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Soluto Anti-Frustration Software Improves Boot Time

by Ira Wilsker
Golden Triangle PC Club

In several past columns I have written about utilities that can speed up the computer boot process. As cluttered as it was, my old XP machine could take up to five minutes to boot; my newer Windows 7-64 machine boots in under two minutes, considering the multilayered security that is installed on it. Traditionally, the ways of speeding the boot process on a PC was to defrag the hard drive, and clean up the programs in the startup that load when the computer is first turned on. When someone

tells me that his computer takes forever to boot, my typical responses are "is your hard drive defragged" (defragmented), and "how many little icons do you have on your task bar adjacent to your clock?." There are several excellent startup managers available (including Windows 'msconfig" feature), both independent utilities and components of utility suites, that can easily control what programs load at boot. Simply unchecking unwanted and unnecessary programs at boot is an accepted way of improving boot time. Likewise, there are several excellent defragmentation utilities available, including the simple one built into Windows, that can do a credible job; by defragging the hard drive, it does not have to work as hard when reading files and data, thus providing some improvement in load times.

While these two methods are well accepted and proven to speed up the boot process, a new concept in utilities was recently released that goes an extra step in controlling the boot process using a software "genome" and community experiences to determine what is loading in the computer at boot, how long each item takes to load, displays what is required or optional to load at boot, and gives the user control of what loads and when it loads during the boot process. Wanted, but low priority items, can be set to load after the computer has fully booted, and is sitting idle, thus not degrading the boot process. Unwanted items can be stopped from automatically loading, but set to load upon demand. The process may sound complex, but it is very simple with the information provided by this new utility, "Soluto Anti-Frustration Software (beta)."

Available as a free download from www. soluto. com, this software is a "beta" or pre-release version, which by definition, is not a highly refined final "release" version. My 18 month old "new" computer booted very quickly when new, but now that I have a lot of security software and other utilities loading at boot, it was taking between a minute and a half, and two minutes to boot. After I downloaded and installed Soluto, and rebooted the computer such that Soluto could measure and analyze my boot process, my first modification of my boot process improved my boot time by almost 25%! Subsequent refinements of my boot process with Soluto, and input from the "community" have helped me to shave off about another 10% of my boot time.

After being installed, Soluto monitors what loads at each boot. During the boot process, the bottom left corner of the desktop turns up like the corner of a page and displays each item as it is loading, while displaying the elapsed time to boot the computer. Information is gathered during the boot process, and added to what has been gathered at previous boots, to provide the data that is analyzed by the program. The data that is collected is anonymously added to the Soluto PC Genome, where the community can input recommendations that will assist the user in determining what can be controlled at boot. According to Soluto, "This anonymous technical data is gathered and sent to Soluto's PC Genome, a one of a kind knowledge base containing statistical insights about PC software and hardware behavior, as well as remedies to alleviate PC usage frustrations. By putting this information into the light, the PC Genome will help consumers and vendors alike. Soluto employs another set of innovative algorithms to determine which remedies will have a positive impact on each Soluto user's unique PC system. These remedies are then shared with other relevant Soluto users." Soluto has found that by pausing when specific items load in the boot process, and reconfiguring some of the applications, boot time and overall behavior of the computer can improve dramatically. Soluto can also determine those programs that degrade computer performance, and provide the "frustrated" user with possible solutions to reduce or eliminate the source of frustration.

Soluto places a small icon on the task bar that looks somewhat like a smiley-face, and opens displaying the Soluto functions. By opening Soluto anytime after the computer has booted, the first screen called the "Boot Page" displays "Potentially Removable" items in an orange font, along with the boot time and sequence for each. By moving the cursor over any of the "Potentially Removable" items, a brief description of the software is displayed (if it is in the Genome). By moving over the "more" on the display, a recommendation may be shown, as well as a pie chart of what other users of that software have done. The user is given the option to "Pause" or "Delay" the item in subsequent boots. "Pause" prevents the item from being loaded at boot, but the program can still be loaded upon demand; "Delay" postpones the selected program from automatically loading until the computer is otherwise idle, which means that it will not slow the initial boot process. Since Soluto (beta) has just been released, the genome is still in its infancy, and does not yet contain a comprehensive database of software. The user can easily click on the pencil icon "edit" and open a Wiki which enables the user to "fill in the blanks" about an item, which will then be verified, and added to the Genome. As more users complete the Wiki, the Genome database will become more complete. As the Genome improves through this community input, all of the users can benefit by the dissemination of the information.

The grey section of the main screen "Boot Page" in Soluto displays the "Required - cannot be removed" items that load at boot, in their boot sequence and with their boot time displayed. While most of the items shown are valid Windows components, with an explanation of what each does along with its boot time, some of the items are non-Microsoft files, and lack detailed descriptions. When I first used Soluto, the components of my MagicJack VoIP service (internet based telephone service) were listed as "Required," and could not be paused or delayed; I opened the Wiki and explained what they were, and then commented that I thought that these particular components should be moved to the "Potentially removable" section where their boot process could be better managed. As the Genome grows and improves, items like this will be better sorted into the appropriate category.

The blue section on the "Boot Page" shows the items that were "Paused' or "Delayed" at boot, and how much time was saved by not loading those items. Clicking on any blue item gives the user the choice of changing the status to boot, "Pause" or "Delay," which will be implemented the next time the computer is booted.

An interesting choice on the Soluto icon is "My PC just frustrated me," which opens the Soluto window, and analyzes the running processes, and tries to determine which program is causing the slowdown. Any information found during the "frustration" analysis is anonymously added to the Genome where it will be comingled with other data and potential solutions may be determined. If a solution to the "frustration" exists, it looks like it will be displayed to the user. When I clicked on the "Frustration" menu item, Soluto identified the beta version of a new security product that I am testing as the potential source of "frustration" but could not yet show any remedy to my "frustration."

While Soluto is still in the "beta" stage of development, I found it a very useful and worthwhile utility to improve PC performance, particularly in the boot process, and for resolving potential "frustrations." Users should give Soluto Anti-Frustration Software a try. In my limited experience with it, I would give it my recommendation, as well as a rating of "two thumbs up."

