The Rochester Computer Society, Inc.

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Next Meeting
Tuesday, February 14

An Evening With Nick Francesco

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the Association of
Personal Computer User Groups

Protect Your Security While Browsing
by Ira Wilsker

As has become obvious in the eleven years that I have been doing this weekly column, I get many of my column ideas from Examiner readers, and listeners to my radio show. This column is no exception. Just yesterday, I received a frantic request from a local attorney whose computer had been hijacked by one of the endemic rogue antivirus virus programs, Vista AntiVirus 2012. As I have written here previously, this is but one of thousands of similar programs, usually from Russia, that completely take over the computer, preventing most other software from running, killing the installed security software, and offers to clean up the hijacked computer for a fee ($29-$69). This is nothing more than international extortion, where the crook not just gets the proceeds from the credit card transaction, but then often posts the credit card information on a variety of illicit sites where credit card information is criminally bought and sold.

The rogue software itself, despite its "AntiVirus" or "Anti-Spyware" moniker, is nothing of the sort; it in itself is often a Trojan that not just offers no protection, it displays fictitious infection reports, may hijack the computer and steal banking information and address books, send out multitudes of spam emails under the user's name, and launch cyberattacks on other computers as part of a zombie network. This rogue software is really nasty, and protects itself from removal. In several previous columns I explained how to remove this rogue software using the portable version of SuperAntispyware, MalwareBytes, or a variety of bootable CD and flash drive based utilities.

As has commonly been used in a variety of contexts, prevention is superior to cures, and that applies to this rogue software as well. Some of this rogue software is loaded by opening links or attachments in emails, often sent by known individuals whose own computers have been hijacked. A major vector of infection is by visiting otherwise legitimate websites that have had surreptitious code inserted into the valid code on the website, which may load the malware directly onto the victims' computers. There are also millions of hijacked websites that have the illicit code embedded, with many thousands more hijacked every day. There are also millions of rogue websites that have been created explicitly for the purpose of infecting the computers of visitors who load those purloined web pages. As an adjunct, there are also millions of other websites that are hosts of scams, crooks, identity thieves, and other illicit activities, that act as bait to ensnare a hapless victim.

Fortunately, there is a somewhat simple defense to most of these dangerous websites that while not perfect, does provide substantial protection from these illicit and dangerous websites. The first line of defense should be the browser itself. All of the latest versions of the major browsers, including Internet Explorer (IE), Firefox, Chrome, and Safari include some degree of protection from malevolent websites, and will warn the user if he is loading a website that is known to be a phishing (identity theft) website, or otherwise known to harbor and load malware. Users of older browsers may be very vulnerable to such attacks, and this alone is often sufficient reason to always install and use the latest version of the chosen browser. Many of the comprehensive security suites (not just antivirus software) include some degree of browser protection that will warn of, or totally block, known dangerous websites.

For those with older browsers, inadequate security software, or just simply want an additional layer of security while browsing, you may want to consider one of the free-standing freeware utilities that provides additional security while browsing. One of the most popular and highest rated browsing protection security utilities is WOT (Web of Trust), available for free from www.mywot.com. As I type this, WOT is approaching 30 million downloads! WOT works as a browser plug-in on most popular browsers, including Firefox, Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, Apple Safari, and Opera. According to the WOT website, "The WOT add-on shows you which websites you can trust based on millions of users' experiences. Our safe surfing browser tool is easy-to-use, fast and completely free." WOT will display a window over a suspicious website warning of the type and degree of threat, giving the user information whether to block the suspicious website, or to go ahead and load it. Since WOT uses community input from millions of users, there is an opportunity to challenge or request a change in a website's rating. WOT also works in conjunction with Google, Bing, and Yahoo! search engines to display the shown website ratings directly on the search results. Using an easy to comprehend red, yellow, and green icon, WOT gives the community rating for each website

listed. Simply moving the cursor over the colored icon on each search result will display relevant security details about the search result, including trustworthiness, vendor reliability, privacy, and child safety.

Another popular and well regarded free browser security scanner is AVG's LinkScanner (linkscanner.avg.com), which is available for PC and Mac computers, and works with Firefox and Internet Explorer. Similarly to the other link scanners, AVG LinkScanner offers two basic types of protection from dangerous websites. "Surf-Shield scans pages behind their links before you click on them. It does the same thing every time you enter a web address into your browser. If the page is infected, it simply prevents you from opening it. Search-Shield scans your Google, Yahoo! and Bing search results and places a safety rating next to each link, letting you know which sites can be trusted and which are to be avoided." AVG LinkScanner is frequently updated, and can be configured to automatically update itself, or can be manually updated. This utility does not consume significant amounts of system resources, and has a negligible impact on computer and browser performance and speed.

AVG is not the only major security software company offering free browser protection add-ons, as several other security software companies offer competing free products. Two others, which are also very popular, are TrendMicro's TrendProtect (www.trendsecure .com/portal/en-US/tools/security_tools/trendprotect) and McAfee's SiteAdvisor (www.site advisor.com). TrendProtect is considered by many to be a top performing free browsing protection utility that has a database of billions of web pages.

TrendProtect is a browser plug-in for Internet Explorer only (Firefox protection will be available in the future). It rates web pages displayed in the Google, Yahoo!, and Bing search results based on unwanted content and hidden threats. It also provides information about any potential threats when a web page is opened, and includes warnings of dangerous content, phishing, scams, and the reputation of the website.

