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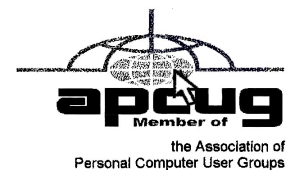
July 2011

Next Meeting
Tuesday, July 12

Internet Genealogy

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Browser Wars Intensify with Release of IE9, Firefox 4

by Ira Wilsker

I have written about the newly released Internet Explorer 9 from Microsoft, and how it has increased speed and security over the older versions of Internet Explorer. Despite the fact that it is included with virtually all builds of Windows sold in the United States and most

(but not all) other countries, and many users are unaware or unwilling to download and use an alternative browser, it has seen a significant decrease in market share.

While it appeared that Internet Explorer had a near monopoly on the browser market for several years, several feisty competitors have appeared, and been met with varying degrees of success in taking market share from Internet Explorer. One of the former strong competitors, Netscape, lost much of its market share, underwent changes in ownership, and was eventually phased out, leaving its open source code for a successor to develop. From this open source code evolved the number two browser in the world, Firefox.

Somewhat akin to the old slogan that Avis used in its epic battle with Hertz, “We’re number two; we try harder!,” Firefox has generally been more innovative than Internet Explorer, generally faster, more feature rich, and more secure than Microsoft’s product, with a quicker upgrade path for bug fixes and security enhancements. Being an open source product, meaning that the program code is readily available, thousands of plug-ins and add-ons have been independently created to increase the usability and security of Firefox, allowing for an almost infinite ability to customize the browser and improve the browsing experience of the user.

When I downloaded and installed Firefox 4, it seamlessly imported my bookmarks (favorites), history, passwords, cookies, and other information and settings from my Firefox 3.6.15. For those installing Firefox 4 for the first time, the installation offers the user to non-destructively import favorites, cookies, history, passwords, and other settings and information from Internet Explorer, such that Firefox 4 is instantly ready to be used, without the loss of any significant material from Internet Explorer.

Users should be aware that Internet Explorer and Firefox (as well as the other browsers such as Opera, Chrome, and Safari) mutually coexist on the computer and desktop without interfering with each other. Each browser asks to be made the default browser, meaning that it will be opened if a web link is clicked, and my personal choice is to have Firefox as my default browser. In no way does this degrade the functionality of the other browsers, as I sometimes use the others for special purposes, but still use Firefox for almost all of my browsing needs. The first thing I noticed after opening my newly installed Firefox 4 is that the “screen real estate” or space used by web pages seemed larger, because it was indeed larger. Firefox 4 reduced the numbers of buttons and tools on the page (they are still available if needed), and combined the functions of others into a single button that intelligently knows what function to engage. To access what used to be the menus at the top of the pages, simply click on the “Firefox” button in the top left corner, and a comprehensive menu drops down, reminiscent of the menus available on older versions of Firefox; after use, the menus disappear, leaving a clean appearance.

The address bar, now called the “Awesome Bar,” and tabs are thinner (less height), also freeing up space on the desktop. Tabs for open pages are now at the top of the screen by default, but can be quickly moved below the Awesome Bar if desired. These changes at the top of the window create a clean appearance, lacking the clutter of older browsers, freeing up space for web pages. If the user wants to restore the classic menu buttons to their archaic positions at the top of the page, and sacrifice some of the newly available real estate, clicking on the “Firefox” button and then Options – Menu Bar will display the menus where they were on the older versions. I usually have several tabs (web pages) open at any given time, and

sometimes it gets confusing and cluttered when switching between tabs. Firefox 4 offers a feature it calls “Panorama.” With Panorama, commonly used tabs can be combined in single group, making them each readily identifiable and accessible.

I created a Panorama for my most commonly used tabs, including my web based email, Facebook, my news page, and my stock quotes. By going to the Panorama, I can instantly see a thumbnail of each of the pages, and open them as desired. Multiple Panoramas can be created for other groups or clusters of often used tabs. The Panorama button is a small, square icon made up of four smaller rectangles, and this will open the Panoramas. Some users have reported that they did not have a Panorama icon, but it is available and can be permanently displayed by clicking on the down arrow on the right of the tabs, displaying a menu of the open tabs; by clicking on the “Tab Groups,” the Panorama screen will open, and the icon for it will now appear on the browser.

Panorama is a powerful tool that can be manipulated and used to manage groups and tabs; a little practice is all that is necessary to master the functions of panorama. Now that users can access Firefox on multiple platforms and devices, including a new Firefox for mobile phones, a “Sync” function allows the user to securely synchronize passwords, tabs, bookmarks, and other information between browsers. Now, if Firefox 4 is used on multiple computers, tablets, smart phones, and other devices, the user can have material from one device instantly available on any other chosen device, all efficiently coordinated or “Synced.”

Clicking on the “Tabs From Other Computers” will display the open tabs from the other synchronized computers. I tried this on two simultaneous running computers with Sync engaged on both, and was able to get an open tab on one machine to automatically appear on the other machine. Sync also works across different operating systems; since Firefox 4 will run on Windows, Mac, and other operating systems, Sync will effectively connect all of them. To save space and maintain a clean look, buttons have been rearranged, which may take the user a few moments to become familiar with using. The “Home” button will display any stored bookmarks by clicking on the “down arrow,” and the “star” icon will create a new bookmark. Frequently used tabs or bookmarks can be “pinned” on the tab bar, somewhat permanently placing them there (they are removable), allowing their easy access whenever Firefox is loaded.