WEBSITES: http://www.soluto.com http://blog.soluto.com http://www.soluto.com/About/Media-Kit

Have Some Wine
When You Just Can't Live Without That Windows Program

by Charles Olsen

Years ago, when I was still happily using Windows XP, I started to see articles about what was in store for us with Windows Vista – considerably higher hardware requirements and new DRM (digital restrictions management), with no real improvement in our computing power or experience. I didn't see any reason to put up with this kind of crap, and it was this new version of Windows that convinced me to switch to Linux.

Some of the software I was using also had Linux versions – including OpenOffice .org, Firefox, and Thunderbird. And even when the same program didn't exist in Linux, I could find equivalent programs that worked just as well.

The one problem I ran into was Info Select. Not that I couldn't find a program to replace it – both Tomboy and BasKet can perform the same function of providing a place to store random bits of information and retrieving them quickly and easily. (After trying both, I liked Tomboy best.)

My problem was that I had been collecting notes in Info Select since the 1980's, when it was a DOS TSR program called Tornado Notes. If you don't know what "DOS" or "TSR" mean, that's not relevant to this article. The point is that I had 20+ years of notes collected in this program, and I needed a way to access them.

Recognizing that much of the information could be years out of date, I didn't want to just transfer all that data into Tomboy. But I still needed a way to retrieve it on occasion.

One solution would be to set up my PC for dual-boot, so that I could boot into Windows when needed. But that's slow and inefficient, and my goal in switching to Linux was to avoid Windows.

It's also possible to run Windows in a virtual machine using VirtualBox or VMware. This would eliminate the need to reboot before using a Windows program, but it would still mean that I'd have to run Windows.

I found a better solution in Wine, a program that allows you to install and run Windows software in Linux. Not all Windows programs run in Wine, but many do.

Wine stands for Wine Is Not an Emulator. Wine is a compatibility layer that allows you to run Windows programs in Linux. It consists of a program loader which loads and executes a Microsoft Windows binary, and a library that implements Windows API calls using their Linux equivalents.

You can download Wine from www.winehq.org, but the easiest way to get it in Linux is to install it from the repository. Once it has been installed, you'll find a new item on the context menu if you right-click on a Windows EXE file in your file browser. The new item will allow you to open the file with Wine.

When you run the file, it will look pretty much like it would if you were installing the program in Windows. You'll see the same screens that you would in Windows, including the EULA, activation keys, install directories, etc.

After the install is finished, you'll find the application on your main system menu under Wine. On the Gnome desktop I'm using at this time, it's under: Applications > Wine > Programs > Info Select. If I want to get to it with one click, I can add it as a button on my panel.

Once I've launched Info Select, I can start opening my old data files. Everything works just like it did in Windows, allowing me to search my notes, add new notes or delete notes. Now all of my old data is available.

Wine also creates directories in your Linux home folder to match the directories that the software would find on a Windows PC, so the program doesn't get confused by the Linux directory structure. A simulated drive C: is created at /home/username/ .wine/ drive_c. Under drive_C are folders for Program Files, Users and Windows. You're not restricted to just these folders, though. Once I had Info Select installed, I was able to open data files I had saved under my /data partition.

Not all Windows applications will run in Wine, though the program is under development and new programs are being added all the time. Of the programs that do run, not all of them run flawlessly. The WineHQ web site has an AppDB page, which lists applications that are known to work in Wine.

It also tells how well they are expected to work. Applications are separated into three categories according to how well they work:

Platinum: Applications which install and run flawlessly on an out-of-the-box Wine installation

Gold: Applications that work flawlessly with some special configuration

Silver: Applications with minor issues that do not affect typical usage

Some of the Platinum applications include Command & Conquer 3, Counter-Strike, The Sims 3, Half-Life 2 and Star Wars: Jedi Knight -Jedi Academy.

Programs on the Gold list include Final Fantasy XI, World of Warcraft, EVE Online, Starcraft, Guild Wars, Team Fortress 2 and Left 4 Dead.

Some of the Silver applications are Fallout 3, Photoshop CS2, Bioshock, Call of Duty 4, Battlefield 2, City of Heroes, MediaMonkey and Google SketchUp.

You can search the entire AppDB at appdb.winehq.org.

Wine is open source, which means you can download the source code and examine or customize it.

There is a commercial version of Wine from CodeWeavers. CrossoverLinux is a more polished version of Wine, and CodeWeavers provides technical support. When you purchase Crossover, the money funds the developers working on Wine. CodeWeavers allows you to download a fully functional trial version of Crossover, so you can try it before you buy it.

CodeWeavers takes the new development for Crossover and passes it back to Wine, helping Wine continue to improve.

CodeWeavers also publishes Crossover Games, a version of Crossover that is optimized to run Windows games.

If you're trying to avoid Windows but just can't let go of that last Windows program or two, Wine or Crossover may give you the freedom to abandon Windows.

Wine

http://www.winehq.org/

Crossover Linux

Crossover Games

Crossover Mac

http://www.codeweavers.com/

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Using Skype

by Mike Kearns
Computer Club of Green Valley, AZ

Using free Skype software on your computer allows you to make calls over the internet to others who have the service. It's easy to download and works with most, if not all, computers. Try this great way to keep in contact with your kids, grandchildren, siblings, and close friends.

You need three things to make it happen:

1. A high-speed internet connection.
2. A web cam, and I recommend Logitech. You can buy a good camera (with install disk) at Wal-Mart for around $50. Newer computers have web cams built in. Each camera requires some adjustments for brightness, contrast and sound, but they are usually easy to work with.
3. You need to download the free program by going to Google and typing "free Skype download." The PC version is 4.2, and the latest Mac version is 2.8.

When you download the program you will be asked what Skype name you wish to use. You can choose any name you want. If you pick an unusual name, it is a good idea to let your Skype friends know, because Skype offers a directory to locate their users all over the world.

