'll tell you about here.

First, of course, is application compatibility. You might think that if a program runs fine on the Windows 7 RC,

it's going to work on the final version too - but that's not necessarily true. I was completely surprised to find that one of the security programs I had used on both the Windows 7 beta and RC wouldn't install properly on my shiny new RTM installation. It seems the driver won't load. The program vendor is well aware of the issue and working to develop a hotfix, which will no doubt be out long before the general public gets Windows 7. But it illustrates how even small changes such as those made between RC and RTM can cause unexpected behavior.

Many Vista apps actually will run fine on Windows 7—except that they won't install. That's because the application's installation program does OS version checking. It's programmed to install on the operating system(s) specified in the program (for example, XP and Vista, designated by version numbers 5.x and 6.x). If it checks the version and doesn't see one of those operating systems, it refuses to install and you get a message saying something like "This application requires Windows XP or higher." Yes, Windows 7 is higher, but the program isn't smart enough to know that. Luckily, you can overcome this problem by running the installation program (usually Setup.exe) in compatibility mode. To do that, right click the shortcut or executable and click the Compatibility tab. Select the appropriate operating system from the drop-down box.

Application compatibility isn't the only issue you're likely to encounter when you decide to switch to Windows 7. If you're using Vista, deciding whether to do an in-place upgrade or a clean installation can be a dilemma. If your Vista installation has any problems, installing Windows 7 over it might fix them; this happened with my laptop, which had both performance problems and application errors that were cleared up by an upgrade to Windows 7. On the other hand, you may bring the problem along with you or even exacerbate it. We upgraded the HP TouchSmart (our kitchen computer), hoping that the graphics card crashes that started just recently would be fixed. Instead, in Windows 7 it was worse: instead of only crashing when Media Center was on and idle, it now crashed at random times even when Media Center was closed.

A clean installation, however, can present problems of its own. On my Core i7, I kept the RC intact and did a clean install of the RTM on a separate partition. But of course, with a clean install, you lose all those configurations that you spent hours or days or weeks or months getting just the way you wanted them, along with any applications you installed and their configurations. I decided to try to shave some time off the setup of the RTM by using the Easy Transfer wizard that's built into Windows 7. It lets you save the user account information, wallpaper and desktop icons, custom Explorer settings, documents, e-mail, music, pictures, videos, IE favorites, etc. from the old computer or installation to a hard drive, USB key, or network location. Then you can restore it to the new computer or installation. I saved all my info from the RC and transferred it to the RTM. Generally, it worked great.

One of the nicest things about Easy Transfer was the way it migrated the settings for my Office applications - even before I installed the programs. My Word custom quick access toolbar was there. My Outlook profile was there,

with my preferred view, autocomplete list, etc. However, I discovered there was a problem with Outlook. I don't know whether it was something that got messed up during easy transfer, or a result of the errant security program I installed that wasn't compatible with the RTM, or something else entirely, but after a day or so I started getting errors upon opening Outlook, saying that the data file didn't close properly. I tried turning off cache mode, which usually fixes this problem. I then tried doing a repair installation of Outlook, but the problem was still there. Next I tried creating a new profile for my Exchange account. That fixed the problem - but now I was back to where you are after a normal clean installation. The most annoying thing about that is that all those addresses I had in autocomplete were gone.

However, you don't have to use the Easy Transfer tool to get those in your new Outlook installation. Those addresses are kept in a file with an NK2 extension. I knew that, but I at first I couldn't find that file. In XP, it's in \ Documents and Settings \ \ Application Data \ Microsoft \ Outlook. But in Windows 7 and Vista, it's at C:\ Users \ \ AppData \ Roaming \ Microsoft \ Outlook. You can find yours, and edit or delete information in it, with a handy little program called NK2View from NirSoft. It's a free download at www.nirsoft.net.

Once you find the NK2 file, just copy it over to the folder referenced above on your new computer or installation. There's a trick, though. If you've created a new profile, as I did, you'll need to rename the NK2 file. By default, it's named Outlook.NK2 because "Outlook" is the name of the default profile. My new profile was named Bill, so I had to rename the file to Bill.NK2. Then I had all my autocomplete addresses back, and Outlook worked great. Sweet.

In general, reported problems with the RTM have been few, but when the final version is released to the public, we're sure to see some interesting issues pop up on various configurations with different applications. If you're running the RTM, tell us about any new problems you've come across (or problems from the RC that have been fixed). Do you have any tricks and tips for the smoothest transition from Vista to Windows 7 based on your own experiences? If you haven't tried Windows 7 yet, what problems do you fear most?

If you have a question about doing an in-place upgrade to Windows 7 if you're running Vista SP1 or SP2. You can do an in-place upgrade, but you have to upgrade to the equivalent or higher edition (for example, you can upgrade Vista Home Premium to Windows 7 Home Premium or Professional or Ultimate, but you can't upgrade Vista Ultimate to Windows 7 Home Premium or Professional). In addition, you can't do an in-place upgrade of Vista 32-bit to Windows 7 64-bit or Vista 64-bit to Windows 7 32-bit.

Is it true that only signed drivers can be installed on 64-bit Windows 7? This is indeed the default. On the RC, you could disable the driver signing requirement using the bcdedit.exe command. I haven't needed to try this yet in the RTM. I'll be checking it out; meanwhile if you've done it, let me know whether it worked for you. Here are the instructions for disabling driver signing enforcement: http://www.vistanews.com/090813-Disable-Driver-Signature

Will the Windows 7 RTM version of Easy Transfer will support Windows Live Mail? This is a way to back up and

restore your Live Mail accounts, contacts and messages to a new machine or new installation. First, follow the directions here: http://www.vistanews.com/090813-Backup-Live-Mail

Then to set it up on the new OS, install Windows Live Mail but don't create any accounts. Import the Mail accounts, using the .iaf files. Then import the messages. If you're using a Windows Live ID account, it should import your contacts, too.

Sony VAIOs don't support enabling of Intel VT in the BIOS even though the processor itself supports VT. Unfortunately, Sony is not the only vendor that does this. I have run into the same problem with an HP laptop, too. If you want to run Windows Virtual PC with XP Mode, be sure to check out the specs in regard to VT or AMD-V for your particular computer model, not just for its processor.

9 things you should know about moving from Windows XP to Windows 7

If you skipped Windows Vista and stuck with Windows XP, chances are good that you are now seriously considering moving to Windows 7 after it's released on October 22. If so, there is much for you to do. Not only should you begin planning for your operating system migration, but you should begin learning as much as you can about Windows 7. Here are 10 things you can do to get ready for the switch.

1: Check your hardware

Windows 7 was designed to be lean in terms of hardware, so that it will be able to function satisfactorily on sub-powered netbooks. If you're running Windows XP on a computer manufactured within the last three or four years, chances are good that Windows 7 will run fine on your system. However, you can make sure that your hardware is compatible by running Microsoft's Windows 7 Upgrade Advisor

The Windows 7 Upgrade Advisor will perform a detailed scan of your entire system, checking hardware, programs, and peripheral devices. Once the scan is complete, the Upgrade Advisor will display a report telling you whether your system meets the hardware requirements and identifying any known compatibility issues with your programs and devices. If it finds problems, the Upgrade Advisor will provide suggestions you can use to better analyze your upgrade options to Windows 7.