One notable improvement in Firefox 4 over its predecessors and some of its major competitors is speed. Firefox 4 loads faster, and displays pages much faster than in the past. In published performance tests, Firefox 4 loaded and displayed web mail, games, and other pages between three and six times faster than the previous Firefox 3.6. One of the several reasons for this improved performance is an improved Java script engine called JägerMonkey, which is faster and more efficient than earlier engines. Another substantial improvement on speed and performance comes from hardware acceleration, which works with Windows 7, Vista, XP, and Max OS X, and takes better advantage of the hardware in the machine to speed the display of games and videos, and other graphic intensive websites. Browsing privacy is becoming more important to users for safety and security reasons.

Firefox 4 offers a “Private Browsing,” which allows the user to surf the net without saving a list of the websites which were visited. Some users prefer to “Clear Recent History” which will delete private data or recent browsing activity, making it difficult for others to see what the user was doing online. Sometimes we visit a website in error, or one that we would prefer

to simply forget; the “Forget This Site” feature deletes every trace of having ever visited that website. Many users are oblivious that websites either by themselves, or in collaboration with other websites, track where the user has been for the purpose of creating marketing profiles for sale to advertisers, or other information about the user; the “Do Not Track” feature informs websites that the user wants to opt-out of any tracking.

Fraud of various types is rampant on the internet; the “Content Security Policy” determines which website content is legitimate, and protects the user from many forms of cross-site scripting attacks. In terms of personal privacy, while Firefox 4 is very good at protecting the user’s privacy, it should be noted that ISP’s and websites typically collect information from the data stream, and a browser cannot definitively control this collection. One claim that has been made about Firefox in the past is that it has often been more secure than Internet Explorer; Firefox 4 continues this tenaciousness by implementing a series of tough security functions at the browser level. One such feature is “Instant Website ID” which displays a color coded icon directly to the left of the web address in the Awesome Bar (address bar), which indicates the degree of valid identity information available about the listed website. If the icon is gray, that indicates that there is no identity information listed for that website, which may be an indication that the particular website is not trustworthy, and personal information and credit card numbers maybe should not be entered on that site. A blue icon indicates that the website has basic identity information available, and that there may be some form of third party “trust” verification, along with some encryption, but the information has not been independently verified by a credible resource. A green icon means that the website being displayed has posted complete information about it, and has validated its authenticity.

Firefox 4 also provides integral protection from phishing (forged websites used to obtain information for the purpose of identity theft or other financial crimes), and malware (Trojans and spyware) which may be transmitted from a purloined website, by warning the user to avoid that particular website. Many of us frequently download and install software and other files from the internet via our browser; this has also become a prominent vector for the transmission of malware. The “Secure Software Installation” feature requires that a secured connection be established prior to the downloading and installation of any software. This feature, along with “AntiVirus Integration,” which integrates the user’s security software with the browser, scans downloads for malware as they are being downloaded, providing an extra level of protection from viruses and other malware.

Browsers incorporate a variety of plug-ins and other add-ons which provide additional functionality to the browser. Common plug-ins include Java, QuickTime, Flash, Adobe Acrobat, and many others. Firefox 4 offers a “Plug-in Check” to display which plug-ins need to be updated, which may result in improved security and performance. Adjacent to each plug-in is a button to automate the update process by automatically downloading the latest plug-ins. Users of Windows 7 who have young children may implement the parental control features integrated into Windows 7; Firefox 4 seamlessly integrates with the Windows 7 parental controls and can block the children from unapproved web access, downloads, and other internet functions.

There are many more new or improved features in Firefox 4, which is explicitly why I use it as my default browser. One minor issue, which Firefox is currently rectifying, is that a few

of my third party plug-ins and add-ons from Firefox 3.6.15 were incompatible with Firefox 4 when imported, and thus could not be used. Firefox 4 has a feature which allows the user to report any incompatible plug-ins to the developers who will try to resolve the incompatible items.

Most of the few plug-ins I had issues with have been resolved, with only my older version of the RoboForm password manager having some issues with Firefox 4. RoboForm is offering an upgraded version that is optimized for Firefox 4 for a fee (\$20), but the blog threads indicate that Firefox may have a fix in the works. Rhetorically, one may ask why Firefox earned the number two position in the browser market. The answers are many, as discussed above. Firefox 4 is available for free for almost all operating systems and platforms, including portable and mobile devices. Since they can all be securely synchronized if desired, Firefox 4 can be an excellent choice, even if another browser is already installed. The different versions can all be accessed at mozilla.com. Download it and install it, and you will likely enjoy Firefox 4 as much as I enjoy it.

WEBSITES:

<http://getfirefox.com> <http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/new> <http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/central>

<http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/plugincheck>

<http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/performance>

<http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/security>



How Private is Email?

Q. I have heard that all mail is read and monitored so mail service providers can collect information about users. I don't like the sound of that, so I wanted to ask you if there is any truth to it?

A. There are no teams of PERs (Professional Email Readers) who sit at monitors day and night and read billions of messages. That simply doesn't happen.

That being said – well, written – every email provider has the ability to access email and other data flowing through or residing on its mail servers. This holds true for text messaging, Twittering, blogging, online photo albums, email – you name it.

If I send email using Cox, Comcast, Verizon, Earthlink, Gmail, or any other provider, those commercial entities have the ability to view it, but there is a world of difference between having the ability to do something and actually doing it. Can operators listen in to our telephone conversations? Of course, they can. But do they do it? No, they don't.

My feeling is that if anybody wants to read my emails or monitor Web sites I visit, that's fine with me. It would probably bore them to tears, which would serve them right.

The bottom line is that all email is viewable under the right circumstances, with the appropriate subpoena or court order. But on a day to day basis, there is nothing untoward occurring with any one mail service that isn't occurring with any other provider.

I have often advised subscribers of my weekly newsletter (www.MrModem.com) to never write in an email that which they would not want to appear on the front page of their local newspaper. When all is said and done, that remains very sound advice, if I do say so myself.

