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Next Meeting
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Arpad Kovacs Will Discuss Windows 8

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netTALK Duo WiFi - Another Competitor for Inexpensive Telephone Service

by Ira Wilsker

As a user of alternative telephone services for several years, I have been very satisfied with their performance. All of them use some variety of VoIP, or Voice over Internet Protocol, to send voice grade telephone conversations over the internet, terminating at the recipients local phone service (landline or cellular), which ultimately connects the call to his local phone. Over the years I have used the voice features of Yahoo! Messenger, Google Phone, MagicJack, and netTALK, and found the best to use were Google Phone and netTALK. I use Google Phone as an adjunct to my cell phone, and to make long distance calls from work without incurring significant long distance phone charges. From home, for almost two years, I have been using a netTALK DUO (the DUO signifies that it works either by a direct connection to a router or to a live USB port), and have been very satisfied with its cost, functionality, clear call quality, and most of all, its U.S. based live technical support.

Almost two years ago I wrote about the then new netTALK DUO, which eclipsed its main competitor, MagicJack by enabling the netTALK DUO to work without a

computer (connected directly to a network port on a router), was fax compatible, and offered live domestic technical support. While both MagicJack and netTALK DUO offered unlimited local and long distance calling for a low annual flat rate (about \$25 - \$30 per year), I switched from MagicJack to the netTALK DUO because the MagicJack model available at that time required an active USB connection in order to send and receive calls, and since I shut down my computer when it is not being used for a period of time, I lost telephone connectability for much of the day. Since the netTALK DUO connected directly to my router, it was always on, even when my computer was shut down, giving it a distinct advantage over the MagicJack. Just to be fair, sometime after I switched to the netTALK DUO, MagicJack came out with a new model that offers similar connectivity (USB or router) as the DUO.

In the time that I have been using the netTALK DUO, it has almost always functioned flawlessly, allowing me to conserve cell phone minutes by using the DUO from home during prime minutes, and also using my DUO connection to send and receive faxes, both local and long distance. It would be totally practical and feasible to “Fire your phone company,” a slogan used by netTALK, and use the device as a sole or primary home phone service, without a hard-wired connection to the local phone company, enabling substantial savings. I pay my local phone company more for a month’s local phone service than I pay netTALK for a year of unlimited local and long distance phone service! Once setup, my wired and cordless home phones connect to my netTALK DUO device as easily as plugging them into a wall jack. The only time that I lost phone connectivity with my DUO over the past two years was when an automatic “push” software upgrade to my DUO failed, causing it to lose its connection. I contacted netTALK’s live 7-day Miami based technical support, and they remotely upgraded my device, restoring service. I sent an email to the executives of netTALK complimenting the technicians who did such a professional job restoring my service.

In recent weeks I saw announcements that netTALK had introduced a new device, the netTALK DUO WiFi that allows the device to connect just like the DUO, by live USB port or direct router connection, plus provides for an alternative, fully functional connection via the common WiFi wireless connections which are so widely available. Eager to try this new technology I ordered one, and now I have it to play with. Retailing for \$64.95, the new netTALK DUO WiFi includes 12 months of unlimited local and long distance phone service (including the U.S. and Canada). Additional years of service can be purchased for \$29.95.

In the box is the device, smaller than an average size cell phone, with a phone jack and network connection on one end, and a combination USB/Power connection (standard USB cable with micro USB plug on one end) and a reset button on the other end. On the top edge is a multi-color LED that indicates the status of the device. Also in the box is an Ethernet cable, USB to micro USB cable, AC adapter, easy setup guide, and support information.

There are six steps listed on the “Easy Setup Guide” (seven steps if using the online guide to configure the WiFi feature), and I am performing those steps as I type this.

Step one is to locate the user name and password that is on a peel-off sticker inside the box. Step 2 is to activate the DUO WiFi by connecting to the netTALK website. During the simple registration process, an E911 service address is created which enables proper connection and identification to the local 911 service. Following the 911 process, the user can select a local phone number or arrange to transfer an existing phone number to the netTALK device; I decided to select a new phone number in my area code. One issue which is common with both MagicJack and netTALK is a dearth of local phone numbers in my 409 area code, only having local numbers for the Galveston and Texas City areas, almost 100 miles west of my location, but I selected a Texas City local phone number; it took a few minutes for the network to create my new phone number, 1-409-419-xxxx.