You can download the Windows 7 Upgrade Advisor from the Microsoft Download Center. At the time of this writing, this tool is listed as being a Beta version. However, running it now will give you a good idea of what you will be facing as you prepare for your upgrade.

If you're planning a much bigger Windows XP to Windows 7 migration, you'll want to investigate the Microsoft Assessment and Planning Toolkit. This free toolkit, which runs across the network without having to install software on client systems, will allow you to investigate systems and compile reports on hardware and device compatibility.

2: Understand the Custom Install

If you're running Windows XP on your computer and you want to use Windows 7 on that same computer, you'll purchase an Upgrade license package of Windows 7. However, you won't be able to perform an in-place upgrade. In other words, you won't be able to upgrade to Windows 7 on top of XP and keep all your applications and settings "in place." Instead, you'll have to perform a Custom Install, which Microsoft describes as follows:

A custom (clean) installation gives you the option to either completely replace your current operating system or install Windows on a specific drive or partition that you select. You can also perform a custom installation if your computer does not have an operating system, or if you want to set up a multiboot system on your computer.

When you completely replace Windows XP, the installation procedure will not totally obliterate it. In fact, the installation procedure will create a folder on the hard disk called Windows.old and will place the Windows, Documents And Settings, and Program Files folders from your Windows XP installation in it. Your data files will be safe and accessible, but your applications will not be viable. (Even though the Custom Install saves your data in the Windows.old folder, you will want to have a separate backup on hand just in case!)

Regardless of whether you choose to completely replace Windows XP or set up a multiboot system, you are going to have to back up and transfer all of your data, reinstall all of your applications, and reconfigure all of your settings.

3: Consider a setting up a multiboot configuration

When pondering a Custom Install, you should consider setting up a multiboot configuration. That will place both Windows XP and Windows 7 at your disposal, which will be a big advantage as you begin migrating your settings, documents, and applications. More specifically, you can boot into Windows XP to check out how something is set up and then boot into Windows 7 to re-create the same configuration. Once you have everything in Windows 7 exactly the way you had it in Windows XP, you can remove the multiboot configuration set Windows 7 as the primary OS and then remove Windows XP.

To be able to perform this type of switch, both XP and 7 must be installed on the same hard disk but on separate partitions. (If you install Windows 7 on a second hard disk, the boot partition will exist on the first hard disk, so you won't be able to remove that drive once you're ready to get rid of XP.) As a result, you'll need to repartition your hard disk to make room for Windows 7. To repartition your hard disk without destroying data, you can take advantage of partition management software, such as Norton PartitionMagic 8.0, which retails for about $70, or Easeus Partition Manager Home Edition 4.0.1, which is available for free and earned a 4.5 star rating in a recent CNET editors' review.

4: Plan your backup and restore strategy

Before you move from one operating system to another, you'll want to back up all your data — at least once and maybe twice, just in case. While it may sound like overkill, having an extra backup will give you peace of mind.

If you're using a third-party backup program, you will need to check the manufacturer's Web site to see whether

the program will be upgraded to work in Windows 7. If you aren't using a third-party backup program, you're probably using Windows XP's native Backup Utility. As you may have heard, the file format used for this tool isn't compatible with Windows Vista's Backup And Restore Center. To provide for that, Microsoft released a special version of the XP Backup Utility, called the Windows NT Backup - Restore Utility. It's designed specifically for restoring backups made on Windows XP to computers running Windows Vista. While I was unable to get official confirmation, it is a safe bet that this special version will work in Windows 7 or will be adapted to do so.

If you aren't willing to take that bet or you are not sure whether your third-party backup program will be upgraded to work in Windows 7, you can simply make copies of all your data files on CD/DVD or on an external hard disk.

5: Plan your data transfer strategy

To move from one operating system to another, you'll probably want to use a transfer program that will scan your XP system, pull out all your data and settings, and then transfer them to Windows 7. Fortunately, the Windows 7 Easy Transfer utility can provide this service for you. However, before you perform this transfer operation, it will be in your best interest to have a separate back up copy of your data (see #4).

The new operating system will come with two copies of the Windows 7 Easy Transfer. One copy will be on the DVD and the other will be installed with the operating system. Before you install Windows 7, you will run Windows 7 Easy Transfer from the DVD and back up all your files and settings. Then, once you have Windows 7 installed, you'll use it to move all your files and settings to the new operating system. You can learn more about the Windows 7 Easy Transfer by reading the article Step-by-Step: Windows 7 Upgrade and Migration on the Microsoft TechNet site.

6: Inventory your applications and gather your CDs

Since you won't be able to perform an in-place upgrade when you move from Windows XP to Windows 7, you'll have to reinstall all your applications that passed the Windows 7 Upgrade Advisor compatibility tests (see #1). It will be helpful to have an inventory of all the installed applications so that you can track down all your CDs or compile a list of Web sites for those applications you downloaded.

While the report generated by the Upgrade Advisor will be helpful as you create an inventory, it won't be comprehensive. To create a detailed inventory, you can use something like the Belarc Advisor. For more details, see the article Gather detailed system information with Belarc Advisor.

7: Become familiar with the new UI

The UI in Windows 7 is quite different from the UI in Windows XP, and it offers a lot of new features. As a result, you may encounter what I call "UI Shock." You'll know what you want to do, but you'll experience a momentary lapse of composure as you strive to adapt what you know about XP's UI to what you're seeing and experiencing in Windows

7.

To ease the level of UI shock, you'll want to become as familiar as possible with the features of the new Windows 7 UI. One starting point is Microsoft's Windows 7 page. While a lot of the content here is essentially marketing related, it will give you a good idea of what to look for when you actually move into the Windows 7 operating system.

To help you get right to the good stuff, check out:

The Windows 7 features section, where you'll find a host of short videos and descriptions.

The Windows 7 Help & How-to section, where you'll find a whole slew of step-by-step articles that show you how get around in Windows 7. Be sure to check out the section on installing Windows.

You'll also find useful information on the Windows Training Portal on the Microsoft Learning site. Be sure to check out:

The Windows 7 Learning Snacks, which are short, interactive presentations. Each Snack is delivered via animations and recorded demos using Microsoft Silverlight.

The Microsoft Press sample chapters from upcoming Windows 7 books. Viewing the free chapters requires registration, but it is a short procedure. Once you're registered, you can access sample chapters from Windows 7 Inside Out, Windows 7 Resource Kit, Windows 7 Step by Step, and Windows 7 for Developers.

8: Check for XP Mode support

If you discover that some of the applications you're currently running in Windows XP are not compatible with Windows 7 (see #1) or you just want to keep Windows XP accessible, don't forget about Windows XP Mode. This virtual environment includes a free, fully licensed, ready-to-run copy of Windows XP with SP3 that runs under Windows Virtual PC in Windows 7.

As you consider the Windows XP Mode, keep these things in mind:

Windows XP Mode is available only in Windows 7 Professional, Enterprise, and Ultimate editions.