McAfee SiteAdvisor (www.siteadvisor.com) is one of the original browsing protection utilities, and has a loyal following. There are versions of SiteAdvisor for Windows, Mac, and Android devices. As with its competitors, SiteAdvisor displays a rating of the search results on the major search engines, as well as many of the lesser search engines. SiteAdvisor is compatible with Internet Explorer, and both the Mac and Windows versions of Firefox. McAfee claims that SiteAdvisor can rate over 95% of websites for safety. SiteAdvisor can identify most web threats, including dangerous downloads, a website's email practices and threats, hijacked websites that can hijack the browser, phishing, sites with a poor reputation, e-commerce vulnerabilities, annoying pop-ups and cookies, and the illicit connections and affiliations between dangerous websites.

Using one of these browser add-ons or plug-ins may allow the user to avoid sources of infection, such as rogue software, phishing attacks, scams, and other types of web based threats. Since all of the above are free, and most will run on almost any computer and browser, there is no valid reason not to utilize one of these utilities.

Being protected from a threat may prevent an undesirable outcome; this is far superior to having to clean up the damage that may be caused by these otherwise preventable threats.
WEBSITES:
http://linkscanner.avg.com
http://www.mywot.com

http://www.siteadvisor.com

http://www.trendsecure.com/portal/en-US/tools/security_tools/trendprotect

https://www.techsupportalert.com/content/best-internet-safety-check-page-2.htm

Windows Live SkyDrive: An Office in the Cloud

by Nancy DeMarte

Sarasota PCUG, FL

A quiet, steady evolution is taking place in the data storage world. Soon CD's and external hard drives may be replaced by storage on the Internet, or, as we say, the "cloud." In this era of mobile devices like smart phones, laptops, and tablets, it is natural for us to want to have access to the files and photos on our base computer when we are in some remote location. SkyDrive is Microsoft's password-protected, free online storage area, complete with abbreviated versions of popular Microsoft Office programs for editing the stored files. It is also equipped for sharing files with others and is a convenient way to transfer files from an old computer to a new one. Microsoft Office users should get to know Windows Live SkyDrive as a solid option for online backup.

Online storage has been around for awhile, primarily purchased by businesses as a backup for large amounts of data. Carbonite, for example, is a well-respected online storage company popular with businesses which also offers a package for home clients. The home client pays an annual fee of about $60 per computer to upload user-created files to a secure spot. Free online storage is not as common, but Google and Microsoft are competing for the title of most popular free cloud storage. I have used Microsoft's SkyDrive for a couple of years and have found it to be a user friendly, flexible service with many good features and being updated all the time.

Windows Live

Before we explore how SkyDrive works, let's take a minute to review the concept of "Windows Live," of which SkyDrive is a part. Microsoft has been reworking the "Live" idea since 2005. It is a group of online services and software downloads which complement Microsoft's operating systems. When Windows 7 was introduced, several applications which had been part of earlier Windows versions were removed, among them Windows Mail and Photo Gallery. Instead, Microsoft offered a suite of programs and services called Microsoft Live Essentials and made it available for free downloads, as long as the person joined the Live community with a username and password. (I have belonged for years and have not received spam as a result.) Users can choose the programs they want from a long list. Many of these are online services, such as SkyDrive and Hotmail. Others are downloadable programs, such as Windows Live Mail and Movie Maker. All are free. Microsoft has announced recently that Windows 8 will have the Live Essentials package included with the system.

SkyDrive: Free Storage

SkyDrive lets a Microsoft Office user add Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, PowerPoint presentations, OneNote documents, and photos to a password-protected place on the Internet at skydrive.live.com. You can add a single file up to 100MB in size and can store a total of 25GB at no charge. These limits were recently raised, and the prediction is that storage space on SkyDrive may be unlimited very soon. Isn't competition great?
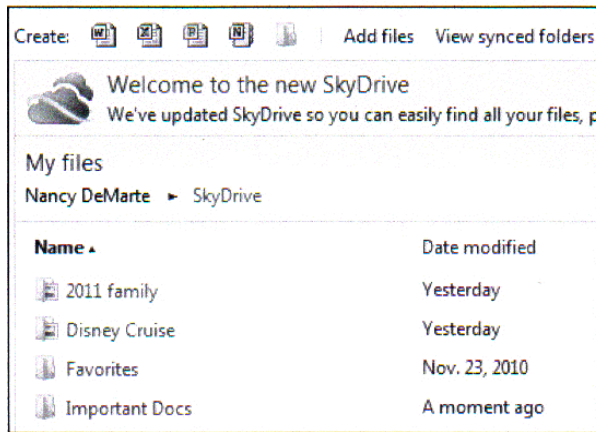
To add files to SkyDrive, you must first create a free Live account, then log on to SkyDrive and create folders to hold your files. You then select the files, including photos, from your computer and upload copies of them into these folders using an easy-to-follow wizard on the SkyDrive home page. You can even upload a whole folder at once as a local zip drive. Next you set permissions for each folder using a simple slider and folksy categories: Everyone (public), People I selected, People with a link, or Just me.

Once files are in SkyDrive, they can be deleted, organized, and renamed. Plus, they can be edited with the Office web apps, mini-versions of Office programs located on the SkyDrive home page, using any version of Office back to 2003. If you have Office 2010, you can open a file that you have stored in SkyDrive in the appropriate web app, and then click the "Open in …" button to open it with your full version of program on your computer. If you have an earlier version of Office, you can download a plug-in program from Microsoft that allows you to open a file with your full program. I tried this on my laptop with Word 2007, however, and found it cumbersome. I guess they want us to buy Office 2010. As a workaround, you can always download a file from SkyDrive to your computer for full editing capabilities.