Q. In a previous column you explained how to cut, copy and, paste, but how do I select a "destination location" for that material that you referred to?

A. Asking where to copy something is a bit like getting in your car and asking, "What is my destination?" When you cut or copy something, you presumably have something in mind that you're planning to do with that data. So whatever you have in mind IS your destination. In other words, if you were not planning to do something with whatever data you cut or copied, you wouldn't cut or copy it in the first place. Your destination location might be another document, email, or you might simply cut and paste a paragraph elsewhere in the same document if you're rearranging the sequence in which material appears.

Q. Do flash drives have a limited lifespan? Do they deteriorate after a couple of years?

A. Nothing is forever, but the general consensus is that flash drives are good for approximately ten years. That estimate depends on the manner in which the device is stored, as temperature, humidity, proximity to electro-magnetic devices, small animals that chew things and small children that flush things, can also adversely affect the useful life of a flash drive.

I would avoid relying on flash drives for long-term data storage. 10 years is an industry "best guess," but failure can occur in far less time. There are simply no guarantees. I randomly check my saved data at least once every year just to make sure it's not deteriorating and that it's still accessible. Every five years I transfer it to new storage media, as new technologies emerge.

Q. I love my iPad, but sometimes I'm frustrated using its touchscreen keyboard. Is there any faster way to capitalize words than by pressing the SHIFT key and then typing a letter?

A. Most iPad (www.apple.com/ipad) users do exactly what you described, but there is a faster way: Tap the SHIFT key, then without removing your finger from the screen, drag it to the letter you want to capitalize and release in a single tap, slide, release motion. You can also do this with numbers and punctuation by tapping the .?123 key.

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

ClickMazes

If you enjoy mazes, you will definitely find something here to both daze and amaze you. These aren't your everyday, garden-variety mazes. No-sir-ee. Here you will find step-over sequence mazes, orientation mazes, punt mazes, and many others that I have never heard of, either.

www.clickmazes.com

Stellarium

Type in your location and this free, online planetarium will show you what you would see if you actually got up off your chair and went outside and looked at the night sky. Set your coordinates and beam yourself up! www.stellarium.org/

Veteran-Owned Businesses

A comprehensive directory of more than 6,000 veteran-owned businesses, divided into 28 categories ranging from Aerospace to Technology. If you're a veteran and would like to add your business, you are invited to submit it online. Be sure to visit this site often and support our veterans.

www.veteranownedbusiness.com

For plain-English answers to your questions by email, plus great computing tips, subscribe to Mr. Modem's award-winning WEEKLY newsletter. Subscribe using Promo Code 1046 and receive one free month (four weekly issues!) with your six-month subscription. To view a sample issue or subscribe, visit www.MrModem.com.

Synchronize Your Bookmarks Between Computers

by Sandy Berger, Compu-KISS

In today's world, more and more of us are accessing the Internet from several different devices. We may use a computer at work, a tablet PC at home, and a smart phone or a laptop computer when we are on the go. When we bookmark a website at the home, we might like to bring up that bookmarked webpage when we are at the office or when we visit a relative. If we are using the default settings of an Internet browser, we cannot do this. However there is a way to synchronize bookmarks between devices.

Just about every web browser today offers some way to synchronize bookmarks either through an add-in, a toolbar or a setting. Most of these solutions, however, only work if you use the same web browser on each device. For instance, if you use a Firefox add-in called Sync, you can only access your bookmarks from a device that has Firefox installed. So if you use Firefox at home, but Firefox doesn't work on your mobile device or your mother doesn't happen to have Firefox installed on her computer, you can't easily access your bookmarks while at those places. There are several stand-alone programs that solve this problem by allowing you to synchronize bookmarks between browsers, but I have a better answer.

The best and easiest solution for synchronizing bookmarks and favorites is a free service from Google called Google Bookmarks. I have used Google Bookmarks for several years. This service keeps a copy of all your bookmarks securely in the cloud, so you can access them from any Internet-connected computer or tablet and most smart phones.

To use Google Bookmarks, you simply surf over to www.google.com/bookmarks. If you already have a Google account from using Gmail, Google Calendar, or another Google service, you can just sign in and add Bookmarks to your account. If you don't have a Google account, you can sign up for the free Google account and activate Google Bookmarks right from this page.

When you add the Google Bookmarks to your Google Account you will be asked if you want to copy your current bookmarks or favorites from your web browser. You will want to do this, unless your bookmarks or favorites have become so unruly that you would like to start with a clean slate.

Once you have the Google Bookmarks set up, the easiest ways to access your new bookmarks is to install the Google Toolbar, which is a free download available at www.google.com/toolbar. You should install this toolbar on the computer that you use most often in the

web browser that you usually use. For instance, if you use Internet Explore on your home computer, installing the Google Toolbar there will give you quick access to your Google Bookmarks as well as some additional features.

If you are using another computer that has the Google Toolbar installed, you can simply log into your Google account to access your bookmarks on that computer. On computers and mobile devices that don't have the Google Toolbar, you can log into your Google account and access your bookmarks at www.google.com/bookmarks. Google also has a small icon that you can drag to the links bar of any browser to access your Google bookmarks. It is available on the same page. Just click "Add Bookmark" at your Google Bookmarks page and you will see a blue box marked "Google Bookmark" that can be added to your web browser toolbar.

The only difficult part about this whole process is remembering to use the Google toolbar or icon to create your bookmarks rather than using your browser bookmark icon. Once you get in the habit of doing that, you are good to go.

Using the Google Bookmarks offers two additional perks. First, their bookmark page is extremely well organized. If you have ever tried to delete, rename, or rearrange your bookmarks or favorites in Internet Explorer, Firefox, or any other web browser, you know that this can be a trying task. Google Bookmarks, however, makes it easy. Just surf over to the Google Bookmarks page. As long as you are logged in to Google, you will see all of your bookmarks and find that it is easy to work with them.