Your computer must support processor-based virtualization.

You can learn more about Windows XP Mode from the following TechRepublic resources:

Determine if your hardware can support Windows XP Mode in Windows 7

Hands on: Windows 7 XP Mode

10 reasons why Windows 7s XP Mode is a big deal

9: Ask questions

You aren't the only one making the move from Windows XP to Windows 7, so ask questions and share information you pick up along the way. Of course, you can use the TechRepublic discussion forums. But you should cast a wider net.

One good place to connect with Microsoft experts is the Getting Ready for Windows 7 section of the Microsoft

Answers site. Another good place is in the Windows 7 forums in the Windows Client TechCenter on the Microsoft TechNet site.

Create Scrolling Screensaver

Q. I would like to create a scrolling message on my screen to welcome my daughter home from college, but I can't seem to figure out how to do that. Can you help me with this, Mr. M?

A. Absolutely! Go to your Control Panel and click Display > Screen Saver tab. (Vista users, go to Control Panel > Appearances and Personalization > Screen Saver.) Using the drop-down menu under Screen Saver, click to select Marquee (select 3D Text in Vista), then click the Settings button. You will see where you can enter your welcome message, adjust its position, select your text style, color and related aesthetic tweaks.

Q. I'm using Gmail, thanks to your recommendation, and I really like it. I often send email to the same list of people. How can I do that in Gmail, Mr. M?

A. You'll need to place your list of recipients into a group. Once you create the group, type in the group name and let Gmail (www.gmail.com) do the rest.

To create a group from existing contacts, select Contacts from the left-side navigation bar. Place a check beside each of the contacts you want to add to the new group, then click the Groups drop-down menu and select "Add To New Group." Type in a name for your new group and click OK.

To address a message to the group, create a new message, then type your email address in the To: field. Next, click Add Bcc: and type the name of your group in the Bcc: field.

The list will be automatically expanded so you will see the individual group members in the Bcc: field. You can then add or remove addresses, as you wish.

Q. My Start menu's list of programs in XP displays three columns, but the third column, the one farthest to the right, is so far to the right that it is unreadable. Can I move it more to the left?

A. I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but you can't move it to the left. Those columns are automatically adjusted as wide as needed to accommodate the length of the longest program's name. One thing you can do, however, is right-click any long program names, select Rename, and make each name shorter. For example, if you rename Microsoft Internet Explorer to "IE" and Windows Media Player to "WMP," and similarly, shorten the names of other longer-named

programs, you will have much narrower columns.

As an alternative, right-click the Start button, click Properties > Customize > Advanced. Scroll down the list and select Scroll Programs, followed by OK. This will cause your programs to appear in a single, scrollable column instead of fanning out to the right. (Bonus Tip: If you want to place programs in alphabetical order, right-click an entry, then select Sort by Name.)

Q. I know this is an unusual question, but do you know if there is anything online that can test for color blindness? Thanks, Mr. M.

A. Before disseminating any information of this type, for purposes of full disclosure, I am not a doctor, nor do I portray one on television, though I do believe in the healing powers of chicken soup. With that caveat, there is a color blindness test located at the appropriately named ColorVisionTesting (http://colorvisiontesting.com) Web site. The site features standard color vision tests in which colored objects and numbers are "hidden" within several circular fields of dots. There is also a pediatric color-vision test for children, and a view of the world through a color-blind person's eyes. The default font on this Web site is large and easy to read. How refreshing.

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

Marketing IQ Test

The test consists of 20 questions that will evaluate your ability to recognize companies and products by their associated marketing efforts, such as an item's logo, tagline, mascot, etc. The test has a cheesy game show feel to it, and a jaunty little tune plays in the background while you select your answers from the multiple choices presented.
http://tinyurl.com/n5h3bw

The Dorcus Collection

A collection of men's fashion photography from the '50s, '60s, and polyestered '70s. Caution: Some of the language on this site is a bit on the coarse side, so sensitive readers or those easily offended, please be forewarned.
http://tinyurl.com/ktj8a5

The Good Earth

View stunning images of this little pellet we call Earth. Images are taken by satellites, the Space Shuttle, and the International Space Station. This multimedia tour allows you to experience the Earth as you have never seen it before. There is a choral-music sound track that accompanies the slideshow that I could do without, though the voices of the Apollo 8 astronauts from their first transmission in 1968 is interesting. A full, 244MB version is available for five dollars, though I found the Web-based freebie to be out of this world.
http://tinyurl.com/n7th3c

For plain-English answers to your questions by email, plus great computing tips, subscribe to Mr. Modem's award-

winning newsletter. Subscribe using Promo Code 1146 and receive a free month with your six-month subscription! To view a sample issue or subscribe, visit www.MrModem.com.

Can You Trust Your Computer? - Part I

by Michael Gemignani
Houston Area League of PC Users

Some 25 years ago, I had unusually high medical expenses. I kept careful records of those expenses and the insurance reimbursements using a CP/M program called SuperCalc. (Yes, that was even before Windows 3.1.) Despite the difficulty of deciphering the insurance statements, I was certain that I had been shorted some $1800. When I complained to Blue Cross/Blue Shield, they, of course, told me I was wrong. After all, their computers had done their calculations. I laid out my argument in careful mathematical terms to prove my point. They examined my case further and discovered a flaw in their computer program. I was right and they were wrong. I got my $1800.

I do not offer this story to show how smart I am. I offer it to show how dumb computers are. Admittedly, had I not kept careful records and had my own computer to help me, I would probably have just accepted BC/BS's figures and let it go. I am sure the bulk of their customers, who had been shorted by the same program error, did just that. I was, after all, the first one who caught the problem, but I am sure I was not the first one stung by it. BC/BS was willing to trust their computer to do the right thing. I was not, nor should you be.

Of course, companies argue that it is their computers that make mistakes. Generally, however, computers do exactly what they are programmed to do, no more and no less. If the computer runs a program to completion and provides an answer, we know the program is free from an error that will cause it to hang; but we have no assurance, except in the simplest of cases, that the answer we get is the correct answer to the question we think our programs asks. In Douglas Adams' classic *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, a powerful computer, Deep Thought, has been put to work to come up with the answer to "The Great Question and Everything." After a long time the computer produces its answer: 42. Deep Thought's program came up with an answer, but the answer was either wrong or as incomprehensible as the question.

Thus, computers can not only give us a wrong answer – that is, an answer that is not the answer to the question we want answered - but they can give us an answer that we cannot understand. We do not know what question, if any, has been answered, or how the answer we get, assuming it is correct, applies to the question we want answered. Consider the following hypothetical. A broker is using a program that tells him that if he invests funds in a certain way, there is a 99% chance that he will make one million dollars. The program gives an accurate prediction. The broker makes piles of money because there is such a slim chance he will lose. Question: How much money will the broker lose

if his investment fails, i.e., falls within the 1% of events where he does not make one million dollars?