Sharing Files

If you want to share a file, whether an Office file for a photo, on SkyDrive with someone, you can either send him a link or set the permission so he can view and/or edit it. I experimented by sharing a Word 2007 document with a friend who is not a member of Windows Live. In SkyDrive, I highlighted the file I wanted to send. From the Sharing menu, I clicked 'Send a Link'. An email message opened ready to address. It contained a link to the file with a spot for me to type a message. My friend received the message with no problem and merely clicked the link to go directly to the folder on SkyDrive. She now has permission to view documents in that folder.

Currently, the only Office web app that allows for shared editing is Excel. This involves editing a spreadsheet in SkyDrive with selected people. Names of those working on the file at the same time show up in the toolbar.

SkyDrive is greatly improved from its predecessor, Windows Live Workspace. I would expect it to get even better as the competition heats up with its rival Google. The reviews show that although Google made a huge push a couple of years ago, with its array of services like Google Apps and Google Calendar, Microsoft is catching up. Its latest version of SkyDrive, plus two new related synchronization services, Live Sync and Live Mesh, are a good start. Microsoft now offers 25 GB of free storage compared with Google's 1 GB (although there is the option to purchase more). If you are a Microsoft Office fan, then you can't go wrong by giving SkyDrive a try.

From the December 2011 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor*, newsletter of the Sarasota, FL PC Users Group.*

Staying Technology Young

by Darry D Eggleston

The challenges for me are increasing as I strive to remain technologically young. What used to take years to change now occurs in a matter of months. So many new products are appearing in such rapid order that, unless one reads, observes, and communicates with like-minded friends, one ends up talking about the "good old days" of technology way back in 2009.

Someone referred to technology's growth in "dog years" and I suspect she might be right. Technology now leaps in one year where we would expect it to take seven years in the past.

One need only look at cellphones, cameras, and notebook computers to see that devices are shrinking while their capabilities are exponentially increasing.

Just yesterday, a conversation between two neighbors awoke me to this fact again. Both are my age in the 60-to-1,000-year-old range. One neighbor extolled finding a new restaurant quickly because of his car's trusty dashboard-mounted global positioning device (GPS).

The other, without hesitating, replied, "Oh, I got rid of my old GPS six months ago," as he pulled out his cellphone. "Mine's in here." Proudly, he showed us his Nokia N8: "Unlocked GSM touchscreen phone featuring GPS with voice navigation and a 12 megapixel camera."

Even my research for this simple article relied on technology that I wish was available when I was younger:

1: I Googled to learn more about Dave's cellphone. (Nokia's website boasts that N8 phones can connect to social networks, web TV programs and Ovi Store apps. It has Carl Zeiss optics, Xenon flash, HD-quality video recording, film editing software, and Dolby Surround Sound.)

2: I used FastStone Capture to take a screenshot of the Nokia description, pasted it into OmniPage which scanned the image and converted it into plain text, which I copied and pasted it into WordPerfect.

You can either ride the waves of innovation rushing to the shores of your existence or you can be swept out into the sea of ignorance. You can stay technologically young or die in place at a pace that's more fitting for an old folk's home.

Choices, my friend, it's all about choices.

Stellarium

by Cal Esneault
Cajun Clickers Computer Club, LA

In my youth, I would take a copy of my uncle's *Star and Telescope* magazine and go to the center section to use the two-page star map guide. Twisting and turning the map to match my view, the many constellations and other night time wonders of the universe could be identified. Today, we can use vastly superior computerized versions to guide us through the night sky. One excellent program is *Stellarium*, an open-source program available for *Windows*, *Mac OS X*, *Linux*, and *BSD* operating systems. Although there are more sophisticated programs designed for professional and advanced amateur stargazers, *Stellarium* fits in the "fun" group by providing simple but detailed functions in a user friendly manner. The essential concept is to get an annotated view of a portion of the sky, adjusted for location and desired viewing time, which can be adjusted horizontally and vertically to match your

viewing perspective.

Initial use can be confusing. It starts up in full screen mode with no menu items visible. Move your mouse to the left or bottom border to activate the command tool bars (see below). Those items on the bottom turn on the various viewing items (constellation names, constellation connectors, planet id's, horizon types, etc.). Those items on the left set up the system controls (location, time, item luminosity to display, etc.).

The default location is Paris, France. Go to the "Location window" icon to choose your city from a dropdown list (or input latitude and longitude). Next, go to the "Date/time window" to set your local time. By using up/down arrow controls you can see what the sky will look like at any future or past time (for example, what can I see if I go out tonight at 10:00 pm?

If you have a telescope with an equatorial mount, you can also display an equatorial grid. Clicking on any object will display key information (apparent magnitude, hour angle and declination, and azimuthal information updated for passage of time). Using the "ocular" view, you can see any listed object as viewed by a telescope of approximately 80x magnification.

The default system includes 600,000 stars along with a full Messier catalog of Nebulae. The constellations of 10 different cultures are included. Various upgrade modules, plug-ins, and scripts exist (for example, you can expand to view over 200 million stars). Depending upon your needs, you can change the projected view of the sky – stereo-scopic, fish-eye, cylindrical, etc. There is a text-entry search window quickly locate objects.

Download a free copy at stellarium.org (Linux users, find with your package manager). Smartphone versions are available for iOS (Android users, use Google Sky instead).

From the December 2011 issue, Cajun Clickers Computer News*, LA.*

Retrofit Laptop with Wireless

Q. Can an older laptop be made wireless and use a wireless carrier such as Verizon? I would want everything to operate the same as it is now using my desktop computer. Would I be able to use Internet Explorer and be able to access all of the Web sites that I can with my current computer? I am using Verizon for my cell phone and thought I might be able to use their Internet access if I can use the same programs and visit the same Web sites.