When you attempt the first contact with another Skype user, the person receiving the call has the option of accepting or rejecting the call. If you attempt to contact someone who doesn't know you, they can reject your call, similar to a spam blocker.

The web cam gives a nice picture of the person to whom you are talking on the screen. Quick movements can distort the picture for a few seconds while the web cam is adjusting.

Skype includes a small window of each party at the bottom of the screens so you know what the other person is viewing. The quality of the picture is better if both parties have a good high-speed connection. Going from a dial-up connection to a high-speed connection can cause distortion in the video and also slows down the interaction.

It is best to set up a time with the person you will be calling so they have their Skype program open and ready to accept the video call. The person you are calling also has the option to accept the call with or without video. Once you are connected, you can talk as long as you want--there is no charge. You can make adjustments to see the person on full screen or half screen. I find that the image gets a little distorted on full screen, but overall it is still a good picture.

Another neat feature permits you to move a Netbook or laptop with the built-in camera around the room to show the person different items of interest in your home. The new, small Netbooks are especially useful because they are so portable and lightweight.

Skype can also be used as your telephone service by clicking on their Shop button. You set up a credit-card account with Skype to pay for the calls. Then you can make a phone call to a person's land line and talk to them through your computer.

I have noticed a few people using the new Netbooks as both a phone and video-calling service. They weigh only two pounds, and many women can carry them in their purse. With Skype you can make phone calls anywhere in the world, and the cost per minute will vary depending on where you are calling. I understand that overseas phone calls are very reasonable.

Keep in mind that Skype is not designed to be a replacement for your ordinary home phone since you would not have your computer on all the time. Also, be aware that you cannot use Skype for emergency calling such as 911.

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What is MalwareBytes Anti-Malware?

by Bob Rankin

Malwarebytes Anti-Malware Malwarebytes Anti-Malware (MBAM) is a free anti-malware application that's been available since 2004. It doesn't get as much press as commercial anti-malware apps like Symantec/Norton, McAfee or CA Antivirus. It's not one of "the usual suspects" that tech journalists rattle off when they're listing anti-malware apps such as Avast, AVG, Trend Micro, etc. I have mentioned MBAM a few times on this site, but you're right to suggest a more in-depth review and recommendation.

Aside from having a fun acronym, MBAM is a solid, speedy, secure anti-malware application that many people rely on to protect their data, computers, and personal identities online. It seems adept at rooting out both viruses and spyware, and often finds nasties that the others left undetected. Best of all, MBAM is free to try, and there are none of the gotchas that often accompany free security tools. Just download, install and run. There are no tricky optional toolbars, smiley-face collections or sneaky data-mining license agreements to watch out for during installation.

Once installed and running, MBAM gives you three options:

- Quick Scan performs a scan for malware in only the folders and files most frequently targeted by malware writers. It's fast; it took me only 3 minutes to scan a hard drive with 300 GB of data on it. It's also easy on computer resources so it doesn't slow down other apps while it's scanning. A log file is saved to disk so you can review whatever MBAM found during its scan.
- Full Scan scans every single byte on your hard drive, USB flash drives, optical media, and other storage devices. There's a rumor that MBAM even looks under your couch cushions, but I can't confirm that. It's best to run a full scan about once a week, or when you suspect you might have a malware infection.
- The unique Flash Scan mode scans only volatile memory and autorun objects, favorite targets for malware. It's a virtually instantaneous check for malware. Flash Scan is available only to registered users of MBAM.

Upgrading Your MalwareBytes Anti-Malware

The registered version of MBAM costs US$24.95, and also includes real-time malware scanning and blocking; automatic malicious website identification and blocking; a scheduler for software and malware signature database updates; and priority customer support.

MBAM quarantines suspected malware-infected files in a secured folder from which they cannot execute commands or operations upon other parts of your system. Quarantine is useful in case you need to extract legitimate data from an infected file before deleting it, or in the case of a "false positive" identification of a legitimate program as malware; you can simply tag the app as "safe" and restore it.

To save time during full scans, you can build a list of folders and files that MBAM should ignore when scanning. Such items might include read-only or encrypted files and folders which cannot be re-written by malware. Read-only CDs and DVDs can also

be ignored if the data on them has been scanned and deemed safe once.

MalwareBytes also makes StartUpLite, a utility that eliminates unnecessary processes from your Windows startup configuration. This speeds up booting, frees RAM, and helps your system run considerably faster.

FileASSASSIN is another handy utility from Malwarebytes. Often, Windows will not let you delete a file; you get a message such as "file in use by another program" or "access denied" even though you know you should be able to delete the file. This utility overrides Windows to let you delete what you wish.

RegASSASSIN is a powerful malware cure that should be used with caution. Malware often inserts new keys in your Windows registry and alters permissions to make the keys difficult to remove. This utility will allow you to unlock and remove unwanted keys. But you must be certain that you are removing the right keys.

I recommend that you download and run MalwareBytes Anti-Malware, even if you're happy with the anti-virus and/or anti-spyware tools you currently have. It's a handy tool to have on your hard drive, and can also be installed on a portable USB drive to help a friend with malware problems.

How Do I Change the Screen Resolution?

Typically, a new Windows or Mac computer will be automatically set up to display at the highest resolution your monitor can support with the software drivers available. The resolution is just the number of dots or pixels displayed on your screen in the horizontal and vertical directions. A high screen resolution like 1680x1050 looks really sharp if you have a large desktop display and 20/20 vision. But older eyes may find that the default screen resolution needs adjusting. Even with perfect vision, things may be a bit small for comfort on a smaller laptop or netbook display. There are other reasons to change the screen resolution occasionally, too.

The higher the quality of your display, the more processing power required. If you have a souped-up graphics accelerator with its own specialized processor and RAM, there may be no problem. But the lower-powered graphics cards integrated into motherboards may bog down under a full load of pixels and colors. Reducing the screen resolution can speed up the ever-changing display without sacrificing much quality. Words will scroll down the screen more smoothly and games will be more responsive.