I suspect that many people will say he will lose one million dollars because if he wins, he will win one million dollars. However, this is an unfounded assumption as many brokers discovered to their regret. The program does not tell us how much could be lost. In fact, the amount could be so large as to dwarf all of the broker's winning. This is precisely what happened in the recent collapse of the market. If the odds of winning were so good, how could one possibly lose so much as to make all those winnings disappear and then some? Stuff happens, particularly when your rapacious greed leads you to trust your computer a bit too much.

To be fair to the computer specialists, "quants" as they are known, who designed and wrote the formulas and the programs that the investment banks relied on, warned the banks about the pitfalls of their programs; for example, the parameters they were using in their formulas were often little more than guesses and were, in any case, subject to rapid change. But there was so much money to be made that the banks relied on the formulas and forgot the warnings. Thus, the mess we're in now. It is not a question of my $1800 from BC/BS but trillions of dollars down the proverbial rat hole. Was it greed or a foolish overreliance on computers, or some of both?

If I am shown a cave filled with riches beyond my wildest dreams, and I am permitted to haul out as much treasure as I want, but I am warned that the cave could collapse at any minute, and if I am inside when it does, I will be killed, would I have enough sense to stop while I am ahead? One wonders.

There are those who wonder if someday computers will become so smart that they will dominate the human race. My concern is more that we will become so reliant on computers that we will trust them in instances we should not, once more to our immense regret.

From the September 2009 issue of HAL-PC Magazine. *The Rev. Dr. Michael Gemignani, an attorney and Episcopal priest, is also a former professor of computer science who has written extensively on legal issues related to computers. Although he is now retired, he enjoys writing and speaking about computer law and security. Contact him at mgmign2@hal-pc.org with any questions or comments about this topic.*

Local Businesses Offer Online Coupons and Deals

by Ira Wilsker

It is no surprise to any of the readers of this column that we are in the economic doldrums. Many of us had our family incomes decline due to unemployment, reductions in hours, and declining dividends and interest received. Many of our local retailers and restaurants are suffering because of a general decline in sales, which may in turn lead to even more employee cutbacks or layoffs.

One may ask what the status of our local restaurants and retail stores has to do with a column on personal technology; the answer is simple. Many of our local businesses have turned to the internet in order to generate

additional sales and bring customers into the stores. I monitor several of the deal websites that list continuously updated daily deals from the major retail stores and restaurants. These deals may either be deep discounts on selected items, closeouts and sales, promotions (including rebates), and high value coupons. In many of the cases the deals are available in-store, or available for pickup in the local store.

Restaurants, both local and national chains and franchises, often publish a coupon that make the meal more affordable, and gets customers into the restaurant. Either way, the promotions bring customers into the stores that may lead to additional sales. After I got home on Friday, I turned on my computer, checked my email, and checked the deal sites updates. One of the local big-box home improvement stores, Home Depot, had very limited time online promotion for deeply discounted LED flashlights at 80% off its regular retail price. The item was only available for pickup in the local store, which the computer said had a quantity in inventory. I printed out the offer and on Saturday morning drove to the big-box store where I purchased a quantity of the discounted flashlights; part of my Christmas shopping is now complete. Inevitably, under the influence of "supermarket psychology," I wandered through the store looking for other items that we did not know that I needed. I would consider that in micro terms, the store considered its online promotion a success as it brought me into the store where I browsed the aisles, and made a purchase.

This trip to the home improvement store was not a unique episode for me, as last week one of the major retail chain stores, Kohl's, posted on one of the deal websites a 15% coupon good for anything purchased in the store, the coupon being applicable to the entire purchase at checkout, and not one individual item. Dutifully, I was motivated by the coupon that I printed, to drive to the store, and purchase a cart full of clothing, shoes, and gifts. The 15% discount coupon, which was in addition to all other promotions and sale prices, made the merchandise a bargain, which stimulated sales. Again, another local business may prosper, because it posted a coupon online which generated sales.

Many of us enjoy going out to eat, and there are many sources of legitimate coupons online that can be used for free items, discounts on the check, and even as gift certificates. I routinely print out the restaurant coupons if it appears that I may use them, and I also forward the links to friends and family who may use them. Being specific, there are many websites that list these deals and coupons, in some cases there are aggregators that compile and publish lists, to the businesses themselves that publish the deals. One aggregator website that I check regularly is dealnews.com and its sister site dealcoupon .com.

Another website that I monitor is Deals of America (dealsofamerica .com). It is on dealnews.com that I found both the flashlight promotion at Home Depot, and the coupon for Kohl's. As I type this, Dealnews also has deals on shoes, Craftsman Tools, and dresses at Sears and video games at ToysRUs.

Other deals available in local stores, which will likely have expired by the time you read this and have been replaced with other deals, are a deep discount on cell phones at Verizon, camcorders and iPhone gift cards at BestBuy.

Other local stores that have been listed in the past few days were Walmart, Kohl's, CVS, Walgreens, Lowes, Office Depot, and others. My experience at Lowes was typical, as an "internet only" price was listed on Dealnews for a folding aluminum ladder, which must be picked up in-store. I checked the Lowes website, verified that that model was in stock, and placed the order online; the next day I went to the store and noticed at the customer service counter a sign that said "Internet Order Pickup." I handed the clerk a printout of my order, and my ladder was brought to the front of the store for me. Being nosey, I wandered back to the ladder display and found that my internet price was about 30% less than if I would have bought that exact ladder directly in the store. Still, Lowes was successful that it brought me into the store where the transaction was completed, and a sale was made for the store.

While not universal, almost all of the local stores listed offer free in store pickup, with no shipping charges. Another way of patronizing local stores by taking advantage of online promotions is the "daily deal" which several of them offer. A daily deal is when one or a few deeply discounted items are offered for only one day (and while quantities last), and may often be picked up in the local store. In my experience, most of the local stores will honor the prices of their own online specials if purchased in store and presented with a printout of the special price. Two of the local stores that I monitor for daily deals are Target and Kohl's. Target offers a daily email as well as a website with the deals (dailydeals.target.com), and Kohl's often has a link on its main webpage for its "Deal of the Day." Mostly these items are at least 50% off, and sometimes more.

Restaurants also need our fiscal help, and they sometimes oblige by publishing coupons or offering deeply discounted gift certificates. While websites such as Dealnews often publish links to restaurant coupons, there are also specialty websites that sell deeply discounted gift certificates. While only a few local restaurants are currently listed, there are gift certificates available for thousands of restaurants around the country. While I have used some of these gift certificates in locally owned restaurants, I also use them extensively when traveling. As I type this, another consolidator deal site, Deals of America (dealsofamerica.com) is listing gift certificates from another website, restaurant.com. Today's deal is a $25 gift certificate for only $2 (normally $10), and a $10 gift certificate for only 80 cents (normally $4). These gift certificates are very restaurant specific, and can be printed immediately after purchase. I have used the $10 gift certificates several times at a particular local restaurant adjacent to the mall, which brought others and me into the restaurant, generating additional business. Regrettably, that particular restaurant no longer participates in the gift certificate program.