The second perk is that Google has recently introduces a feature called "Lists" to their bookmarks. This feature lets you create a list of websites that revolve around one topic. It is a great way to research a topic, plan a trip, or organize an event. You can share your lists with selected people if you need to collaborate on any project. Google will also give you suggestions that pertain to the items in your list and sometimes these are very useful. So if you decide to try Google Bookmarks, you may also want to try the list feature.

If you use multiple devices, Google Bookmarks will keep your bookmarks in sync. Although this may only be a small step in keeping your world organized, being in sync can give you a very good feeling.

Cell Phone Lingo

by Wil Wakely

President, Seniors Computer Group, CA

When it's time to buy or upgrade to a new cell phone, are you as confused as I am with all the fancy terms and acronyms in the sales pitch? They make my head spin. Some of the terms you will encounter refer to the technology generation of the phone, as in GO to G5. About every 10 years the next larger G (generation) number appears denoting a major improvement in cell phone technology. Each generation improves the speed, security, power usage, range and reliability of cell phones.

GO refers to the original mobile telephone, a large unit stored in the car trunk with a hand-set between the driver and passenger seat. Remember those? Essentially it was a souped-up shortwave radio. These first made the scene via Motorola and Bell Telephone in the 50's.

Next came G 1 using GMS tech (see below) which also was analog, first introduced in Japan in 1979 and later in the USA in June 2011.

In 1992, G 2 was a major improvement using digital tech-nology vs. analog that was used in G1. So what's the difference? Analog is a continuous smooth signal like whistling a tune. Digital rapidly samples the song and converts each small time segment into a series of ones and zeros, or digits. Through some clever complex calculations, these digits are converted back to the original sound tone and volume. The advantages of digital are that the data can be compressed and encoded for security and no information is lost as long as the I/O signal can be detected, even from a lot of accompanying noise.

In 2001, 3G was introduced using a new technology called CDMA (code division multiple access) developed by our local Qualcomm com-pany. This is a very complex encoding that allows many more users on the same channel at the same time. G3 is probably the most common system in use today.

G4 arrived in 2006 and allows 1 Gbt/s (one gigabit per second) downloads from a fixed location or 100 mbt/s (megabits per second) from a moving vehicle. These high speeds allow streaming high-definition video (HD movies) on your cell phone. Also, connections to the Internet are faster and better. G5 is still in the lab and promises even more features, but may not arrive before 2020.

The cell phone field is rampant with 3,4, and 5 letter acronyms. Here are a few that a salesman may try to impress you with:

GMS (global mobile system): still widely used in older phones.

TDMA (time domain multiple access): sharing the airwave in small time slots.

FDMA (frequency domain multiple access): sharing the airwave in different frequencies.

CDMA (see above).

An analogy to the problem of multiple access is a room (channel) in which people wish to talk to each other simultaneously. To avoid confusion, people could take turns speaking (time division), speak at different pitches (frequency division), or speak in different languages (code division).

Other terms you may encounter are LTE (long term evolution), OTDMA (orthogonal TDMA) and WiMax (similar to WiFi). These are fancy names for some of the latest improvements in the field. So the best strategy for buying a new cell phone is to read the reviews and then find a salesman you can trust. Some of the above information may help you understand his pitch and also impress him with your knowledge.

From the March 2011 issue of Bits and Bytes, The Official Electronic Newsletter of the Seniors Computer Group [www.SCGsd.org.wilw\(at\)adnc.com](http://www.SCGsd.org.wilw(at)adnc.com)

OnGuardOnline.gov — Stop, Think, Click — Online Safety

by Ira Wilsker

The news has been overwhelmed by stories about the dangers of the internet. Just in recent days, we have heard of major banks losing the personal information of hundreds of thousands of account holders; a congressman's indiscretions on a social networking website; hackers accessing thousands of accounts at a major retailer; and many other mass data breaches that may result in wholesale identity theft. Individuals are still falling prey to

the infamous “Nigerian 419” scams, sending money to pay the “fees and taxes” in order to receive unimaginable riches from the Nigerian Oil Minister’s widow.

Many people are duped into ordering merchandise from crooks who take the money (or credit card data), and have no intention of ever delivering the purported merchandise. We constantly hear of children who have become the victims of cyber-bullying, where social network websites or chat rooms are utilized to engage in the cyber-bullying. Russian crooks, often teenagers, continue to spread rogue antivirus software in order to extort money from victims, and then sell the credit card information to other crooks. We plead that something ought to be done about these and the other endemic online scams; once again, the federal government has launched a website to educate us such that we may become resistant to such scams and other internet threats, OnGuardOnline.gov.

According to the header on the opening page of OnGuardOnline.gov, “(this website) provides practical tips from the federal government and the technology industry to help you be on guard against Internet fraud, secure your computer, and protect your personal information.” The website is maintained by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) with the assistance of a substantial public — private partnership. Among the federal agencies and private organizations that contribute material to the website are the U.S. Department of Justice; Department of Homeland Security; Internal Revenue Service (IRS); Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC); Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS); Consumers Union (Consumers Reports magazine); National Cyber Security Alliance; Anti-Phishing Working Group (APWG); National Center for Missing & Exploited Children; Cyberbully411; The SANS Institute; The National Association of Attorneys General; Better Business Bureau (BBB); National Crime Prevention Council (McGruff the Crime Dog); and several other agencies and organizations. The extensive resources of these agencies and organizations have created and compiled some excellent online safety resources for the use of children, adults, and families.