To change screen resolution in Windows XP:

- Right-click on the Windows desktop and select Properties from the context menu
- Click on the Settings tab
- Drag the Screen Resolution slidebar left or right to reduce or increase the number of pixels displayed (1440x900, 1024x768, etc.)
- Click on the Color Quality box and select the number of colors to be used
- Click Apply to change the display to the new settings
- If you like what you see, click Yes and then Save. If not, click No and choose new settings

Windows 7 works much the same way as XP, with a couple of twists:

- When you right-click on the desktop, "Screen Resolution" appears on the context menu
- Instead of a slidebar, there's a pulldown menu from which to select a supported screen resolution
- Color Quality" is under "Advanced Settings" and is called "Color Management
- "Make text and other items larger or smaller" without changing screen resolution is a new option at the bottom of the Screen Resolution window.

Settings include 100% (normal), 125%, and 150%. You will have to log off (not restart) to have these new settings take effect.

What settings are optimal depends on your eyes, hardware, and the applications you use. Making text 150% larger may result in some text not showing at the bottom of the screen where the software puts it. All of the text just won't fit. Some Web pages may display enlarged text overlapping other items in your browser. Reducing the screen resolution to less than about 80% of its maximum size is generally not advisable.

Mac OS X users can change screen resolutions by following these instructions:

- Open the System Preference dialogue via the Dock or from the Apple menu
- Open the Displays panel and click the Displays tab
- Select the desired Resolution from the list on the left
- Close the System Preferences when you are satisfied with the resolution

Other Options for Screen Magnification

There's yet another display option in Windows, called the Magnifier, and it works like a magnifying glass. Under Mac OS, it's called the Zoom feature.

- On Windows XP, click Start, then Run, type "magnify" then press ENTER.
- On Windows Vista, click Start, Control Panel, Ease of Access, Ease of Access Center, Start Magnifier.
- On Windows 7, click Start, enter "magnifier" in the Search box, press ENTER, then click "Turn Magnifier On or Off."
- On Mac OS X, open Finder, click the Apple menu, click System Preferences, click Universal Access, click the Seeing tab, then click "Turn on Zoom."

On Windows, a rectangular window will appear in which a magnified view of the area around your cursor is displayed. The magnified area shifts as you move the cursor around, just like the magnified area displayed through a moving magnifying glass. You can adjust the amount of magnification and the size of the magnified area though a floating dialogue box.

Another trick which works on both Windows and Mac computers, is to use the scroll wheel on your mouse, if you have one. Hold down the Ctrl key and spin the scroll wheel up or down to adjust the text and graphics on your screen. On Windows, this works on an application level, and not every program supports zooming. Web browsers like Firefox, Internet Explorer, Microsoft Office, and other popular programs all have the zoom feature.

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BeWARES!

by Berry F. Phillips
Computer Club of Oklahoma City

The wares have often perplexed computer users with numerous decisions regarding software. The multitude of wares has been even more confusing. Comware is commercial software which generally has more "bells and whistles" but requires the highest financial expenditure without the option to try the software in advance. Trialware is usually characterized on the Internet as a free download for a limited time but requires a purchase to continue using the software. Shareware is also free to download but often has features turned off or has an expiration date unless you purchase the software. Trialware and Shareware do offer an opportunity to use the

software before making the decision to purchase. Freeware is free for personal use on the Internet but it may contain adware, viruses, or be poor software. Further, the marketing promotion of the wares can be even more misleading, causing you to download and then delete software that you thought was freeware when you discover it is, in fact, pay ware.

The world of wares can be very frustrating a well as expensive to the computer user. One can spend considerable time, frustration, and even expense downloading and deleting various wares on the Internet. Beware, retailers will not accept returned Comware after it has been opened for a money back guarantee. Relax, my holiday gift to my readers is a solution to the problem that I have used for several years, saving me considerable time and money! However, I have had to endure personal comments from some of my fellow computer users that I am "cheap!" Since my ancestry is Scottish who are known for being thrifty, I do not consider that comment an insult. However, I do prefer the use of the word "conservative" to the rather blunt, "cheap."

Excluding my operating system, I have nothing but freeware downloaded from the Internet on my system! Aha, you are thinking, but what about adware, viruses, or poor freeware, and the considerable time in downloading and deleting it takes to find the best free ware on the Internet? There are several sites that contain only freeware. However, I recommend Gizmo's Freeware site because I have used it for several years and found it to be very effective in reviewing freeware and efficient to. use in going quickly via links to safe and secure freeware sites for downloading. I am reluctant to recommend other sites that I have not used for purposes of this article.

Gizmo's Freeware is easy to use and makes it very simple to locate the best freeware on the Internet because it is extensively reviewed before it is recommended. Until July 2008 Gizmo was the editor of "Support Alert," a highly recommended technical newsletter that was distributed to over 150,000 subscribers. The site evolved from his highly popular list of the "46 Best-ever Freeware Utilities." The site grew well beyond 46 and reached the point that it could not be maintained by one person. Today, the site has grown into a kind of Wikipedia for Freeware utilizing contributions of dozens of volunteer editors who edit and moderate suggestions from thousands of site visitors. As a result, the range of free software covered by the site is ever increasing and the quality of the reviews is ever improving. Gizmo's Freeware has, in a real sense, become the "Wikipedia for Freeware." I strongly suggest you check your freeware on your system against the recommendations of the best and consider downloading the best.

The primary purpose of Gizmo's Freeware is to make it easy to select the best freeware product for your particular needs. The best freeware programs are as good as or better than their commercial counterparts, but funding the most appropriate programs can be challenging. There are dozens of freeware download sites but few of these actually help you select the best program for your needs. The site has no downloads just honest advice and useful guidance. Links are provided where you can safely and securely download the product you want. Furthermore, you will know that what you have selected is the best available. Gizmo's Freeware is easy to use and will save you time, money, and lots of frustration!

Be sure to bookmark gizmo's free ware because you will use it frequently to solve problems -- saving you money, time, and lots of stress: http://vvww.techsupportalert.com.