The deal sites usually have restaurant.com gift certificates for at least 50% off (a $25 gift certificate, normally $10, for $5) and sometimes up to 80% off. Restaurant. com also offers an email service by subscription where it announces current discounts on its gift certificates. Restaurant. com is a BBB accredited business, and I have never had a problem with them or with their gift certificates. These are but a very few of the many competitor websites where local

businesses promote their goods and services. One that can be easily configured to display local coupons for both goods and services is Yahoo!'s deal site at deals. yahoo.com. I have used coupons from this website for local purchases including tires, oil changes, groceries, restaurants, and other goods and services. I am proud to support local businesses, but not too proud to use their coupons and shop for bargains from them. That is a win-win situation for both the customer and the business. By monitoring some of the local deal websites, and subscribing to daily deals either by email or by RSS feed, one can support local businesses and save a lot of money at the same time.

WEBSITES:

http://dealnews.com

http://dealcoupon.com

http://www.kohls.com

http://dailydeals.target.com

http://www.dealsofamerica.com

http://www.restaurant.com

http://deals.yahoo.com

Piggyback Downloads

by Bob Rankin

S uddenly my web browser is cluttered with toolbars that I never asked for. I delete them, but sometimes they come back. Why is this happening, and how do I get rid of all those unwanted toolbars?"

Piggyback Toolbar Download You open your Web browser one day and there at the top is a toolbar you didn't install. You close your Web browser and up pops something calling itself "History Swatter" bugging you to delete your browsing history and oh, by the way, download this other "nifty, free" utility. Oh, and you didn't install that, either? Where did these things come from? How can you get rid of them? How can you avoid picking up more of them?
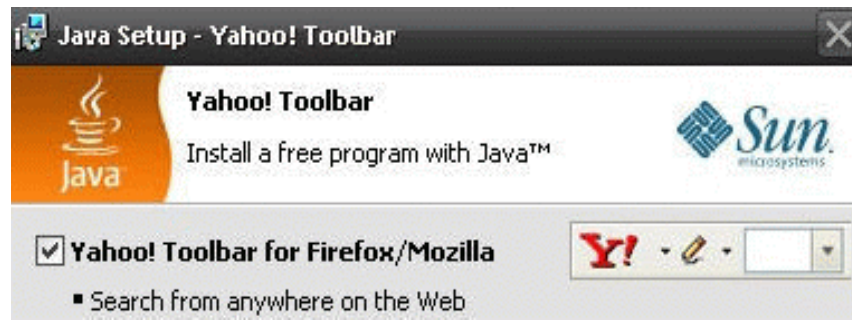
Often such annoying programs are sneaked into your computer with other programs that you actually did mean to download. The annoyances "piggyback" a ride onto what you want and are installed along with the desired program. Usually, you can avoid piggybacks if you pay attention during the installation of a desired program. But some distributors of free programs sneak piggybacks in far under a normal person's radar.

Yahoo, Microsoft, Google, Ask.com and others have

toolbar piggyback programs, and one can only presume the company pays software distributors to sneak it in on their users' computers. During the installation of the desired program, after clicking on several routine buttons and getting used to clicking "OK" or "Continue" mindlessly, there will be a notice that asks if you wish to install a toolbar, or some other extra thing. They're counting on you to be lazy or impatient, and just click the go-ahead button without really reading what you're agreeing to.

Usually there is a checkbox you can uncheck to deny the installation of piggyback program. Just pay attention for it.

Other software is even more stealthy and devious. There are quite a few trusted software packages that try to foist toolbars and other addons under the radar. Even some security-related programs use this tactic! Here is a sampling of some well-known programs that include piggyback downloads:

* Sun Java Update (Offers Carbonite or Microsoft's Bing toolbar)
* Adobe Flash Player / Reader (Offers Google Toolbar or McAfee Security Scan)
* AVG Antivirus (Offers Yahoo Toolbar)
* CCleaner (Offers Yahoo Toolbar)
* Comodo Internet Security (Offers Ask Toolbar)
* Foxit PDF Reader (Offers Ask Toolbar and eBay Desktop Shortcut)
* IrfanView (Offers Google Toolbar)
* RealPlayer (Offers Google Toolbar or Google Chrome)
* Skype (Offers Google Toolbar)
* Winzip (Offers UniBlue RegistryBooster)
* ZoneAlarm (Offers SpyBlocker aka Ask Toolbar)

HistorySwatter is infamous among Web surfers. It is a stealth piggyback on an "opt-in" piggyback like the Yahoo! toolbar; the opt-in is called MyWebSearch Plus. Here's how the nasty scheme works:

You download and install any of several hundred free programs, and during installation you get an option to install MyWebSearch Plus. Giving the go-ahead implicitly states that you "agree" to the Terms of Service that are part
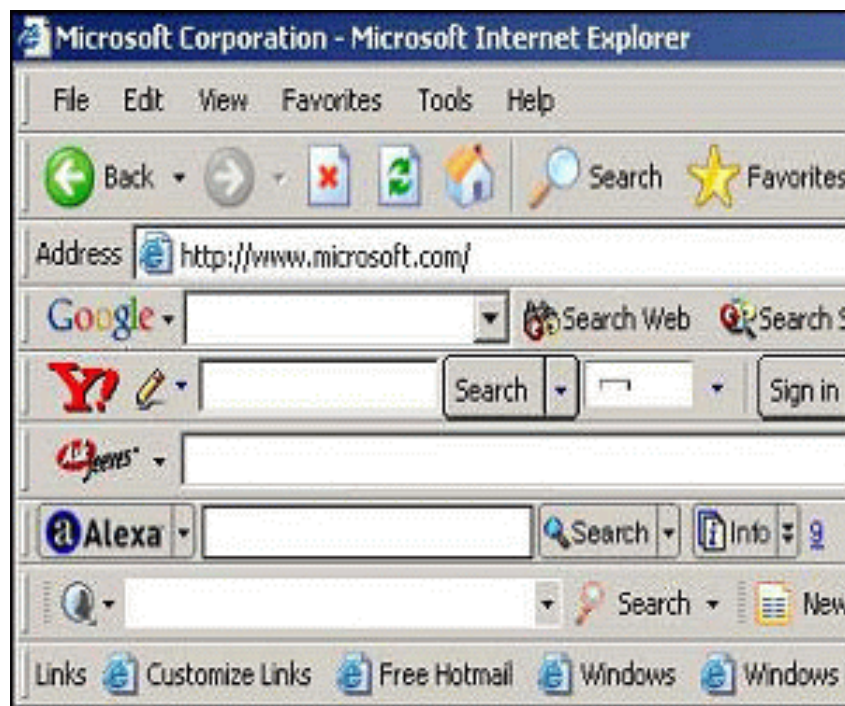
of MyWebSearch Plus—a lengthy piece of legalese displayed five lines at a time in a tiny window, which no one ever reads. But buried deep in this land-mine is this clause:

"We reserve the right to add additional features or functions to the existing Software. When installed on your computer, the Software periodically communicates with our servers. We may require the updating of the Software on your computer when we release a new version of the Software, or when we make new features available. This update may occur automatically or through other means and may occur all at once or over multiple sessions..."

In simple terms, MyWebSearch downloads and installs additional applications without your knowledge. History Swatter is just one of them.