A. While virtually all new laptops are configured for wireless connectivity, an older laptop can generally have a wireless network card installed, if it doesn't have one, to make it WiFi-ready. That's not a big deal, but it really depends on the computer. Any reputable computer repair person or service can examine your laptop and quickly determine what it will need, if anything. Even easier, since you are using Verizon, take your laptop to a Verizon store and ask one of the young techies – who will try desperately to avoid making eye contact with you – to take a look.

Understanding wireless connectivity can be a bit confusing, but "connecting wirelessly" means exactly that: It's establishing an Internet connection that's wireless. What you do online or what programs you use, such as Internet Explorer, is up to you. The connection doesn't care

what sites you visit or what programs you use with it. It's a bit like buying a new car and asking "Will it drive to San Diego?" The car doesn't care where it goes.

Q. All of a sudden when I open a message, the screen doesn't go all the way to the bottom and I can see the other screen behind it. I can grab the edge and pull it down, but it's aggravating. Is there a way I can fix it so it will be like it was?

A. It sounds like the window isn't maximized if you can see another screen behind it. Click the middle button in the upper right-hand corner or double click the Title Bar at the top to maximize the window so it will then fill the screen. That should resolve it.

Q. My computer is coming up on its third birthday. It's been working very well for me, but I would like to avoid what has happened in the past, namely having to replace it after a major problem occurs. How do you decide when it's time to replace your computer?

A. I'm probably not the best person to ask because I love gadgets and technology, so when newer, better, faster, shinier things come along, I tend to buy them, long before any major problems arise. (Yes, it's a sickness.)

For most normal people, however, there are two options: Periodic replacement within a typical three- to five-year window, or waiting until a problem arises. For some users, being offline or without a computer for a few days while one is being repaired, or until a new computer is purchased, is not a problem. Mrs. Modem considers it a blessing.

If you're running a business or you have a compelling need to be connected daily and cannot afford any down time, having some redundancy is well advised. You might want to purchase another computer when your current one is a few years old, just to have another system that's configured and updated, so if a problem arises you can easily switch from one system to the other.

For most typical users, having a desktop computer and a laptop and/or an iPad or smartphone is a good combination and provides an appropriate level of redundancy.

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

History of the Supreme Court

This site, hosted by the Supreme Court Historical Society, is dedicated to the collection and preservation of the history of the Supreme Court of the United States. It does this by sponsoring educational programs, conducting historical research, publishing books, journals, electronic materials, fixing parking tickets, and collecting antiques and artifacts related to the Court's history.

www.supremecourthistory.org

PENopl

Keyboards may be today's preferred writing implements, but many people still prefer a good, old-fashioned fountain pen, which just happens to be the focus of this Web site. Here you'll find information about the fountain pen's history and the many different manufacturers that still produce these elegant instruments, such as Montblanc, Parker, Sheaffer, and Eversharp. Sharpie? Don't even think about it.

www.rickconner.net/penoply

Road ID

If you have ever been concerned about having a medical emergency and being unable to communicate with friends, family, medical or emergency personnel, this line of identification

products can ease your mind. Hopefully, you'll never need to use one, but under the right circumstances, it could save your life. As an avid-yet-sluggish cyclist, I never leave home without mine.

www.roadid.com

"Mr. Modem's Top 50 Computing Tips," and "Mr. Modem's Top 50 iPad Tips" are available on amazon.com. Each life-altering volume features 50 of Mr. M.'s all-time favorite tips.

Review: WinPatrol

Take back control of your computer with Scotty

by Jim Thornton

One of the more common ways to keep your computer running at its best performance is to be aware when any new programs are being installed and when any existing programs are slowing down your computer. WinPatrol is a small program that puts you back in control of your computer. The goal of WinPatrol is to help you know what programs are running on your computer, to alert you whenever new programs have been added without your permission, to have you know that all existing programs are always being monitored, and to let you know whenever any program is attempting to make any changes to your computer. WinPatrol calls its monitoring feature Scotty, the WinPatrol dog, and Scotty is always on patrol and will bark to get your attention whenever he has discovered any of these potential problems.

In addition to Scotty, WinPatrol provides 14 separate lists of programs: (1) Startup Programs, a list of programs that start every time you turn on your computer or anytime that you restart Windows; (2) Delayed Start, a list of other startup programs that are delayed in starting, thus improving your startup time; (3) IE Helpers, a list of programs that aid your Internet Explorer browser; (4) Scheduled Tasks, a list of programs that are scheduled by your Windows Task Scheduler to run on certain dates and times; (5) Services, a list of Windows Services including client/server applications, Web servers, database servers, and other server-based applications to users, both locally and across the network; (6) Active Tasks, a list of the programs currently running on your computer; (7) Cookies, a list of cookies that you may want to selectively remove; (8) File Types, a list of programs associated by a particular file type; (9) Hidden Files, a list of the hidden files; (10) Recent, a list of malware infections; (11) ActiveX, a list of controls that have been registered to be used by your Internet Explorer; (12) Registry Monitoring, a list of registry locations that shouldn't be changed without your permission; (13) Plus, shows the version number of WinPatrol and your name and registration code; and (14) Options, shows your performance and security needs.