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Regain Cursor Control

Q. My mouse cursor used to automatically land in the correct spot when I had to click OK or CANCEL or make some other selection, but it doesn't do that anymore. How can I get that feature working again? It was very handy and saved a lot of mouse maneuvering.
A. What you're describing is a mouse pointer setting, so go to the Control Panel > Mouse > Pointer Options tab and place a check mark beside "Automatically move pointer to the default button in a dialog box," followed by Apply > OK. (Windows 7 users, go to Start > Search and type in "Change mouse settings" then click the Pointer Options tab.)

It doesn't work in every instance because there isn't always a default button, but by configuring it in this manner, it will automatically move to the OK (or other) button in many situations.

Q. I want to single-space the title page of a Word document, then double-space and line number the rest of document. How can I accomplish that?
A. Word uses single-spacing by default, so there is nothing you have to do other than type your title page as you normally would. To double-space other text, highlight the data, then click Format > Paragraph and under Spacing, click Double > OK. To add line numbering, click File > Page Setup > Layout tab > Line Numbers button. You'll see the line-numbering options there.

Q. The time on my computer appears as 24-hour military time. How can I change this to the normal 12-hour display?
A. You didn't mention what version of Windows you're using, but you should be able to go to the Control Panel and double click the Regional and Language Options icon. On the Regional Options tab, click the Customize button, then the Time tab, followed by the down arrow next to the Time Format box. Select h:mm.ss and click OK twice to save and exit. If you want "AM" or "PM" to appear with the time, use h:mm:ss:tt. (Windows 7 users, click Clock, Language and Region in the Control Panel, then Change the Date, Time or Number Format.)

Q. I am trying to copy photos from a folder on my hard drive to something called an SD card to use in a digital picture frame. Every time I try, I get an error message that says, "Cannot copy file. The disk is write protected. Remove the write protection or use another disk." I've used two different SD cards with the same result. What am I doing wrong, Mr. M?
A. An SD card is a Secure Digital card, which is a flash-memory device widely used in digital cameras, handheld computers, PDAs (personal digital assistants), cell phones, GPS receivers, among other devices. The problem you describe is a fairly common one, and the fix is about as low-tech as you can get: Place a small piece of tape (Scotch tape will do nicely) over the tiny switch on the SD card, then insert it again. It will work fine.

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

Cooking Light

Your online guide to eating smart, being fit and living well. No, seriously. Here you can search, browse, and review thousands of healthy recipes. The Healthy Life section includes tips on fitness, beauty, travel, nutrition, and maintaining a positive attitude in the absence of sugar. The Community section provides access to topical bulletin boards where you can post your tips and questions or read what other participants have to say.

www.cookinglight.com

How Old is Your Brain?

Don't be alarmed that this site appears in Japanese; consider it part of its charm. Click Start, then wait for the 3, 2, 1 countdown. The objective is to memorize the number positions as they appear on screen, then click the circles in the same positions, moving from the smallest number to the largest number. After ten sequences have been completed, it will reveal how old your brain is. (Pray for double-digits.)

http://tinyurl.com/yvq36y

Airline Seating

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MP3 Tag - A Useful Utility

by Phil Sorrentino

Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, FL

As I have said in the past, "Utilities are usually small programs that are intended to do a specific task or a small range of tasks." And I have also directed you to the SPCUG Monitor Computer Buffet, where you can learn about various free utilities (and even find a website from where you can download the utility). However, keep in mind that when you download something from the internet, you could get something you were not expecting; so be very careful. With that said, I'd like to discuss a free utility that allows you to modify the MP3 Tag information that is used by MP3 players like Windows Media Player or iTunes.

The reason you might want to use an MP3 Tag utility is because these types of media players depend on the Tag information to organize the tunes they find in your music folders. If the Tag information is not what you expect, the tune will be put in a location that might make it difficult for you to find. It doesn't matter what the file name is, the tune will be put in a sequence depending on the Tag information, only. Is it "The Beatles," or "Beatles," "The Kingston Trio," or "Kingston Trio"? When I put all my tunes together, I found both versions of artist names. Also, sometimes the tune comes from a compilation of artists. In this case it probably goes into the "Various Artists" category, instead of the "artist's name" category.

MP3Tag is a free metadata editor that supports the MP3 audio format as well as many other formats such as AAC, FLAC, MPC, OGG, MP4, WMA, and others. It runs under Microsoft Windows XP and Vista (and probably Windows 7). MP3Tag allows the user to modify the ID3 tag data that is created along with the MP3 file when a tune is initially created, or ripped from a CD. It allows information such as the title, artist, album, track number, or other information about the audio portion of the file to be stored in the file itself. By the way, there are many MP3 Tagging utilities available, just Google MP3 Tag and you'll see all the possibilities.

This may be too much detail, but there are two unrelated versions of ID3: ID3v1 and ID3v2. (If this is too much detail, skip this paragraph entirely.) ID3v1 was the original attempt at capturing data about the tune. ID3v2 followed shortly after and is very different from the v1 version. ID3v2 is fairly complex, but suffice it to say that it includes all of the pertinent information, and then some, relating to the specific tune. ID3v2 has been modified and improved over the past few years and is currently at ID3v2.4. For those of you who asked "What the heck is metadata?, here is a brief discussion that comes from Wikipedia. Metadata (or sometimes metainformation) is "data about other data," of any sort in any media. An item of metadata may describe an individual datum, or content item, or a collection of data including multiple content items and hierarchical levels. In data processing, metadata provides information about, or documentation of, other data managed within an application or environment. This commonly defines the structure or schema of the primary data. For example, metadata would document data about data elements or attributes, (name, size, data type, etc.) and data about records or data structures (length, fields, columns, etc.) and data about data (where it is located, how it is associated, ownership, etc.). Metadata may include descriptive information about the context, quality and condition, or characteristics of the data. And there you have a description of metadata.