Step 3 was to connect my telephone to the netTALK DUO WiFi; I have a multi-handset cordless phone, which I connected to the phone jack on the device. Step 4 is to connect the device to either a live USB port, router port, or WiFi. I already have my original DUO connected to my router, so I decided to connect this one to my existing wireless network. The instructions to connect to WiFi direct the user to www.nettalk.com/wifi guide which repeats initial steps already completed (which can be skipped), and the steps to configure it for WiFi; the six steps in the Easy Setup Guide for USB or router connections are simple and fast, and none of the WiFi specific steps (below) are necessary. It needs to be noted that for those who may travel with the DUO WiFi, it can store information on up to 12 WiFi networks, allowing instant connection to each as necessary. The website (Step 4), required the downloading and installation of a “DUO WiFi Management Tool” (both Windows and MAC versions available) a 1.8 mb file, which installed the proper drivers on the computer and then rebooted the computer; this tool enables the user to configure the DUO WiFi for his wireless network.

Step 5 is where the device is connected to the computer via USB, and to the telephone. If all goes well, the LED on the device will flash orange while connecting, and then green when completed, followed by a single ring of the phone. Step 6 is selecting a WiFi network, using the DUO WiFi Management Tool. The management tool attempted to detect and configure the DUO WiFi automatically, but since I have a hidden SSID and sophisticated encryption on my wireless-N router, the management tool required me to connect manually and enter my SSID, encryption mode and key, and other information, which quickly enabled the wireless connection between the DUO WiFi and my wireless-N router. For public access WiFi the DUO WiFi Management Tool will automatically configure the device.

The seventh and final step is “Get Ready to Make Calls Over Wi-Fi.” Instructions are to disconnect the DUO WiFi device from the computer (and phone, if using a different phone), connecting the USB cable to the AC power adapter that is supplied, and the device will connect via WiFi, indicating success (after a minute or two) with a green LED on the device, and a single ring of the phone.

Regardless of the mode of connection, USB, router, or WiFi, the netTALK DUO

WiFi is very feature rich including the unlimited local and long distance calls to the U.S. and Canada (first year included then \$30/year), free DUO to DUO calls anywhere in the world, inexpensive flat rate or per minute calling to other countries (\$5.85 extra per month for unlimited calls to Puerto Rico and Mexico, \$10 per month extra for unlimited calls to the 60 countries listed at www.nettalk.com/callplansinternational), free 411 directory assistance, enhanced 911 service, fax compatible, Videophone application, call waiting, caller ID, three-way calling, call forwarding, and conference calling. Since the new netTALK DUO WiFi can easily provide phone service almost anywhere there is some type of internet connection, is totally portable, so reasonably priced, and so feature rich, it could be an excellent alternative to more traditional phone service. With this netTALK device, as its commercials say, you really can “Fire your phone company!” and save substantial money.

WEBSITES:

<http://www.nettalk.com/en/duowifi>

<http://www.nettalk.com/en/wifi-faqs>

<http://www.nettalk.com/wifiguide>

<http://www.nettalk.com/en/wifi-setup>

<http://www.nettalk.com/en/wifitroubleshooting>

Change of Allegiance Does the Antivirus_Software You Use Really Matter?

by Greg Skalka

President, Under the Computer Hood User Group, CA

I just switched to a new antivirus program. I'd been a loyal user of my previous program for over five years, which seems like an eternity in the ever-changing computer software business. I've wondered for some time if it mattered which brand I used. Although there are probably dozens of antivirus programs available, some of which are even free, I have only ever used four. Am I using the best one? Is there a best one? Would I be wasting my time trying to determine the best one? And is what is best relative to my needs anyway?

I was surprised at the results of an informal survey taken at one of our recent general meetings. Our membership appears to use a wide variety of the available antivirus offerings. Around a dozen different vendors were being used by our members, with no one source having more than 10% of the market in our group. With the market apparently so fragmented, can one brand really be that much better than the others?

I don't deny the importance of computer security. It is a common tenant of cyber security that every computer should run an antivirus program to protect against those threats. Microsoft believes this so much that every version of Windows since XP performs checks to see that an antivirus program is installed and that the virus signatures are not out of date. I'd just like to see proof that the antivirus software is doing its job.