Protect Yourself From Piggyback Downloads

Anti-adware programs such as ZoneAlarm, Avast! Antivirus, Advanced System Care Plus, etc., will detect and remove piggyback programs like these. But things like MyWebSearch just download and install the darned things again and again. It's perfectly legal and completely evil.

To get rid of piggyback programs once and for all, use the Control Panel to uninstall MyWebSearch and any other free software you may suspect of downloading piggyback programs. SmileyCentral is another example of this wicked breed; it provides a library of animated graphical emoticons which most people don't want to receive in email anyhow. Get rid of it!

Think before you download. If it's free, somebody may be paying the distributor to load up your computer with adware or extras you don't need. Pay attention during installation; opt out of anything you don't really need; and take the time to read Terms Of Service before agreeing to them—or just don't agree to such things without compelling productivity reasons.

Gurus Bob Rankin and Patrick Crispen (aka the "Click & Clack" of the online world) explain internet technology in plain English with a dash of humor in the Internet Toolbus. To subscribe to their free newsletter http:www.internettourbus.com/tickets.html

The Cathedral & the Bazaar

Reviewed by Sean Henderson
Danbury Area Computer Society, CT

About ten years ago a very inspiring book was published by a famed hacker by the name of Eric S. Raymond. The title is *The Cathedral and the Bazaar*; it was published in 1999. Raymond was the author of a program in UNIX called fetchmail and this book is based on an essay he presented at a Linux event. I came across this volume in the bookshelf where I work. The title was cited in the documentary "Revolution OS." Now having read the book I can see where much of the book and documentary dovetail.
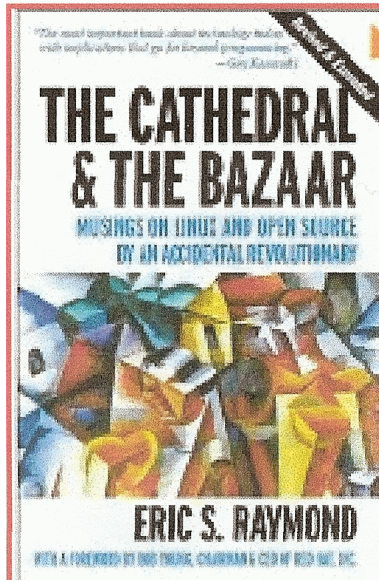
Raymond's book has some not-so-obvious aspects to it. One is that it is a bit of a theoretical primer on economics and resource management theory. Before reading the book I didn't know the terms "hierarchy culture," "exchange culture," and "gift culture." Now being aware of these terms and definitions, I look at open-source software in a more informed way. For the past couple months I've been concerned at work that I was the only developer on a commercial application with thousands of users. After reading this book it has confirmed my notion that developing in isolation is not the most advantageous way to develop any application, regardless of whether the source files are released or not. The implications for development of any complex system are apparent.

One of the book's nuggets is a quote from Linus Torvalds that "given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow." Other great information is provided on the nature of hacking, the term "hacker" and how it is abused in media, and the origins of the whole free software movement and various other distinctions. It also explains to non-programmers and business types why programmers would contribute code and improvements to a project on a volunteer basis.

It's available at amazon.com for $11.56.

I highly recommend this book to anyone involved in any sort of software development or if you are managing a software project. It is a useful book also for filling in some technology history gaps, and perhaps (re)learn some key concepts.

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 (shenderson (at)dacs.org).

Speed It Up!
A Non-Technical Guide
for Speeding Up Slow Computers

Reviewed by Gordon Strickland
North Orange County Computer Club, CA

Almost anyone would like his computer to run faster. This book may therefore be regarded as being aimed at a very wide potential readership. It discusses measures for restoring the performance of a computer whose performance has degraded from what it was originally and hardware modifications to enhance its performance perhaps even over the original. However, if the measures discussed in the main part of the book will not yield sufficient improvement, the author also includes a final section offering guidelines for buying a new computer. The specific discussions in the

book are applicable primarily to machines running Windows XP and Vista, although some of the material would also be applicable to earlier versions of Windows. Apart from some hardware issues, there is little applicable to Linux and Apple machines.

The book is organized into an introduction, eighteen chapters, and an appendix. The chapters are grouped into six sections, with titles that I will abridge as follows: Quick Diagnosis, Simple Speedups, Power Speedups, Upgrading Your PC, Internet and Network Speedups, and Buying a Faster PC.

Under Quick Diagnosis, the author rightly notes that the perception of performance degradation can be very subjective. He describes instances where acquaintances thought that their machines were slowing down, when in fact that had not really happened. Perceptions of degraded performance are particularly apt to occur when an older machine is asked to run new, demanding software. Windows Vista and some of the newer games can be very problematical in this respect. The author then discusses various symptoms of actual performance degradation, and emphasizes the importance of doing a thorough backup before moving on to the tasks of repair and enhancement.

The Simple Speedups section deals with removing spyware and viruses, cleaning out unnecessary programs, optimizing the hard disk, and making Windows go faster. The Power Speedups section discusses cleaning the Windows registry and reinstalling Windows from scratch ("when all else fails").

Under Upgrading Your PC, the author discusses hardware upgrades such as adding more RAM, installing a larger hard disk, upgrading the video card (perhaps particularly beneficial when going to the more demanding versions of Vista), and installing a faster CPU. This last measure is sometimes possible with machines that are of fairly recent vintage. Alternatively, the author suggests that one can provide for a new CPU by also installing a new motherboard, but this would seem to get one into the area of the final section, Buying a Faster PC.

The appendix, entitled "PC Performance Resources," consists of useful lists of available software packages for the performance of the various optimization and repair tasks discussed in the previous text. For instance, under "Registry Cleaners," ten different programs are listed, including a number of free ones.

Other categories of programs presented include General Performance Suites, Benchmarking, Startup Optimization, File Cleaning, Hard Disk Optimization, Internet Speedup, and others. Altogether, the appendix lists 61 programs.

By way of criticism, it is curious that there is no discussion of the possibility of reflashing (reloading) the BIOS

of a machine. This procedure, admittedly only for the more courageous user, might provide important benefits where the originally loaded BIOS contained bugs, had become corrupted, or did not provide proper support for software or hardware developed since the date of the originally loaded BIOS. The author misleadingly states (pg 166) that the BIOS is loaded into ROM that cannot be written to, but this is not true in modern machines. Indeed, some BIOS's can be reflashed even from within the Windows operating system.

With the printed book, the purchaser also receives, for 45 days, access to a free online edition of the book. Presumably the access period can be extended for a fee, if the user desires. The object here seems to be to make the book more convenient to use when one is already working at the computer. I tend to prefer to use a printed version of a publication in such situations, if it will stay open at the page you are consulting while typing at the keyboard. Unfortunately, the book is assembled with the now near-universal "perfect" binding (was there ever a more outrageously misleading terminology?), and therefore is quite likely to change pages, or close, spontaneously. Depending on your monitor size and other factors, the online version might be more convenient in some situations.

I thought that the book was very informative and potentially useful. The experienced user, opening up the book at random and examining a particular topic, might be inclined to say, "Oh, I already knew that," but most should find the detailed, systematic, and thorough coverage very helpful. Even the experienced user may find that the book fills in occasional knowledge gaps.