MP3Tag is very easy to use. First, I have created a folder called "FixThese" in my "MP3Music" folder, where I put any tunes that I think need to have their ID3 tags modified. Then I setup MP3Tag to use this folder. This way, I do my work in a specific folder so I don't upset anything in the folders that contain all my music. Also, it is easier to work with a folder that has a handful of files rather than thousands of tune files. (The folder to be used is setup by clicking "File" and then selecting "Change Directory," then navigating to the directory of your choice, "D:\MP3Music\FixThese" in this case.)

MP3 Tag window

The MP3Tag window has two panes. The right-hand pane shows the files in the designated folder. The left-hand pane shows each of the specific ID3 data items that can be modified. (By the way, default values can be setup for each of these items, but I have left the default to "keep," so that I preserve the values when a tune is selected.

These default values can be setup in the Tools-Options-Tag Panel window.) When you select a tune in the right-hand pane, the appropriate values show up in the ID3 tag items on the left. Once the tune selection is made, the values on the left can be changed to your desired values. In the example shown above, the tune "Ventures – Hawaii Five-O.mp3" has been selected. The Title is "Hawaii Five-O – The Ventures" which is the file name. The title of the tune should be only "Hawaii Five-O," so I would change the title to be such. The Artist: name is "Various – Adult" which I would want to change to "Ventures," or possibly "The Ventures" if that is how you are referring to this artist. Other information such as Album, Year, and Track may be correct as indicated and will probably be left alone. Genre is an item that is not as well defined as the other tags and therefore I have found it to be less useful. Genre has some general meaning but the meanings may vary a lot from person to person. There are some fairly specific meanings for genre such as "Rock & Roll," "Country," "Classical," but many other meanings are in the grey areas such as "Popular" and "Easy Listening." If you want to employ this tag to any degree of usefulness, you'll have to make your own definitions and then categorize all your tunes according to these definitions. Otherwise, you'll get whatever the recording studio used for their definitions of genres. After you are satisfied with the changes you have made, click "File" and then select "Save tag" or just click on the icon that looks like a floppy disk, to save the tag information with the tune.

MP3Tag is a useful utility if you are accumulating a large music collection and you have some specific ideas about how you would like the tunes to be organized. MP3Tag has a lot of additional features. I have described the ones that, I feel, are basic to organizing a music collection. Music collections have a way of growing in all directions and using an MP3 Tag utility is a way of controlling that growth.

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Windows 7 Tech Tips

by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.
Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, FL

Have you ever wanted or needed information about the hardware in your computer? Did you know that Windows 7 contains a command that can provide you with a list of your hardware components including memory information? It does and it is very easy to explore and to save to a file. There are other helpful little bits of information hidden in the recesses of Win7, so let's take some time to explore a few of them.

First let's check out the system information command. Go to Start and type "cmd" in the Search box (without the quotes), then press Enter. This will open a command window in which you can type "systeminfo," also without the quote marks. Press Enter again and you will get a detailed profile of your computer. This list will include the processor, BIOS version, operating system and updates, both installed and available memory and much more. In all, there are thirty-two categories of information provided by this command. You can scroll up and down through this information. Then, if you want to save this info to a disc file, type the command "systeminfo /FO CSV > systeminfo.csv." Again, without the quotes. This file will be saved in the directory shown at the beginning of the command line. So be sure you remember this location when you go to look for the file. A CSV file can be opened in a spreadsheet or a database program. Now you will have a ready reference for the components which

make up your computer. It's not a bad idea to create this file and keep it for reference purposes.

Of course, if you are a frequent reader of Dr Herb's "Computer Buffet" you would have seen references to "Belarc Advisor." This free program gives you a profile of all the hardware and software on your machine. It also highlights problem areas such as non-working applications. The software information can be quite extensive. The last time I ran this application on a Windows machine I had more than eight pages of information. Far more than I really wanted. The systeminfo command gives you a summary which is printable in one page.

There is another use for system information. If you type this "system information" command into the Start-Search box, it will bring up a list of applications before you finish typing. Select "System Information" from the list and click on it. You now have a double pane window with a tree of topics on the left and an information window on the right. The first item is a general summary of system information similar to the information we obtained in the command window. But there are other more detailed topics under the headings in the tree list. For example, hardware resources, components and software environment. Under components you will find a very important topic – problem devices. Hopefully, at this point there will be nothing listed when you highlight this topic. But if there are, it can lead you to solutions for some of your hardware problems. Under software environment you will find a topic called Startups. This lists the applications that are loaded into memory when your computer starts. Always something worth knowing.

Another interesting item under Software Environment is Windows Error Reporting. This gives you a detailed list of applications that have "misfired" or produced system hang-ups. This can be useful when you have problems with either Windows or third-party applications. All of the errors I found on my system were related to missing drivers that I had to install after installing Win7. Once that was completed the errors disappeared. Yes, I said that with crossed fingers – no use asking for bad luck, right?

If you haven't backed up your computer recently, then you should try the backup built into Win7. In previous versions of Windows the backup application provided by Microsoft was very slow and some versions were very limited in the media to which they would write the backup file. It was also useless when you changed your Windows version as the file formats in the backup file were not compatible with the newer version. In the Win7 help files there is information on how to restore a backup made with Vista to Win7. So at least the latest versions should be compatible.

These latest versions of the backup applications are much faster than previous versions. To try the backup applications, open the Control Panel and select System Security, then backup and restore. Here you have several options. You can do a complete image of your hard drive, just backup your data, or make a system repair disc. If you did not get a Windows installation disc when you purchased your computer, then the first thing you should do is make a system repair disc. All you need for this is a blank CD and then just follow the on-screen instructions. The next step would be to make a complete image file, preferably on an external drive. It's really not a good idea to put it on the same drive you are imaging even if it is a separate partition. Why? Because when the drive fails you won't be able to access the image file to restore anything to a new hard drive. Even if you do have a Windows installation disc the repair disc plus the image file are a better solution for restoring Windows and your files after a drive failure. The image file you create will be more current than the

original installation disc when it comes to Windows updates. It will also include the installation of all the applications you added after you purchased the system or upgraded to Win7.