One of my problems with antivirus software is that, at least in my experience, it

seldom finds any viruses. I've tried to be diligent in my regular computer maintenance, running antivirus and anti-malware software once each week and keeping the signatures updated. My anti-malware software will often find some kind of spyware or malware on one of my computers to quarantine or delete, but from all the probably hundreds of hours I've spent running antivirus scans, I've yet to find a virus. I do know viruses still exist out there in the cyber world, as I have seen others have them. My daughter had a virus on her laptop last year, and this month we found the Conficker worm on some network servers at the company I work for. Since I've not found any, could I be running just a placebo antivirus program?

I guess the effectiveness of antivirus software is something we may have to take on faith. I've never seen comparisons or reviews of antivirus software that evaluated the ability to detect or remove particular threats.

Usually the software's rating is based on less essential but more measurable parameters like ease of use, cost or manufacturer's reputation. With new virus threats appearing constantly (or so we are led to believe), how can a program's ability to quickly recognize something new be evaluated in advance? Selecting an antivirus program might be similar to choosing a religion, in that all you have initially is your faith in your choice, and you won't likely find out until much later whether you chose correctly.

I originally started out (over a decade ago) using Norton Antivirus, as it was one of the first and few of this type of program on the market. They also offered a lot of rebates on their products, so I could usually get my antivirus every year for free. I really liked the Norton Utilities, and so it was not long before I was using Symantec's Norton SystemWorks suite. I also really liked the ZoneAlarm firewall, and so used their free version for many years alongside the Norton suite. Eventually, however, Symantec came out with their own firewall program, and they made a decision that has me soured on their products to this day. Symantec made their Antivirus product incompatible with the ZoneAlarm firewall, probably to promote their own Norton firewall. This made me have to choose between them, and ZoneAlarm won. I don't think I've purchased a Symantec product since.

Around this time, ZoneAlarm came out with their own security suite, ZoneAlarm Internet Security Suite. It combined my favorite firewall with antivirus and anti-spyware. It was also usually available periodically for free after rebate (my favorite kind of software), so I used their suite on all my computers for at least five years. The ZoneAlarm antivirus never really impressed me, but at least it worked well with their firewall, and so I had faith that it was protecting me.

In the last year, however, the ZoneAlarm antivirus turned into a real nuisance. It became a drag on my computer's resources, slowing it down considerably while updating and while scanning. Every time my computer was started, the suite tried to check for updated antivirus signatures. This process took minutes to complete, and occupied the computer to such an extent that it was not possible to use it until the update was completed. This became very annoying, as it slowed my computer just as

I was most interested in using it. If I wanted to boot my computer quickly to look up something on the Internet, it added additional minutes to my search time. It also suddenly went from a few hours to overnight and more to run an antivirus scan. I even tried (unsuccessfully) to disable the antivirus updates. Finally I had enough and decided to look for a new antivirus program. This also coincided with the end of my ZoneAlarm ISS subscription and the apparent end of their rebate deals.

During this time I had also used McAfee's antivirus briefly on a new computer that came with a free trial, and used it on the computers provided by my employer. I didn't think it was anything special.

A trusted reference was the deciding factor in my selection of a new antivirus program. Our group's webmaster has been using ESET's NOD32 antivirus software for many years, and had nothing but good to say about it. He claimed it used little hard drive space and ran quickly with little impact on computer performance. I considered using it in conjunction with the free version of the ZoneAlarm firewall, but a rebate deal on ESET Smart Security persuaded me to try another firewall program as well. I bought two of the three-user packs, and figured I was set for all my computers for the next year.

I soon found out why the ESET Smart Security 4 suite was offered at a discount, as within a month Smart Security 5 was released. I was allowed a free upgrade to version 5, but found upgrading from 4 to 5 had issues. It was much better to install version 5 from the web (using my normal activation information), as it allowed the installation on a drive other than the boot drive. The firewall also seemed to work better this way. I'm still learning about ESET's firewall, but their antivirus seems to live up to its reputation as easy on resources. I guess I have something new to have faith in.

From the March 2012 issue of Drive Light, newsletter of the Under the Computer Hood User Group, CA.