The 2009 book is authored by Michael Miller and from Que Publishing (Pearson Education, Inc.) (312+xvi pages). http://www .informit.com/store/product.aspx?isbn=078973947X List price is $22. If your group is a member of the Pearson User Group program, a 30 % discount is available to members plus free shipping.

From the July 2009 issue of Orange Bytes*, newsletter of the North Orange County Computer Club, CA. 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) noccc.org).*

Foxit Reader: A Short Review

by Sharon Walbran

Editor, TCPC Digital Viking, Twin Cities PC User Group, Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN

A Worthy Alternative to Adobe Reader

When one of my clients was concerned about hacker threats to Adobe Reader last winter I went in search of alternative software. I found the free version of Foxit Reader at http://www.foxitsoftware.com/pdf/reader/ It's well worth a look! Here are just some of the advantages:

Small Size. The file is about one-sixth the size of the latest free version of Adobe Reader and takes seconds to

download and install. The small footprint is great for older computers or those short on hard drive space. There is also a U3 version for flash drives.

Speed. It starts up fast and runs fast. No delays while splash screens load. Printing is also speedy.

"No surprises." Foxit Reader will remind you of Adobe Reader-same interface, menus and toolbars so the transition is painless.

Open multiple files in tabbed format. If you like the ability to open several web pages on tabs in Mozilla Firefox you'll like the tabbed format of Foxit Reader as well. View several PDF files at a time and switch between them easily by clicking the tabs.

Mark up and leave comments on PDF documents. You can insert text boxes with comments right in line with text in the PDF document or draw arrows and graphics or highlight text. This is very helpful, especially when you are collaborating on a document with others.

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 (SQWalbran(ai)yahoo.com).

# Adobe Photoshop Elements 7 Classroom in a Book

by Willis Irons
Tucson Computer Society, AZ

T his book is part of the official training series from Adobe graphics and publishing software developed by Adobe product experts. Eleven lessons in this book are made up of a series of self-paced projects that give a hands on experience using Photoshop Elements 7. An included CD contains all the image files used in this book.

The book covers the basics of learning Adobe Photoshop Elements and provides countless tips and techniques to help you become more productive with the program. Each lesson has clear explanations and step-by-step instructions. The book contains approximately 370 pages allowing in-depth study of many top1cs.

The approach is definitely from a technical how-to-do-it. Very little mention is made about using a camera for recording a scene or composing an ideal visual photograph. Encouragement is given to starting with the best conditions possible.

I began using Elements during the earliest versions and was using version 7 prior to receiving the book, so I felt that I was reasonably proficient. However I decided that I would not skip even one step of any lesson. That was a good decision. I continually was introduced to a new or more
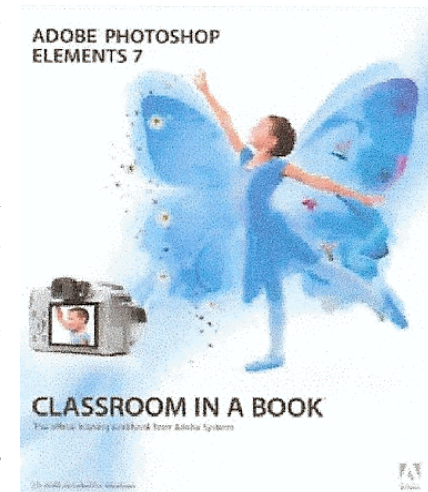
efficient technique, a time-saving automated-workflow or working with multiple files in batches.

For example, the Organizer is much more complex than I had been aware of. !he suggestion is made to work with multiple catalogs, each with a separate project to provide a more efficient workflow. Catalogs can then be combined. The search portion is much more sophisticated than I had discovered. A wonderful new option for me was to discover the method for capturing frames from digital Video. Do you know that you can import whole pages or just selected images from a PDF document?

One lengthy lesson is devoted to creating projects. The slide-show editor is very adequate for most creations. Many options are available for an appealing show. While assembling a complex photo montage from a blank screen the subject of layers is introduced. The artwork library is also introduced and explained. Several methods of sharing are the discussed including Online Album. This service can also be used for backup of all photo files.

The lesson about adjusting color in images is in depth. The three Edit modes are demonstrated and explained. Each has advantages. Guided edit, Quick Fix and Full Edit were each used with the same files for comparison. Applying multiple Smart Paint adjustments to a drab sky was illuminating. No pun intended.

The more techniques that you are to master, the more likely that you can meet the challenge of fixing a difficult photograph. At this time, sophisticated selection methods were introduced as well as a more in-depth look at layers. The next lesson was concerned with fixing exposure problems. Adjustment layers and blending modes were explained and demonstrated. Multiple images can be automatically fixed in batches with good results. Several methods and approaches are shown.

One lesson explores working with text. Included is a section on overlaying text that provides the ability to add a copyright of various appearances. Creating a type mask is demonstrated.

Another lesson is devoted to combining multiple images easily. The lesson learned: do not believe any image that you see.

And another very good lesson is provided regarding editing RAW images.

Overall

This was a very interesting and informative book. Time-wise, I spent the best part of three days reviewing each lesson and completing suggested assignments. Now, if I can just remember and use what I have learned! Practice. Practice.

Publisher: Adobe Press

http://www.adobepress.com/bookstore/product.asp?isbn=0321573900

From the June 2009 issue of the eJournal *of the Tucson Computer Society. 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 (wbirons(ai)earthlink.net).*

Make Your Cell Phone Battery Last Longer:

If your battery won't hold a charge very well or you don't always have access to a charger there are a few things you can do to stretch your battery's charge time. When you're not using your phoner turn it off unless you are expecting an important call. If you are in an area without service turn your phone off so it isn't searching for signals. If you want to leave your phone on you can also change a few settings on the phone to save battery. Turn your phone's vibrate feature off and use a basic ringtone on low volume. Also turn your backlight off as it will take up excessive battery power. Features like Bluetooth internet cameras etc. will drain the battery you have left so try to use these features only when you absolutely need them.

In-Store Recycling:

Electronics that are beyond repair or are no longer compatible with your current components don't serve a purpose around your homer other than taking up space. If you're ready to be rid of these obsolete items including DVD players. cell phones, and computers call around to local electronics stores. Often stores will take in old electronics for recycling. Some stores will charge a small recycling fee for submitting items with screens, such as TVs and CRT monitors, but they'll sometimes supplement that charge with store credit.

Be Good to Your Hearing:

The next time you take a flight and want to listen to some tunes, consider using a noise-canceling pair of headphones. Plane cabins are noisy, and in order to compensate, you're likely to turn up your audio to levels that can be harmful to your hearing. Because a noise-canceling pair of headphones will drone out ambient noise, you'll be able to enjoy your songs at a comfortable hearing level.