Once you have the repair disc and the image backup you can start doing data backups, or you can create new image files periodically. There is no need to make image files unless you have added applications or made substantial changes to your system. Windows file backup can be set to run automatically to save your data files. It will also add new folders and files to the backup list when you create them. I would also recommend that this be saved to an external drive.

Do you have a need for a system to remember user names and passwords? Win7 has a credential manager which can be used for storing user names and passwords in an encrypted file. This application can be found in the Control Panel under User Accounts. If you can't find it, try searching within the Control Panel.

I frequently have a need to write down short notes or references to information I found on the Internet or in other sources. This is where Sticky Notes comes in quite handy. You can run this application by typing "stikynot" in the Start – Search box and clicking on the program that shows in the popdown menu. Alternatively, you can go to All Programs – Accessories and click on Sticky Notes. These can be placed anywhere on your desktop. You can also pin the application to the taskbar so it will be readily available. Just right click on the menu item or one of the sticky notes and select "pin to taskbar."

If you want to see the minute by minute performance of your computer, try typing "resource monitor" in the Start - Search box. The complete term will show up before you have completed typing and you can then click on the item. This brings up a window in which you can view the memory utilization, cpu utilization and other resources as you use your computer. It's a great way to see which applications are using the most memory.

By playing around with the Control Panel and other aspects of Windows 7, you can find many helpful built-in functions. You can also query the Help files. On my system the Help response is much quicker than it was in Vista and XP. I also found that many subjects are better explained and more detailed. So if you are stuck on something, try the Help application that's on the Start menu. The more you play with Win7, the more you will find that may be useful.

Dr. Lewis is a former university and medical school professor of physiology. He has been working with personal computers for over thirty years, developing software and assembling systems. 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 (bwsail at yahoo.com).

From The DealsGuy

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

How My Reimage Repair Went

Using Reimage to bring my computer back to its original condition was an experience. The first time I started the repair, it got deep into downloading over 770 files and all of a sudden, my computer warned that the CPU was overheating. I didn't see any way to pause it, so I forced the computer to shut down. After a few days, I tried running Reimage again. It got almost all of the way though the downloading, but the session was interrupted for unknown reasons. When you start a Reimage Repair, it goes through examining your entire hard drive and operating

system for viruses, malware, and all the bad stuff, as well as any corrupted files in your operating system, and replaces them with the correct ones.

A few days later, I gave it another try and it went through the many downloads, which took well over an hour, but one of the problems I wanted repaired was the proper shutdown of my computer, which hadn't been happening. I had to finish the shutdown myself, so it failed to reboot when the repair was completed, which was necessary to finish the session and I was left with a Reimage "we'll soon be finished" screen each time I started my computer.

I sent a message to Reimage tech support concerning the failed repair and they responded telling me to run it again in safe mode. When I tried it in safe mode, it couldn't access the Internet, so nothing could be done. Then they said it was necessary to schedule a remote session to attempt the repair from their end. A week later, I had scheduled a remote session and the tech sent me an e-mail prior to the scheduled time with a "LogMeIn" link to use for my session. Their tech worked over an hour and downloaded "autoruns" (Sysinternals) from the Microsoft Web site and installed it. Eventually the machine started shutting down saying it would be downloading 60 updates, but when it finished doing that, it failed to shut off. I never found out why all the updates because I try to keep them up to date.

I received an e-mail saying the session had been interrupted and I needed to reschedule a new session. I finally scheduled a new session a week later and the tech worked almost two hours and finally told me he had decided that the failing shutdown was being caused by my firewall, Online Armor. When he disabled it, he could restart the computer successfully, but when it was activated, the restart failed because the computer failed to shut down. I was convinced and so far the shutdown is working and my firewall is disabled, so that's where I stand now. He suggested that reinstalling it might help. I'm not sure if I'll try that, but the peculiar part is that I have been using OnLine Armor successfully for over two years, but the problems started after I installed Internet Explorer 8 recently. What is the connection? Tonight, I noticed that I was unable to launch MS Access so I'm wondering what's wrong with that now. It wants to install when I launch it.

Reimage is located in Israel and the tech used perfect English in his sessions, which consisted of us communicating via LogMeIn. There is no telephone support. He was patient with my typing and sometimes had questions that he wanted answered in my own words.

During the session, he found Glary Utilities on my machine. I thought I had installed a full version downloaded from Giveaway oftheday.com, but I aparently had actually installed a trial. He asked if I would like him to install it for me and I readily agreed. How helpful is that! While the time duration for the repair was lengthy, I was satisfied to an extent. Not all of my problems were fixed, but my lack of adequate memory could be part of the problem. When I first built the computer, it was enough memory, but because of all the updates and other installed items, memory may be part of the problem. However, it uses Rambus, which is very expensive.

How Is Your Flash Drive Working?

Browsing the results of a search the other day I noticed H2testw <http://wareseeker.com/free-h2testw-1.4/> and took a look. It's a test you can run to tell you that a flash drive does, or doesn't, work like it should. There are many places to download this test and it seems to have other uses, but H2testw 1.4 will test your Flash drive and tell you if there are any errors, and won't hurt your data.

Flash drives are a different type of storage that sometimes perplexes a user. There have been articles on how long they last, but since they are new technology, who really knows for sure. I've seen numbers stating their dependability, but do you count the times you use yours? It wouldn't hurt to check occasionally to see if a Flash drive is working as it should because anything can fail at any time; especially when a user carries it in their pocket or hanging on their neck After all, just reading the drive has little effect on it, but writing to it and bumping it against pocket items doesn't help. The product is free.

Corel Deals

From time to time, special offers are sent out by the Corel people and they usually expire before I could include them in my column. Perhaps you can get on their mailing list by calling their ordering number, 1-877-582-6735, to ask. (Mon- Fri, 9:00 am to 7:00 pm EST). Also, here is the URL <http://www.corel.com> for browsing.