Nine of the program lists have an Info option, and these lists of programs are Startup Programs, Delayed Start; IE Helpers; Scheduled Tasks; Services; Active Tasks; File Types; Hidden Files; and ActiveX. When you have highlighted a program within the list, and click on Info, it will provide the program's company name, the version number, the copyright information, the location of the program on your hard drive, etc. And if you are using WinPatrol Plus, you may click on Plus Info, and you will be automatically connected to the WinPatrol website, which provides more information, including if the program is safe or not.   One of the most frequently used lists of programs is Startup Programs, where you can disable or

remove a program based on the information and recommendations provided. The better option is to disable it for later removal. Then, should you find that the disabled program should be active again, you can easily add it back.

The other lists of programs where you can remove or disable programs are Delayed Start, IE Helpers, Scheduled Tasks, Cookies, File Types, ActiveX, and Registry Monitoring.

WinPatrol does a good job in monitoring and exposing adware, keyloggers, spyware, worms, cookies, and other malicious software and alerting you anytime new programs being added without your permission.

If you are a Window Vista user and use the User Access Control feature, you'll find opening the main WinPatrol interface will require the additional permission. It's Vista's way of protecting your system from programs that are accessing critical system locations. In addition, you may already have some startup programs that require User Access Control interaction; moving these programs to your WinPatrol's Delay Start list will make Vista less annoying to use.

If some of your Delayed Startup Programs no longer work, it might be caused if you use a registry cleaner and some of your Delayed Startup Programs were removed. With WinPatrol, you can restore these removed Delayed Startup Programs by clicking WinPatrol's History button, which will list any Delayed Startup Programs that may have been erased so you can selectivity restore any of the Delayed Startup Programs of your choice.

WinPatrol was first released in 1997, and since I first reviewed it more than five years ago, in December 2006, many improvements have been added. Back then, there were only seven lists of programs; the new ones are Delayed Start,Hidden Files, Recent, ActiveX, Registry Monitoring, Plus, and Options.

There are three versions of WinPatrol: (1) a free version, which doesn't receive automatic updates; (2) the $29.95 WinPatrol Plus version, which is stated for unlimited personal computers and gets a lifetime of updates; and (3) the $49.95 WinPatrol Plus Family Pack, which is stated to support your entire family, and gets a lifetime of updates. The automatic updates provide new detecting features. If you have the free version, you can go frequently to the WinPatrol website to see if a new update has been released, and, if so you can download the newer free version. The current version is 20.5.2011, which was released on May 15, 2011, and is designed to work with Windows 95, 98, Me, XP, Vista, and 7, including the 64-bit version and Firefox. The Win Patrol website is http://www.winpatrol.com.

Both *PC World* magazine and Kim Komando, on her weekly radio show, have recommended the WinPatrol program.

Backup – Image, What's the difference?

by Phil Sorrentino
Sarasota PCUG, Florida

This topic can be very confusing because of the similarities and the differences between backups and images. Backups and Images are similar in that they are both copies of something. The difference is in the "what" and the "how." Normally, a backup is thought of as a copy of a file or a folder or a collection of files and folders (that is the "what"). The backup copy is just a copy, an exact duplicate and is not processed in any way (the "how"). The backup files can be used by any programs that could use the original files. The reason for having a backup file is to restore a file if it is accidentally destroyed or deleted.

An Image, on the other hand, is a copy of the Operating System and all of its components (referred to as the Operating Environment), as they exist in the memory of your operating computer (that's the "what"). The Image can only be created by an imaging program (the how), and the image created can only be used by that same imaging program. The reason for having an image is to be able to re-install your "Operating Environment" if, or rather when, a virus or hardware problem makes your system unusable.

The topic can also be confusing because people, and even the literature, often use the terms backup and image in confusing ways. Often you will see or hear the term "backup image" which is meant to refer to a copy of an image. Well, an image is already a copy of something, so is this an image or is it a copy of an image? In order to keep things straight, I have tried to use the term "backup" to mean an exact copy of a file that needs to be saved. (I know that sometimes backup copies are "zipped" or compressed to save space, but those files are no longer exact copies of the originals and are not directly usable, so I would not call them backups, I would have to call them "zipped backups" or "compressed backups," to be accurate.) And I use the term "image" to refer to the resultant file (or file collection) that is produced by an imaging program such as Ghost, or Acronis True Image, or Macrium Reflect, or even Windows 7.

To be completely protected against potential problems (viruses and/or hardware problems) you have to address both issues, backup and image. You have to backup all of your important files, those that you really do not want to lose, and you have to have an image of your Operating Environment for re-installation when needed. (Just as a point of interest, Windows 7 includes the ability to do both, via the Backup & Restore Control Panel.)

The files to backup are those that you have created or collected, such as your pictures, music, videos, Word documents, and spreadsheets. Any file that you would really be hard pressed to reproduce, if it was lost, is a good candidate for backup. How often to backup is dependent on the file in question. Files that are changing daily should probably be backed up daily, but files that don't change need only be backed up on some weekly or monthly schedule. For backups, in general, follow "Chicago Politics" advice and backup early and often.

Also, be aware that there are many ways of backing up your files since it is only a Copy operation. However, there are many programs that make the job quick and easy. If you have a folder of pictures and you only add a few pictures to the collection weekly, then there is no need to copy all of the pictures each week, you only need to backup the new pictures. Backup programs such as Microsoft Synctoy, and Synchromagic, check the collection of files to be backed up against the last backup and only copy the new files or those that have changed since the last backup. These programs make the backup process quick, efficient and so easy that you will probably do it often enough.

By now you are probably feeling that you have got the idea of backup, but where do put these backup files? The best place for backup files is on an external hard drive that is normally not connected to the computer. Right before you are ready to backup your file collection, connect the external hard drive and fire-up the backup program and run the backup task. After the backup is finished disconnect the external drive and put it away in a safe place.