This website consists of three major sections; Topics, Games, and Videos; all of the information is presented at a level that would be appropriate for family viewing. The Topics section consists of over two dozen discreet subjects, each hyperlinked to a detailed explanation of that subject. The Topics include a child online safety section “Net Cetera”; scam avoidance; instructions on how to safely dispose of old computers, considering both personal security and environmental concerns; “An Overview of Computer Security - Stop • Think • Click”; securing your home wireless network; identity theft; internet auctions; “Kids’ Privacy”; laptop security; spyware, malware, and viruses; online investing safety; safe online shopping tips; phishing (identity theft); hotspot safety and security; and other relevant and useful topics.

Many kids and adults like playing games, and the Games section has a baker’s dozen games. According to the Games page, “Feeling up for a challenge? Then test your cyber smarts with one or all of our interactive quizzes on everything from spam and spyware to phishing and file-sharing.” I tried several of the online games, and they are both cute and educational. The games are colorful, utilize exciting sounds and music, and are mostly of the interactive question and answer variety. If correct answers are chosen, the game displays some congratulatory words, as well as an enhanced explanation; if an incorrect answer is picked, the reasons are given why the answer is wrong, and the correct response is then displayed. At the end of each game a final score is displayed along with links for additional information.

Games cover a variety of topics including P2P (Peer to Peer) file sharing, ID Theft, spyware, cybercrime, and other contemporary cyber safety subjects. Users should play each of these games, and learn from them. Each game only takes a minute or two to play, but they are loaded with useful and beneficial information. In “Invasion of the Wire-less Hackers,” the player must protect his Wi-Fi network from evil hackers by correctly answering questions about wireless security. A correct answer keeps the evil hackers away from the computer, but incorrect answers, along with some creepy music, bring the hackers closer and closer to the computer until it is taken over by the evil hackers. In the game “Invest Quest” the player spins and advances by successfully answering questions about online investing safety. Several times during the game a window pops up warning the player that a scammer is trying to steal his money, and he can be protected by answering the question correctly, otherwise the winnings in his piggy bank may be stolen.

By playing these fun games the user can learn valuable lessons about computing safety and security. The games are appropriate for both children and adults, and could be a healthy family activity. For those with websites or blogs, the code for each of the games can be obtained by clicking the “Grab this Game” button, which will display a few lines of code. This code can then be copied and pasted into the blog or on the website, allowing others to play the games.

The videos available on OnGuardOnline.gov cover a variety of subjects, and are clearly geared to different age levels. Five of the videos are “Net Cetera Videos” (also available on YouTube) and are intended to be viewed by children (as well as parents), and cover “... online risks, including sharing too much information, scams, viruses, P2P file-sharing, and cyberbullying.” Another video is intended to “...help parents start a conversation with their kids about online safety, and find resources to help them.”

The three “Phishy Videos” are “60-second spots [which] expose phishing scams where online fraudsters use email, pop-ups, or text messages to get your personal and financial information by showing what phishing would look like offline.” All of these videos may be explicitly forwarded, posted, or linked from other websites and blogs.

OnGuardOnline.gov is an excellent website that provides a wealth of information for parents and children in a fun and pleasant way. It would be most appropriate for families to play the games and watch the videos together. While some of the subjects are intended to help us protect our fiscal health, the most valuable subjects can help us protect our most valuable assets, our children.

WEBSITE: <http://www.onguardonline.gov>

Your Computer's Health — What Junk Files?

by Bob Woods

Webmaster, UCHUG, CA

The UCHUG Drive Light is presenting a series of articles on the general topic of Your Computer's Health. I have a Compaq laptop that is around 7 months old that I use for reading e-mail, surfing the web, P!lblishing the changes to the UCHUG web site and occasionally playing games. Since I have any important files backed up on eXternal devices I haven't been too concerned with making a full backup image of the hard drive on this PC. I also have not run any cleanup utilities. After all, if it ain't broke, why

fix it? But, after having the PC for 7 months I thought it might be time to take on these tasks. In the January 2011 edition of Drive Light, Art Gresham started a series of articles on PC maintenance. Part 1 of the series was tips for basic hard drive and OS data cleaning. I figured that there is no better time to do a cleanup than before imaging the hard drive.

Following Art's advice I first loaded CCleaner. I am a volunteer in the IT department at the USS Midway Museum; we use CCleaner to start data cleanup on the computers in use by the staff so I am familiar with its use. When run, CCleaner gives you a nice interface with a number of options for cleaning temporary files left behind by Internet browsers (IE, Firefox, etc.), Windows Explorer, Windows itself and other applications that use temp files. To check on what it finds you can click on "Analyze" vice "Run Cleaner." That way you have a chance to de-termine what the application will be doing. I expected it to list a number of IE and Firefox temp files, but was surprised at how many system and application temp files it found. In all over 350 MB would be cleaned off the drive. After running the cleaning function I clicked to scan the registry for problems. During this scan CCleaner looks for unused items, missing shared DLL's and application paths, obsolete software references, leftover installation references, fragments and a few other items. CCleaner lists all that it finds for you to review.

Again, given that the PC was only 7 months old I was surprised by the number of leftovers from updates and software removals. Cleaning these items will result in a cleaner registry which will speed bootup and shutdown times and increase system stability. When you click to "Fix selected issues." you will be given the option to save the registry prior to the cleanup or cancel the operation. It took about 10 minutes to do the all of the cleanup.

The next application to install and run is Advanced System Care. This application will allow you to further clean up the registry, remove Spyware, clean up more junk files and past browser history. You may ask why do this as CCleaner did some of the same functions? Each of the applications will take a slightly different approach to scanning your system and find different items the other did not find. Sure enough, there were a few more registry issues and temp files missed by CCleaner. Advanced System Care also has a system diagnosis section not in CCleaner that will analyze and fix system performance, system configuration and security problems. Another few issues were cleaned up. Advanced System Care also took about 10 minutes for the cleanup. I could have also used it for disk defragment, but wanted to use a separate defrag program so loaded IOBit Smart Defrag.