That's it for this month. I'll have some more new product announcements on my Web site that didn't offer discounts. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click <bobclick at bellsouth dot net>. Visit my Web site at <http://www.dealsguy .com>

Society News

Program Meeting – Penfield Library

Tuesday, June 8, 2010

Help's Half Hour

Led by: Carl Schmidtmann

Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Q: Does anyone use Picassa for photography work? He is having trouble adding new photos from his memory card. Some seem to get left behind.

A: On the left hand screen the placement of the photos will be shown as a folder. Be sure to highlight all or 'select all'. Be sure to identify the folder at the bottom if it is new.

Q: Is there an easy way to synchronize two Excel files? He has two files of telephone information and would like to combine them into one.

A: Perhaps he could copy the second into the first, sort on name and then remove the older, duplicate listings. There may be a program that would identify duplicates as a function. You may want to add a column to show which file was the original source before combining.

Q: Who has a suggestion on how to catalog and list of your photographs?

A: Picassa and Photoshop Elements have the capability. Using Windows Live Photo allows you to tag faces in the photos.

Q: Did everyone apply their patches today?

A: The second Tuesday is always the day when updates for the OS are published.

Q: There was a notice that support for Windows 2000 will be stopped. Windows XP deadline is also coming up for SP 1 and SP2.

A: Yes, Microsoft is trying to reduce the number of systems that need to be kept upgraded. Be sure to keep current to get the longest coverage.

Q: Does anyone have a suggestion about upgrading to Windows 7? Which version is needed?

A: Wikipedia has a nice graph comparing the features of the options. You want to ask yourself what you will be using it for. Go to the Professional version if you can get a decent price. Win7 Professional has an XP mode that will allow you to continue to use your XP programs. You may want to consider joining TechNet. With the membership you will get the Ultimate software and all technical support. It also is good if you are going to be upgrading more than one machine.
NOTE: Carl recently tried the 64 bit operation with Windows 7 and running an old application. It worked just fine. He was pleasantly surprised. He also downloaded virtual PC. It will also add XP programs to the Windows 7 launch area. When you click on it in Windows 7, it will start up the XP window and start your program.
Q: The latest upgrade to CA software now takes lots of space and runs very slowly or dies.
A: Many members do not use this software. It may help to clear out your startup menu to help come up faster.

Business Meeting:

Led by Carl Schmidtmann/Dan Rothfuss

Carl/Dan are leading tonight's meeting because Steve's mother passed away on Saturday. Today is the viewing hours and tomorrow is the funeral. All persons can see Dan to join or renew their membership. Cards will be available next meeting.

As of next month's meeting, (July), all members are asked to wear their tags. Doing so makes you eligible for door prizes. If you do not wear your tag, you will be asked to make a contribution to our "Help the Club Box."

Our newsletter assembly is set for this coming Saturday, June 12th at St. Steven's, starting at 9:30 a.m. The Planning meeting is the first Tuesday of each month at Sally's house, starting at 7 p.m. Our July meeting will be held at the Brighton library. We are always looking for ideas for the new programs but the next three meetings are covered.

The Excel Tricks program will be brought to our July 13th meeting by Dan Phelps. Dan challenged us to learn at least ten new things. We will have a Part III on photography in September. Please check the official announcement in our newsletter to confirm which program will be presented at our next meeting.

Does anyone have a lead for ads to include in our newsletter? We are also looking for a permanent home where we can meet every month. We are still looking for a Program Chair, noting that this person can work from home.

The Rochester Ham Fest was held on Saturday, June 5th at the Barnard Exempt Fireman's field. We had a booth there. Arpad reported that they ran out of newsletters (60 -70). A small list of folks interested in the club was put together. We received positive feedback regarding the newsletter.

The Digital Photography SIG meets with Dave. Dave will no longer be acting as the chair. So a new leader is being sought. They do have a permanent place to meet. This month's session will be the last one led by Dave as he is moving out of town.

The Linux SIG meets with Carl. They meet at 1115 East Main at Goodman. There is no meeting in June. The next meeting will be in July.

Plans are being made for our annual club picnic being held this year on the second Tuesday in August, 8/10. There will be a silent auction. It will be at the Brighton Town Park. We will eat at 6:00 p.m. A – I names are to bring munchies. J – R names are asked to bring salads. S- G names are to bring desserts. All items that will be donated for the auction are to be sent in to Sally so that she can include them in the July

newsletter. There is a $5.00 charge. It covers the facility rental and the meats, plates, beverages, etc.

Program

Carl Schmidtmann's presentation was given on Understanding Simple Networks – Network Basics. His group's website is http://www .interlockroc.org/. He began by talking about types of network connections, starting with Ethernet. Next he talked about Point to Point networks which are direct connections between two systems. Most folks here use Cable/DSL networking. Lastly, he talked about Wireless networking. Give your network a unique name that is not too personal. Be sure to set up the security, including a password. Follow the setup procedure.

The next topic was Network Routing. Included was information on Routing IP Addresses. Carl then covered Application Level topics such as ports and protocols. This topic included encryption, certificates, proxies and firewalls. Under Application Protocols, he talked about HTTP (using port 80). SMTP is the mail protocol and includes both mail servers and clients.

The final topic covered Routers, Firewalls, or Modems. He summarized Windows access

Everyone learned a lot. Thanks, Carl!

From the President:

For the second month I have to start with an announcement that a club member passed away. On May 14th. Floyd Matteson passed away. Floyd was 80 years young. He was a member for 5 years and when he made a meeting he always brought with him his great sense of humor.

I would like to thank the members who attended my mother's wake, sent e-mail with their sympathy, and took time to sign a sympathy card at the last meeting. I appreciate it immensely.

–Steve Staub

The Lighter Side

Compaq ad from the '80s with John Cleese:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTMdXZ_QwTo

Video on the progression of information technology. Did you know?
http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=did+you+ know&aq=0

- Customer: "My laptop won't boot."
- Tech Support: "Have you tried rebooting?"
- Customer: "I can't reboot, because it doesn't boot in the first place."
- Tech Support: "Sir, we have to do things my way, okay?"