Creating an image is a little more difficult than creating backup files because imaging is not just a simple Copy operation. Because an image is a copy of your operating computer memory, the program must know a lot about the architecture of the memory. This is very

specialized knowledge and is the essence of an imaging program. The imaging program must be installed on your computer for use in creating an image. And, it must create a bootable disk to be used when your system is not operating correctly. The image it creates can usually be put on a system drive (other than the C: drive), or an external hard drive, or a number of DVDs. The image created is usually a very large collection of files that may total from 20 to 60 GB.

The imaging process can take many hours depending on the size of the image and the amount of compression that is selected. Imaging is a very lengthy process, and it creates such large files, so you probably only want to do it when absolutely necessary. A new image is only necessary when the Operating Environment changes, when you add or delete programs, or when you update your operating system. You may not add or delete programs very often, but the operating system is updated, at least monthly, so you might want to create a new image every 3 or 4 month or whenever a big change is made to the Operating Environment.

So you can see there is a great difference between Backup and Image. But, both are necessary if you hope to completely recover from a future hardware failure or malware infection.

From the December 2011 issue of the Sarasota PC Monitor*, newsletter of the Sarasota FL PCUG.*

Are you being followed?

by Linda Gonse
Orange County PCUG, CA

You may not even suspect you are being followed. But, as many as 60 ad networks may be tracking you on the web right now! What's more, they may be selling personally identifiable details about you.

The National Advertising Initiative (NAI) is a cooperative of dozens of online ad networks that track you. An NAI statement says it developed an Opt-out Tool "in conjunction with our members for the express purpose of allowing consumers to 'opt out' of the behavioral advertising delivered by our member companies." To this end, NAI offers a YouTube video on their home page showing you how the Opt-out Tool works. (You can also see the enlarged video before you go to their site at http://bit.ly/ruQt9S)

Basically, the Opt-out Tool, which will not be installed on your computer, examines cookies (small text files) on your computer and identifies those member companies that have placed an advertising cookie on it.

When a member company's cookie is identified by the Opt-out Tool, you simply check the box next to the company name. If you are strongly motivated (or highly frustrated), check the "Select All" box! Then, click the "Submit" button, and you're done. The cookies will be removed for the selected companies and your opt-out status will be automatically verified.

Go to the NAI website at http://bit.ly/sNMlj0 to get the opt-out process started.

There are two caveats. 1. Opting out of a network does not mean you will no longer see online advertising. But, the network from which you opted out will no longer be tracking you personally and displaying ads that are "tailored to your web preferences and usage patterns." Isn't that the idea? 2. Networks voluntarily allow opting out. It isn't a legal mandate. Also, technical glitches may occur. Cookies from any of these networks may reappear. So, use the Opt-out Tool regularly.

Quantcast Measurement and Advertising does not participate in the National Advertising

initiative, but also offers you the ability to opt-out of their ads based on your interests.

Quantcast claims it doesn't store your IP address or any other personally identifiable information. "But, if you prefer not to receive interest-based content and advertisements enabled by Quantcast and not to have Quantcast measure your pattern of website visits or other online media consumption, you can opt-out by using our opt-out tool" at http://bit.ly /vNAXOB.

Opting out is the only way you can avoid being tagged, tracked and tempted by advertisers who know your purchasing history. By opting out you can end hunting season by advertisers who are determined to bag your money.

From the December issue of nibbles & bits*, newsletter of the Orange County PCUG, CA*

Too Many Choices

by Wil Wakely
Seniors Computer Group, CA

Choosing a computer used to be relatively easy: Do you want a desktop with a tower or a flat unit that fits under your monitor? This is no longer true. Now we have a plethora of choices: Desktop, Laptop, Notebook, Tablet, Smart Phone, and smart e-Book Reader. Perhaps I have missed a late comer; if so, forgive me. Let's review the features, pros and cons of each.

Desktop

For a fixed location, non-portable computer a Desktop is the best choice. It is the least expensive computer and can be easily customized to whatever your computing needs might be. It is a necessity for gamers and heavy-duty computing such as photo and video processing, CAD (computer-aided design), and data processing. There are wide choices of software and hardware which results in lower costs and greater availability of these items. Larger displays, multiple ones if desired, are available along with specialty multi-function keyboards and a variety of mice, all of which can be easily attached. More powerful computer chips, memory chips, video processors, large, multiple hard drives and powerful wireless adaptors are choices only available with Desktops.

The choice between proprietary brands such as Dell or HP vs. a "plain vanilla" custom machine depends upon your budget and how much technical support you may need.

Laptop

Portable laptop computers come in a variety of sizes, prices and features. Many of the more expensive ones rival some Desktop machines in capability. The display screens are smaller than Desktops and the keyboards with the integrated touchpad mouse are not as user friendly as those on Desktops. Newer models have built-in Wi-Fi for connection to the Internet, whereas older models required a USB Wi-Fi adapter. Most Laptops have a built-in video camera for video messaging with friends via Skype. For equivalent features, Laptops are always more expensive than Desktops as are any repairs or upgrades. However, if portability of a powerful computer is a requirement, a Laptop is a good choice. An auxiliary USB external hard drive or large thumb drive (flash drive) is useful for backup and storage for Laptops.

Notebook

The Notebook is just a smaller, lighter version of a Laptop with a smaller screen and

keyboard. It is not recommended for heavy duty use, but is fine for travel and is less expensive than Laptops, Tablets or Smart Phones. Most of the Laptop features are also found in Notebooks. Some Notebooks come with electronic memory instead of hard drives. This memory is faster and lighter, but holds much less data than hard drives. The Chrome by Google is a Notebook that utilizes the Cloud for much of its power and capability.