The DAM Book, 2nd Edition

Reviewed by Mike Morris and Bert Broekstra

Front Range PC Users Group (FRPCUG), CO

Peter Krogh, 2009, 496 pages. O'Reilly Media, Sebastopol, CA

<http://shop.oreilly.com/product/9780596523589.do>

Print ISBN: 978-0-596-52357-2 or ISBN 10: 0-596-52357-2

In his Introduction, the author, Peter Krogh states that “This book is written for people who are serious about their photographs.” He also says “The approach described in this book is not for the casual photographer.” Once you start reading the book, the full implications of that statement become clear.

The book is an extraordinary source of information on how to manage many digital photographs—or any “digital assets,” including audio and video files, which he mentions only briefly. This is not a book about photo editing—by Photoshop or any other photo editing software application (although he talks about Non-destructive, or

Parametric Image Editing in chapter 2).

The key elements of this book, in our opinion, are:

1. Chapter 3 Metadata
2. Chapter 4 Organizing and Naming Files and Folders
3. Chapter 7 Ingestion Workflow

In fact, “workflow” is the primary lesson we obtained from this book. Each of us established different workflows to suit our needs, but both were based on careful study of the author's recommendations. For example, my colleague uses the raw format a great deal, whereas I do not (yet). I developed one workflow for the scans of many very old family photographs, and a different workflow for my own photos. The family photograph workflow includes metadata entry to capture as much information as possible about the people and places in those photos. Sadly, many of the people and places in those old photos are no longer identifiable—an excellent demonstration of why Krogh's management techniques are so important.

Metadata, usually defined as “data about data,” is fundamental to managing digital photos. Krogh's discussion of this topic was the best we have seen anywhere. He talks about “. . . broad classes (of metadata) . . . mostly measured in how much effort it takes to create the information.” That was very important lesson for both my old family photo scans and my own photos. For example, I established a Baseline metadata template that I apply to all of the scans and a different Baseline metadata template that I apply to my photos. In either case, that takes very little effort. Then I add image specific metadata that takes more time.

The use of metadata makes it unnecessary to try to squeeze descriptive information into the file name. The author states emphatically that “The file name does not have to carry important content information about the file.” That turns out to be more difficult to understand than you might think. I had to send detailed instructions on how to access the metadata to family members with whom I have shared those old photos. In several cases I even had to recommend a (free) software application that they could use for that purpose. Those family members were expecting to see a description of the photo's content in the file name (an expectation shared, I suspect, by the overwhelming majority of casual photographers).

In his discussion of “The Fine Art of File Naming,” the author describes a file naming approach for both the camera original files and what he calls “derivatives (edited photos).” You may not need as many derivatives as the author (unless you are a professional photographer), but his approach (perhaps modified, as I did, to suit your needs) will work equally well for the serious amateur photographer.

Naming a file is not however, the starting point for managing digital photos. That starting point is when you download the photos from your camera(s) to your computer. In Chapter 7, Ingestion Workflow, the author describes a process that includes applying a unique name (in place of the usual combination of letters and numbers), applying “bulk” metadata, backing up the photos, and other tasks.

One criticism of this book, and it is a mild criticism, is that it took me some time,

moving back and forth between chapters 3, 4 and 7 (and, to a lesser extent, Chapter 8, Working Files Management) to gain enough of an understanding of Krogh's concepts so that I could adapt them to my less complex needs.

For example, my folder structure for the old family photo scans is very simple—just one folder. However, for my photos, I create a new folder for every photo “event.” I define a photo “event” as any occasion where I take photos. It could be a family get-together, a trip into the mountains or just any time I use my camera. Within each of those events I create 4 subfolders: Camera Originals, Working, Archive, Delivery. While it is not necessary to describe in detail in this review the differences between those folders, it is worth noting that I evolved that structure after reading *The DAM Book* and evaluating the author's recommendations. It is also worth noting that the Camera Originals are just exactly that. They contain no edits and no metadata. That is my preference.

There is much more to this book. Chapter 5 talks about image storage hardware and Chapter 6 talks about backup software and backup strategies. There are chapters on cataloging software and cataloging strategies. The final chapter talks about “Data Migration,” which covers how to move many previously unorganized photos into an organized file structure, how to move photos from one storage medium to another and a section on converting film to digital files.

This book is a “must-have” for anyone with more than a passing interest in digital photography. It is an excellent book.