Smart Defrag is another application that has a nice clean interface that is easy to use and understand. When ran it I found fragmentation after 7 months was less than 1% (only .71%). Back in the earlier versions of Windows I would have expected at least 10-15% frag-mentation. It seems that the OS may be getting better at not fragmenting files. Still, any fragmentation will use extra space and take extra time for the hard drive heads to move to pick up bits and pieces. So even at less than 1% fragmentation I was Willing to take the time to perform the defragmentation. Total time was about 15 minutes to defrag the 50 GB of data stored on a 220 GB drive.

At the end of the whole process I saved hard drive space, cleaned up the registry, and eased the burden on the hard drive. So, did I see a performance improvement? Without running a benchmark it would be hard to tell, but the system does seem a bit quicker. But the overall benefits to the health of the system should result in better performance and longer hard drive life.

As for the backup, it went smoothly and is much cleaner as I did not back up unnecessary temp files and junk in the registry.

From the March 2011 issue of UCHUG (Under the Computer Hood User Group) Drive Light.

Registry First Aid

Reviewed by Herb Goldstein

Editor, Sarasota PCUG, FL

Solving the Registry Cleaning Dilemma

Nothing much happens in Windows without control by that mysterious architecture known as the Registry. It is a humongous database repository of instructions, commands, and framework for the software, hardware, and just about every other kind of ware that functions in Windows. You can also think of it as the Windows brain, and fooling with it is about as welcome as brain surgery self-taught.

Unfortunately and as unwelcome as it may be, the Registry does require some basic manipulation by users from time to time. Add or remove software or change the locations of its components, make routine changes in Windows, and a whole host of other functions in everyday computer usage result in changes in the Registry. In time it can easily become bogged down with errors that can dramatically hinder the normal or optimal functioning of your computer. It's little wonder why keeping the registry clean and error free is so important, yet so avoided. It's even less wonder why the average computer user either shuns necessary Registry housekeeping altogether or winds up employing tools that do considerably more harm than good.

A clean, error-free Registry is vital in keeping your computer working properly, but finding and fixing Registry errors indeed poses a dilemma. There is no shortage of utilities that promise to make your computer function like new by taking out your Registry garbage. Unfortunately, you are most often better off living with an error-laden Registry than one whose key functions have been impaired by incompetent fixers.

With all these caveats in mind, I spent considerable effort, investigation, and experimentation years ago to find the Registry cleaning utility that would do an honest, safe and effective job. Through several versions of Windows and most recently with Windows 7, I have been using Registry First Aid (RFA). It is a well-known, popular, easy to use, and remarkably competent Registry utility that will find, fix, and prevent Registry errors and malfunctions safely and effectively. It is the only one I trust to do the job! Here's what it will do:

1. RFA will search the Registry for errors. Your first search will undoubtedly come up with an amazing number of errors. It will present a color coded list of them. Those in green can be safely eliminated or fixed. For each error, you will be provided with a reason for its problem and an indication of what is needed to either delete or fix it. If, for example, a software reference is not valid because it is sitting in the wrong place, RFA will discover where it rightfully belongs and offers to put it there. If no fix is possible, it offers to delete it.

Those errors that require caution in fixing are listed in yellow, along with reasons and recommendations. The choice will be yours. Those listed in red are also explained and high caution warned.

In any event, each and every error will be explained, recommendation made, and the choice for action will be up to you. No changes are automatic. You are in complete control!

2. Registry backup and restore. Before making any changes, you might want to back up your current Registry configuration. RFA stores the backup and you can at any later time restore the Registry to exactly the way it was before you modified it. Great safety feature!
3. Registry search. If you need to find anything in the Registry, RFA will do a lightning fast keyword search for you. A great feature in finding and eliminating references to software you have gotten rid of.
4. Registry management. Set up the Registry in your own parameters to function according to your preferences.
5. Defragment and compress the Registry.

While most Registry utilities offer to make your computer work faster and better by cleaning the Registry, they offer no information as to what they are doing or why. It's a blind faith and trust scenario. On the other hand, RFA bends over backwards in every step along the way to keep you safe and informed.

RFA is the recipient of numerous awards as the safest and most effective Registry cleaner available. They are well deserved. It has long ago solved the Registry cleaning dilemma for me. It is compatible with all current versions of Windows including XP, Vista, and Windows 7. RFA is published by and available from Rose City Software (rosecitysoftware.com) for \$27.95.

From the April 2011 issue, The Monitor, www.spcug.org, [pcugedit \(at\) verizon.net](mailto:pcugedit@verizon.net).