Tablet

A Tablet has no external keyboard, but the screen is touch sensitive so a virtual keyboard on the screen is provided instead. However, the touch-screen eliminates much of the standard keyboard activity. The availability of software for Tablets is growing rapidly, but there is nowhere near the number of titles available for the computers described above. For casual use, Tablets are fine for email, Web browsing, limited word processing and spreadsheet work. Most Tablets are less expensive than Laptops, but often cost more than Notebooks. Tablets also have e-Book reading capability. They have no hard drive but Cloud storage via the Internet somewhat replaces this function. The iPad by Apple seems to be the leader in Tablets, but many competitors are coming on-line with similar features at lower prices.

Smart Phone

There are two major varieties of Smart Phones: iPhone and Android. The iPhone is a proprietary operating system by Apple and is more expensive than other Smart Phones, but is claimed to be more user friendly. The Android phone is an "open source" operating system developed by Google and as such has many more Apps, (software applications). The major drawback to these phones is the small display screen. They have touch screens in lieu of a keyboard. However, they are cell phones, which none of the above are. They are also connected to the Internet for email and Web browsing and can play music and video. The phones can be quite inexpensive because the carriers (Verizon, ATT, etc.) require signing a two year contract for the reduced cost. Breaking the contract early can be very expensive. There is a basic cost for the phone service and an equivalent monthly charge for Internet service. There also can be an additional service charge for data usage. Look for unlimited data-use contracts, if available.

Smart e-Book

Older e-Book readers were just that — monochrome digital book readers, e.g., early models of the Amazon Kindle. Newer Readers such as the Amazon Fire and Barns & Noble Nook have full color touch screens with Wi-Fi along with their e-Book reader function. The Fire also has free Internet connectivity via Sprint. So the e-Books are now competing with the Tablets, having similar features but with a display size intermediate between Tablets and Smart Phones. Look for e-Book Readers to become even smarter in the near future.

So what's next? I predict expanded speech recognition and generation will soon be incorporated in most computers, as an alternate to touch-screen, mouse and keyboard. A larger selection of Apps will become available as software programmers jump on this lucrative bandwagon. Faster Internet connections are already available in selected locations and will come to your area soon. Look for LTE, 4G, 5G and even faster connections. Better displays that don't wash out in sunlight are being developed and we should see them soon. Lower prices and enhanced features due to competition favor the consumer and should happen very quickly. Decisions, decisions….

Stay tuned!

From the December 2011 issue of Bits and Bytes*, newsletter of the Seniors Computer Group, CA.*

Review: Photographically Speaking –
A Deeper Look at Creating Stronger Images

Author: David DuChemin
Reviewed by: Marlene Martin
Tucson Computer Society, AZ

D uChemin, in his introduction states that the "subject of this book is the expression of vision or intent and not the vision itself." DuChemin's premise is that successful photographs "communicate a key thought or feeling."

To accomplish this, photographers must first be clear in their own minds about their "intent" prior to making decisions about what to include or exclude. Only then can the more technical decisions be made to portray those chosen elements to communicate that vision or intent. The author compares the craft of photography to writing but with its own visual language and grammar.

Learning to use photographic language effectively allows photographers to communicate their intent to the reader, i.e. the viewer, in ways that evoke a response. After setting the stage in Part 1, and making a case for his premise that "mindfully" determining your intent will lead to stronger images, DuChemin looks at how to use the elements of Visual Language along with compositional and technical aspects to communicate intent.

"Part II – "Visual Language" explores the Elements (words) that can be manipulated within the photographic frame and the Decisions (grammar) that determines how we visual present the elements to the "reader." Each element (lines, repetition, contrast, color, etc.) is explored, individually and in depth, using the author's photographs as examples of that particular element.

This is one of the real strengths of this book. The author not only shows us the picture, he describes what he did and why, but also what he wanted to communicate with the selected element. His descriptions are clear, articulate and are often accompanied by additional graphic examples or photographs on which he superimposes additional information to illustrate his example. He also, where it adds to the lesson, includes photographs taken immediately before or after and discusses, in the same depth, why they aren't as strong and/or don't communicate his intent as well as the selected photo.

The same format is used to explore each decision that organizes and presents the selected elements – framing, placement, optics, focus, etc.

To assist the reader to explore each concept for themselves, each subsection ends with a suggested "Creative Exercise." These are fairly simply, short exercises to trigger making an idea or technique part of your photographic thought process. For example, in the section on color, the creative exercise is "pick six of your favorite color photographs, rendering one of each into black and white."

There are then a set of suggested questions to use when viewing the original and changed photos – what is the difference in your emotional response, does your eye travel differently when you view the photograph, does color add or detract, etc.

DuChemin suggests that photographers are often distracted by color and that it prevents

them from looking critically at the elements in the photograph. He believes that the ability to see beyond the color and pay more attention to the elements prior to making the photograph will improve the decisions used to create the image.

I found that just reading and thinking about each "Creative Exercise" was very helpful in reviewing and driving home the concept being explored, and many of them are definitely on my "to do" list.

The last section of the book, Part III is a series of 20 photographs selected from the author's work to represent the concepts explored in the book. Each is discussed in detail in terms of the elements and decisions used to make the photo, plus possible alternatives that might have made the photograph stronger. DuChemin challenges the reader to critically view each photograph – intent, subject, elements, decisions, etc. and actually write down their responses – before reading his description.