In the interest of full disclosure:

1. This book was provided at no charge to the reviewers under the O'Reilly User Group Program (and is now part of the FRPCUG library)
2. This review contains contributions from two reviewers, although written by one (Mike Morris)



Beware of Email Trickery

Q. I received an email from my daughter that had no Subject line and the message only contained a link. I clicked the link which turned out to be a Canadian company selling Viagra. Is there anything I can do to make sure something like this doesn't happen again? Thanks, Mr. M.

A. You can always count on Mr. Modem to state the obvious, but the best way to make sure it never happens again is to not do it again. In short, links do not click themselves.

In today's *eWorld*, the From: address should not be the sole basis upon which a decision is made whether to view a message or not. For example, even though the message in question appeared to be from your daughter, if there was no Subject line, and she usually includes a Subject line, that's one red flag. The fact that the message was blank except for a link – no greeting, no explanation – that's red flag number two. My standard practice is that unless a sender includes a personal greeting or explanation that lets me know the message is legitimate, I'm going to delete it. Is that too harsh? Perhaps, but I don't believe it is asking too much given the number of malicious messages in circulation today. All it takes is a simple, "Hi, Mr. Modem. Here's a link to a video of a cat on a pogo stick I think you will enjoy." Tell me that and I'm there in a heartbeat.

Not all email received is worthy of your time or attention, so it's important not to feel compelled to open every message, either. Some people respond in knee-jerk fashion to any incoming email. The bad guys know this and a lot of computers wind up infected because of it. Get into the habit of not automatically opening every message received – thinking before clicking and you will soon be able to spot problematic email and delete them upon receipt.

Q. I read several of your Top 50 Computing Tips eBooks, and they're great. I would like to give several of them to my friends who can definitely use them. I know I can purchase gift cards from amazon.com, so this is probably a dumb question, but if I do that, do I receive actual plastic cards from amazon that I then have to send out to my recipients, or how does that work? I'm so behind the curve on these things. Thanks for being there, Mr. M.

A. Amazon makes it very easy to give eBooks as gifts. Simply locate the book(s) you want to give on Amazon, then click the little "Give as Gift" button to the right of the book. After providing the name and email address of your recipient, compose any personal message you would like to include and click the Submit button. Amazon will send an email to your recipient that includes your message and a link. A quick click on the provided link and the eBook will be transmitted to your recipient's Kindle, iPad, or other device, and charged to your account. For direct links to all my eBooks on amazon, please visit the eBooks section of my Web site at www.MrModem.com.

Q. I have a two-monitor setup, but when I go to PrintScreen to try and print some selected text that appears on one of my monitors, it always prints what appears on both monitors. Is there a way to print from only one of the monitors?

A. If you hold down the ALT key and click PrintScr, the active screen (where your highlighted data and cursor are located) will be captured to the Windows Clipboard. Go to a destination location, such as a word processing document or email, right-click and select Paste. Your captured screen image will pop right into your document, which you can then print.

Batmobile History

If you were watching television in the 1960's, you probably watched the original Batman series. KAPOW! Sure, Batman was a hero, but the real star of the show was The Batmobile. THWACK! This site takes a look at the history of this famous vehicle. Each entry includes photos and a blurb about the car, including in which episode it appeared, in the unlikely event you do not have each episode committed to memory. SWOOSH!

www.batmobilehistory.com

Brainwaves Center

The Brainwaves Center provides practical applications of current research in the neurosciences designed to improve and maintain our mental skills. Test your memory and learning skills, executive planning, emotional response, social interaction, language /computation and spatial construction. I was enjoying the heck out of this site right up to the point that I forgot why I was there. But give it a try. I'm sure you'll do much better.www.brainwaves.com

This Day

This site provides an interesting, high-tech twist on run-of-the-mill "On This Day in History" sites. Because it is hosted by Nikon, the photography is outstanding.

<http://bit.ly/bcfsDL>

Mr. Modem's technology-tips eBooks and award-winning weekly computer-help newsletter, now in its 12th year of continuous publication, are available on www.MrModem.com.