Samsung 256GB Solid State Drive

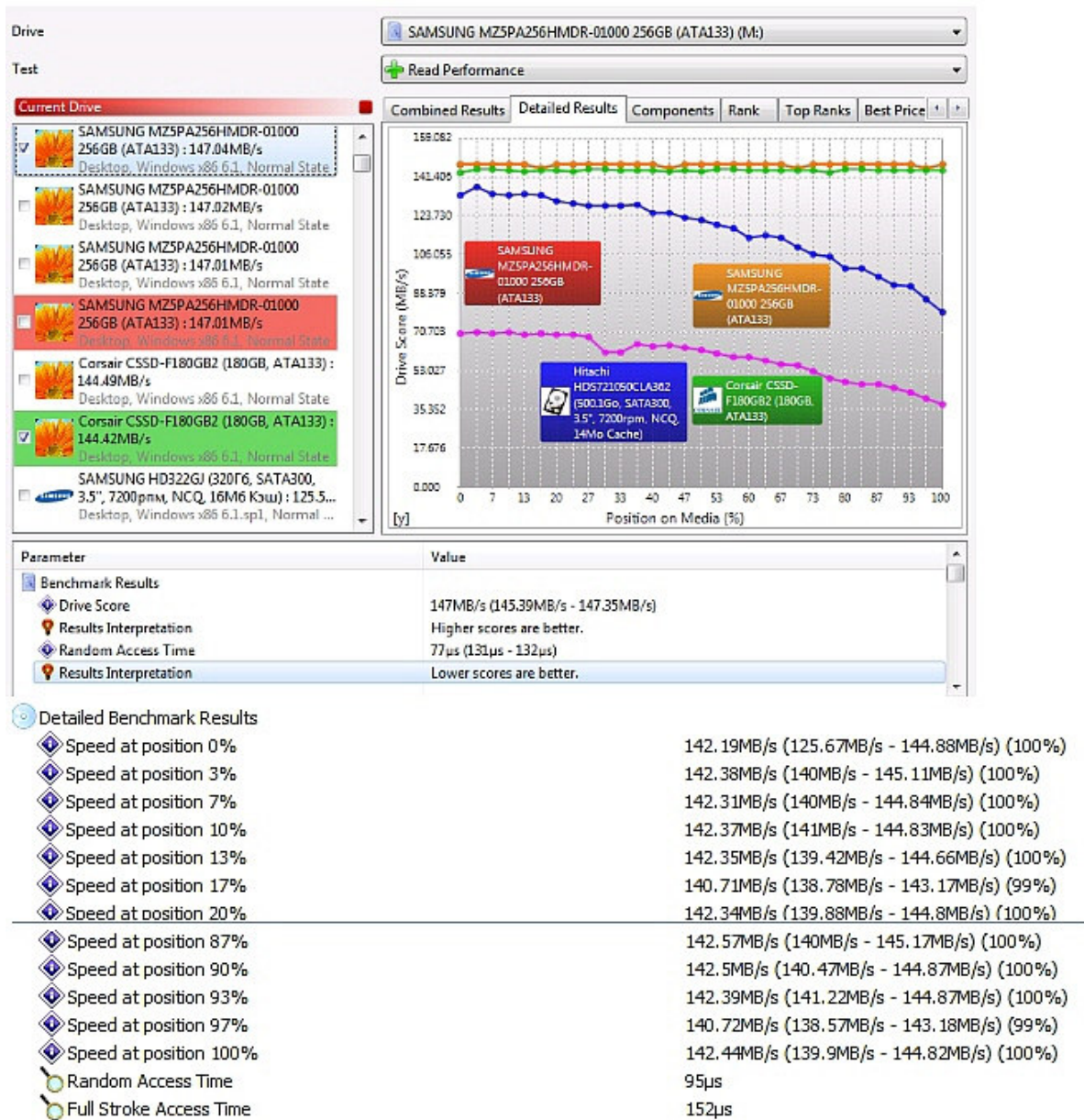
by Alice Hamilton

Houston Area League of PC Users, Houston, TX

If you want something that's fast, energy-efficient, lightweight and durable, and don't mind the hefty prices, Samsung's outstanding performance will make it worth the investment. This is simply the best drive on the market with performance to back it up.



It's mighty fast, light, and, like all SSDs, designed to be durable and save energy, since it has no moving parts. It's a 2.5" format, solid state (basic technology: think flash drive) and supports: Windows, Mac and Linux. If for no other reason, laptop owners – it generates less heat than your palm!



Like all SSDs, the Samsung has no moving parts, so it potentially can endure shocks, vibration, and even water damage much better than traditional hard drives. The drive supports the most popular SATA 3Gbps standard, also known as SATA2. This is a little disappointing since the new, much faster SATA 6Gbps standard has been available for a while and Samsung doesn't support it. Samsung – how come? It is S.M.A.R.T. compliant, a feature I'd like to see more of on mechanical hard drives..

When it comes to storage devices, the length of the warranty is the most important factor, and Samsung offers a decent one – a three-year warranty, although less than the five-year warranty by Seagate. “Samsung claims a MTBF (Mean Time Between Failures) of 1.5 million

hours. This is a typical estimate that most manufacturers label their SSDs with. Samsung also claims that the drive will withstand 1500G shock resistance, also standard amongst SSDs.” We didn’t test for this one!

Big news: Samsung has a new controller in all three SSDs as of last summer and features a revised NAND flash memory. All three models use just fraction of a single watt and a meager watt when active. Do not format this or any SSD. If you are running Windows 7, it understands how to take care of a SSD. This drive is very green. Nice touch Sam-sung!

Should the drive need to be tuned up, the performance you should use the optimization option to restore original performance. This is a very handy feature for those not using Windows 7. Introducing the: SSD Magician software. It is a small application (less than 10MB) that provides those who operate Windows XP/SP3 and above, Windows Server 2003/SP2 and Windows Server 2008 the ability to use the TRIM function to restore lost performance. This makes it very easy for users to keep an eye on their Samsung SSD is performing and any kind of drive degradation is occurring. Very well designed program and user friendly. Go to Samsung’s site for information on the TRIM feature.

On the other hand: The Samsung SSD is significantly more expensive than mechanical hard drives and its storage capacity is a fairly meager 256GB. The drive doesn't support the new SATA 6Gbps data transfer rate. Samsung, that could have really put you out front...way out front.

See test chart for many details – in fact, take it with you when you are ready to buy a SSD. The retail package comes with an installation bracket to fit it into any 3.5” slot. This exceptional solid state hard drive has set the gold standard. It is fast and furious and will work its heart out for you – just keep it away from heat! For more info, updates and support go to www.samsung.com.