Reprinted with permission from Smart Computing. *Visit www.5martComputing.com /Groups to learn what Smart Computing can do for you and your user group!*

A Tale of Two Printers, a Scanner, and a CD Drive

by Bruce Preston
Danbury Area Computer Society

Printer #1: About two months ago, my friend/dentist called to say that he had a problem with his Epson Stylus CX-3810 Multifunction printer. Usually when he printed, a pop-up window would appear showing the level of his ink cartridges. This had disappeared. In addition he could not get it to appear when he went to the printer's property page by way of Control Panel > Printers. He had wasted two hours on the phone with Epson's support "somewhere" - they had him uninstall the printer and reinstall it twice, and finally they used the generic "not my

problem" cure - they told him to "reinstall Windows." Fortunately he didn't follow that instruction.

Printer #2: About a week ago, I had a problem with my HP OfficeJet 6310, a multifunction printer. It just ceased to respond to print requests, although the scan and copy functions worked just fine. I tried doing a "repair install." HP's large hourglass thing came up for a while, a screen flashed by too fast to read, and the setup utility concluded before asking me what to do. I went to the HP site and found that they had a 38MB download of basic drivers for "Corporate Use Only." Reading the description, it detailed that this was a lightweight install for distributing over a corporate network such that the printer's functions could be shared over a local area network (which I do) without the baggage (not their phrasing) of all the add-on software that the consumer installation puts on each machine. The consumer install puts "HP Director" - a dashboard application, various photo manipulation software, various photo sharing software, and the ubiquitous automatic check for updates application. The one thing that it would lose would be the ability to send a scan to a desktop application at a selected machine by pushing buttons on the printer's control panel – "pushing" the scan to the computer rather than "pulling" it from the computer. This is a feature I don't need. The lightweight install was just what I wanted. In addition, it said that if it found the consumer drivers it would uninstall them. I downloaded it and cranked up the installation program from the command line as instructed. Again, I got the large hourglass, a too-fast-to-read pop-up, and then nothing.

Scanner: About a month ago there was a Q&A Posting on SmartComputing where a reader had a problem with an Epson Perfection 2580 scanner. Upon pushing the scan button he got a message on his computer's display that a DLL was unable to save the file. Previously it had worked fine. He too had not gotten a solution from Epson support. CD Drive: About two weeks ago a friend of mine in Michigan had a problem with a CD drive. It "just disappeared."

When she had installed an upgrade to her antivirus software it had complained about an incompatibility with the CD burner software (the software came with the machine when new). She ran the uninstall program which crashed, and the drive disappeared from the device manager.

What do all of these have in common? It appears that all the problems were caused by corrupted registry entries. It is unknown what might have corrupted the registry entries, perhaps an update from either the vendor or Microsoft - but I won't point fingers without evidence. Whatever the cause, the standard response of "uninstall/ reinstall" or "repair reinstall" didn't fix the system.

The good news is that free RevoUninstaller from http://www.revouninstaller .com" resolved all four problems in minutes. After uninstalling the broken software we were able to install components without a problem.

RevoUninstaller loads quickly and presents you with a very inclusive list of things that it offers to remove for you. I found it notable that it presented the list within a second whereas the standard Add/Remove Programs takes about a minute to populate on my machine. When you select something to uninstall, it gives you three options:

1) Safe - fast uninstall and a scan of the hard disk for left over files.

2) Moderate - same as Safe with an additional extended scan of the system registry for left over entries.

3) Advanced - Same as Moderate but with a deeper registry scan. Takes a bit more time but finds and/or clears more.

I have always used the "Advanced" option. RevoUninstaller analyzes the application for a moment and then uses the application's native uninstall mechanism first. Upon completion it then does its own digging. When done, it presents you with a tree-view of what it found in the registry with full path to the registry keys. The items it suggests for deletion are shown in bold, and have an adjacent check box. I have always used the SELECT ALL and the DELETE button. Having cleaned the registry of leftover, it then displays a similar page with a list of leftover files, and gives you the same option of selecting files for deletion. Again, I have used SELECT ALL and DELETE to good effect.

Why it works - this is just an educated guess but I suspect it to be accurate. When an application is installed, along with the core .EXE files the vendors often include a multitude of dynamic link libraries - DLLs, which are either provided by the vendor or a third party. These DLLs provide common functionality across products. (For example, almost every application in Windows is likely to make use of COMDLG32.DLL from Microsoft - this Common Dialog module provides the ubiquitous FILE / OPEN, FILE / SAVE, FILE / PRINT dialog boxes. DLLs are activated from the .EXE by way of registry entries. If COMDLG32.DLL has three functions (known as Entry Points) then it would have three registry entries, one for each function. Now suppose an update is installed - it may replace a DLL with a newer one, and may insert a new registry entry to point to the new DLL. But, if some other application also makes use of the DLL that has been replaced, it may break. For this reason when you uninstall something you may see a warning message that asks for permission to remove a component that might be shared.

I suspect that the first two printer problems weren't cured by the reinstall SETUP because the SETUP found either the leftover files or left over registry entries and decided that it wasn't necessary to continue, and thus either skipped a critical step or just decided to bail out. By running RevoUninstaller the machine was wiped clean in such a manner that the SETUP was forced to do all of its operations.

For what it's worth - the HP installer seems to be a homegrown custom module rather than an installer based upon the almost industry standard InstallShield product. I don't know about the Epson installers or the one for the CD drive. There are several products used for creating installations - InstallShield, Wyse, Microsoft's MSI, etc. I won't go so far as to say that the problem is specific to any particular installer product – in fact, they may all be innocent and victims of a sloppy update.

Lastly, I'm not a fan of the various "registry cleaners" as I have found them to be either a scam (We've found 4,513 problems in your registry. We will remove 33 of them, and if you pay us $29.95 and we'll remove the rest!) or to work

only on the registry without delving into the innards of related applications. Revo Uninstaller seems to approach the registry from the application's side and work from the outside in, rather than from the registry side and work from the inside out. Again, that's just my educated guess. Be that as it may, I highly recommend RevoUninstaller.

The Lighter Side

We have a minor help site for the easiest to answer questions, and we're always telling customers to go look at that first before phoning us. Anyway, my colleague was on the phone, and I overheard this conversation:

Tech Support: "Yeah, just go to our website it's at www.[our company].com ... yeah, three w's, then a dot, then [our company], then a dot then 'com'...yeah, that's right.... What do you mean, how do you spell 'dot'?"

Tech Support: "I need you to right-click on the Open Desktop."
Customer: "Ok."
Tech Support: "Did you get a pop-up menu?"
Customer: "No."
Tech Support: "Ok. Right click again. Do you see a pop-up menu?"
Customer: "No."
Tech Support: "Ok, sir. Can you tell me what you have done up until this point?"
Customer: "Sure, you told me to write 'click' and I wrote 'click'."
(At this point I had to put the caller on hold to tell the rest of the tech support staff what had happened. I couldn't, however, stop from giggling when I got back to the call.)
Tech Support: "Ok, did you type 'click' with the keyboard?"
Customer: "I have done something dumb, right?"

My father worked in the technical support department of a computer company. This was the most memorable of his calls.
Customer: "Right, this computer's gone all crazy. It's blinking, beeping, and doing all sorts of stuff!"
Him: "What were you doing with the computer at the time?"
Customer: "I was dusting it."