For each photograph, the format is similar to that of Part II – alternative photographs taken at the same time and graphic overlays to illustrate a concept present in the photograph. Careful viewing and reading of this section helps solidify the educational and practical material presented in this book.

Appended to the final photograph, "Candles & Prayers, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2010," is a list of 19 questions to "mindfully ask" when viewing your own or other's photographs. They include questions designed to elicit your feelings and emotional responses in addition to how decisions about elements ("words") and decisions ("grammar") affect the photograph and thereby communication with the reader. They are a very useful summary of the book.

In his conclusion, DuChemin cautions that while he has simplified the material for educational purposes, to fully integrate the concepts into your photographic workflow is anything but easy. Just like learning any new language, it takes time and conscious practice.

While this is the fourth book of a series DuChemin has written on photographic vision, it stands on its own and is eminently readable and usable without knowledge of the first three books. I have not read any of the others. I can enthusiastically recommend this book to anyone except perhaps a very novice photographer. A basic knowledge of focus, shutter speed, etc. and how these affect a photograph would definitely add to getting the most from the material.

The book is probably most helpful for someone who has mastered the technical aspects and now wants to improve how they create their "intent" within the photographic frame to increase the impact of their work. The author presents organized, well written concepts and information with appropriate images and detail and has caused me to think about how I approach photographs in a more thoughtful way.

My suggestion would be to read Part I, "The Photographer's Intent" first but without getting too caught up in whether you agree or disagree with his "message."

Read Parts II and III for the specifics and consider doing the "Creative Exercises" as you go along or pick and choose afterwards. Then go back and re-read Part I. This worked for me.

About: Photographically Speaking – A Deeper Look at Creating Stronger Images
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Gizmo's Picks

H ere's a novel but highly useful Windows freeware program. Like Dropbox, it syncs your files across all your computers and also keeps them in the cloud. But unlike Dropbox, you don't have to sign up for another storage service. Instead, it uses your Google Docs file area.

There are a couple of advantages to doing things this way. First, your Google Docs storage space is larger than the free 2 GB that DropBox provides. Secondly, and much more importantly, Google Docs allows you to edit and view your files in your browser, whereas the standard Dropbox storage is, well, just storage. And all changes are seamlessly synced across your devices.

http://www.techsupportalert.com/content /dropbox-and-google-docs-best-both-worlds.htm

In her never-ending quest to find you interesting and safe new websites editor Rhiannon has come up with five sites for your perusal. They range from "How to Prevent Interference From Other Wireless Networks" to a clear explanation of what the Google Android mobile operating system is and how it compares to Apple iOS as used on iPhones and iPads. My favorite was the animated guide to tying knots but I used to sail when I was younger so that's not all that surprising.

http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/finds-week-january-8-2012.htm

This site is not really about computers but rather is geared to those who have an inquiring mind. If that's you than you will find this site a feast. It's 100% safe as well.

http://www .techsupportalert.com/content /web-site-week-lifes-little-mysteries.htm

In today's media rich world most of us need will to convert media files from one format to another. Whether its to play AVI files on your phone or tablet or simply to convert your music collection to mp3 you will readily appreciate a convenience of having a conversion program always available on your PC.

There is no shortage of commercial media conversion programs but why pay up to $89 for such a program when these freebies will do the job just as well and in some cases even better.

http://www.techsupportalert.com/best-free-audio-video-format-conversion-program.htm

Society News

Help's Half Hour

January 10, 2012

by Jan Rothfuss

Q: A member is trying to run the Security Tango but he cannot sign on as the administrator in Windows 7.

A: The first user login is the administrator. A virus can strip off the administrative privileges. If you find the actual program file (.exe) you can right mouse to bring up the menu and then pick 'run as administrator'.

Q: Is it possible to retrieve the favorites once they have disappeared?

A: No.

Q: Another user using Thunderbird watched as his inbox folder emptied. He did try the solutions on the user group blog area.

A: All you can try is to look inside the other folders. Maybe the archive area. If the archive file has been corrupted, the messages are corrupted and too. It is best to turn it to keep all messages on the server. However you can run out of space there, too. It was suggested that another interface than Thunderbird can go directly to your provider server using their web service.

The Lighter Side

My neighbors asked me one day to check their computer, because it was no longer working properly. After realizing that the problem was caused by some corrupted or deleted system files, I reinstalled Windows, but I could not find their cable modem installation disk among their CDs. After I asked them for it, they gave me a weird look, so I put my question in simpler terms. "When you bought this little box over here," I said, "they must have you given a shiny little round disk like this with it. I just need that shiny little round disk."

They said they kept all their "computer stuff" in the other room in a cupboard, so they went to search for it. After a few minutes, the wife returned with a power cable. "This was the only thing we found," she explained, "but I hope it will be just as good."

<div align="center">*</div>

Customer: "So, is there a spray I can buy for my computer?"
Tech Support: "Er, I beg your pardon?"
Customer: "You know, a spray – one that I can spray the inside of my computer with."
Tech Support: "What sort of spray are we talking about here?"
I thought perhaps he had seen someone use a can of compressed air to clean out a machine and mistook it for some sort of spray.
Customer: "Well, I was hoping that there would be a spray that would kill all the viruses."
Tech Support: "Aaaah... ummm... you mean like a bug spray? For computer viruses?"

Customer: "Yes! Would that help?"
Tech Support: "I'm really very sorry, but nobody makes anything like that. Computer viruses are just a name we give to malicious software. We use the word 'virus' because it explains how the software behaves."
Customer: "So ... no spray then."
Tech Support: "No."