Alice Hamilton is a Houston Area League of PC Users family member who is a computer hardware instructor at a local community college and private consultant. From the April 2011 issue of HAL-PC.



Everything You Need to Know about Modern Mobile Operating Systems

Whether you own a smartphone or tablet, are considering buying one, or are curious about what's available, this article is a must read. <http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/everything-you-need-know-about-modern-mobile-operating-systems.htm>

Hey, a Decent DTP Program for Windows that's Free

Most quality desktop publishing programs are commercial and so is this one. What's different is they offer a cut-down free version that's good enough to meet the needs of non-professional users. No, it's no Quark or even Microsoft Publisher but it does provide a totally usable solution for most common DTP applications. As a bonus it's small download. <http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/dtp-program-windows-free.htm>

New Way to Get Air Flight Information with Google Search

Just in time for the summer travel season, Google announced today that it was making it easier to get flight information. It is now very simple to find out which airlines service a particular route and what the flight times are. This article shows you how to do it.

<http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/new-way-get-air-flight-information-google-search.htm>

Updated: Best Free Internet Safety Check

Want to find out the best way to surf the internet without getting infected? Then check out this wonderful article by editor "Remah." It's more a total re-write than an update and it is sufficiently impressive to get my top recommendation.

<http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/best-internet-safety-check.htm>.

How To Clean Your Electronics

This article located by our Roving Editor Rhiannon, has some really good tips on how to clean your electronics without damaging them. Humph, I wish it was on our site not somebody else's.

Best Free Computer Security Diet Plan

Is your computer fat, slow, and bloated because it's running too many security products? Then it's time to put it on a diet by reducing the number of security products down to those that really matter. If you follow the advice in this article your new lighter computer will not only run faster and react quicker but will provide the same or even better protection.

This is an intermediate level article not suited to beginners. It is also one of the top rated articles on our website.

<http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/best-free-security-diet-plan.htm>

What's on Your CD?

by Elaine Szaniszlo

If you want an index of what is on your CD, follow the following instructions.

1. Open CD from My Computer (select drive it is in).
2. View "Details."
3. Select full screen view.
4. Adjust the columns to display the detail you want.
5. Press Print Screen button. (This takes a picture of the screen.)
6. Open Word.
7. Paste picture (Edit-Paste or Cont-V).
8. Change picture to "Tight" View.
9. Crop unwanted information.

10. Size picture to fit the CD case (4-3/4" x 4- 3/4", for example). Note the ruler marks on top and side of page.
11. Print.
You will then need to trim the document to fit the CD case.

Society News

June 14, 2011

Help's Half Hour

by Jan Rothfuss

Q: When you run Adaware, is there a process running in the back-ground?

A: The free version only runs when you manually request a scan. Download the program from CNET.com or Download.com

Q: When using AVG antivirus, it now seems that it is really running a lot lately.

A: Yes, there seems to be a lot of updates and, when downloading, does cause the system to be slow. It is good that it will then detect viruses. Another program AVAST is similar in its function. Be aware that, when it has completed an update, an announcement comes over your speakers. Also, if performing a full scan, it can have an impact on the response time.

Q: When using Windows 7, he got a message that there were all kinds of virus issues.

A: It was suggested that message was likely a virus itself. Restart the machine in safe mode and run your anti-virus software to remove. The viruses are getting really good at mimicking what looks like a real Windows message window. To make it easier to detect these problems, change the default colors.

NOTE: SlimDrivers (available for free on Download.com) will scan your machine and identify outdated drivers. It will then create a restore point and download the needed drivers.

Q: Why does a Windows PC or laptop eventually slow down and stop?

A: The machine often keeps many unneeded bits. The registry gets clogged with hundreds of items that are no longer needed. Most uninstall programs do not take out all of the pieces. Revo Uninstaller should be used to uninstall a program to get rid of the most of these last parts. Wise Registry cleaner is free and detects items that can be removed.

Slides from Bob Coomber's presentation on genealogy are now available at our website <<http://www.rcsi.org/program.htm>>.

The Lighter Side

I work in an office for a major bank, which doesn't have an on-site IT technician. As I know more than most people there about computers, it falls to me to fill the role of IT coordinator.

My immediate boss, no matter how many times I explain it to him, insists on calling the CPU tower of a PC "the hard drive." Although it caused some confusion to begin with, I generally know what he means and ignore it, and the job gets done. But this came to a head a while ago when we had some extra work coming in, and we needed 20 new PCs, which my boss dutifully ordered.

When the shipment came in, it was in a suspiciously small box. Of course my boss had put in a call asking for “20 new hard drives,” and of course that’s what we’d been sent.

The funniest part was listening to one side of a telephone conversation in which he angrily complained that he’d wanted “HARD DRIVES, not this box of useless junk!”

While working the customer service desk at Staples, a white-haired gentleman came up with a DSL filter and asked if we sold them. We did, and I told him where they were located. Then he asked me if I knew anything about them.

Me: “Well, there really isn’t a whole lot to it. What did you want to know?”

Customer: “Well, here’s the thing. I’m dealing with some computer hackers, and they’ve managed to blow this thing, so I need something stronger.”

Me: “Um, I don’t think that’s the problem.”

Customer: “You know, there must be a huge amount of benefit and enjoyment in this whole hacking thing if they go to such lengths. If I don’t get something stronger they’ll just blow the next one.”

Me: “Well, a DSL filter is a DSL filter. They don’t really come in strengths. What you’re saying really isn’t possible.”

Customer: (waving the DSL filter) “They did it!”

Me: “Sir, it is physically impossible to destroy computer hardware remotely via hacking. Something else must have happened if the filter blew.”

Customer: “Well, you can go ahead and believe that if you want to.”