Software Review: Acronis True Image Home 2012

By Mark Mattson

Editor, Computer Users of Erie, PA

One never knows when disaster will strike. It could come anywhere, anytime, from any direction. And this is no less true when it comes to disaster striking your computer system. Just in the last month, I found out how true this is. I was preparing to start working on last month's newsletter and, when I started up my second computer (the one that does all my digital photo and newsletter work), I was faced with the dreaded 'click of Death' from the boot hard drive inside the box.

Naturally, it had been over a month since the last backup on this system, and all my document templates and such were captive on a dying drive. Holding my breath, I gave the drive controller board a blast of component cooler, and it got the drive to boot. I then transferred all vital files from the dying drive as well as the second drive to my NAS system, and prepared for disaster recovery.

I had been running evaluation tests on Acronis True Image Home 2012 prior to this failure, so I had a copy available to use to clone the entire drive to the second drive in

the machine. This would allow me to keep working until I could purchase a new boot drive for this system.

I installed the software onto the bad drive, and ran the drive clone feature, which imaged the original boot drive to the other one. When it was complete, I pulled the failing drive (good now for a paperweight), and fired up the machine again.

Success! The image worked, and the computer was once again up and running.

What could have been a disaster of major proportions was solved by the use of a single, inexpensive program. Without it, I would have faced at least a week of reloading all the apps on this machine, not to mention trying to find workable copies of newsletter templates, including the actual files of the published issues. I most likely would have lost a majority of the 2011 files. But the image had them all. The biggest timesaver was the preservation of my Lightroom catalog...that alone would take about three days to recreate from the NAS box. In a matter of minutes, it was restored to the new drive and was intact.

Acronis True Image Home 2012 is the latest release of their most popular backup solution for home users. Introduced originally in 2002, it then could produce disk images on recordable DVDs and other external recordable media, for use in restoring your system. As the years went by, the releases added more and more functionality, until the current version, which incorporates all the features of previous versions, and also gives you the online backup option debuted in True Image Home 2010. True Image Home 2011 also added support for Windows 7, as well as a new user interface, among other enhancements.

Features to make life easier

The feature set of True Image Home is able to handle most recovery backup task you can think of. You may image your entire disk at once, or use it to make file level backups at any time you need them. No matter what your needs, there's a function built-in to handle it.

- Patented disk imaging and cloning software ensures that every bit of your data is backed up, and able to be restored to its original condition in minutes. No need to reinstall your software and OS (Operating System) again!
- The new File Synchronization functionality allows you to keep files in sync between all your computers, with no effort on your part.
- Run your backups on your schedule, not the program's. Smart scheduling allows you to set the times and days when the backups will run. And the new Set & Forget feature lets you set up your schedules once, then it does the work of running them for you. No more forgetting to run a backup.
- Try & Decide allows you to install a new piece of software that you're not entirely sure of (as far as it not being a bug factory), and allows you to "roll back" your system safely to before you installed it. No more dangers of bad things corrupting your computer. Good also for surfing somewhat iffy websites ... it will help recover from those dangers as well, if you encounter any.

- Nonstop Backup makes incremental backups of your data as you work, around the clock. You can now restore to any given point in time.
- If you back up to large external hard drives that may not be supported your OS not a problem. True Image Home will support 2TB and larger drives with ease.
- Have a NAS attached to your home network? No problem. True Image will detect it, and set it up as a backup location for you.
- If you need to recover a single file or folder, or several, you can mount your backup image and use it to get what you need. No need to restore an entire disk for just a few missing files or folders.
- If you have sensitive data that needs protection, not a problem ...there's built-in encryption for you, waiting to be put to use.
- Flexible backup options allow you to backup how you want...full image, file level backups, or incremental / differential backups. And the backup can run while you work...no need to shut down and boot into a backup only running environment.
- If you need off-site storage for your backups, there is an option available for you as well. Acronis True Image Online allows you to back up your files to their secure data center, giving you peace of mind that your data will be available anywhere you may be.

One feature to beware of, however, is the Secure Zone. It makes a hidden partition on the drive you are backing up, to store your backup files in. This WAS a useful function in the days when external drives weren't available, or too expensive to justify the cost. But the real danger is, if the drive should fail completely, as mine did, all your data is gone ...because it's on the dead drive with your live partition. DO NOT use the Secure Zone feature.

Installation

When you purchase your copy of True Image Home 2012, you receive it via direct download to your machine. An email with your purchase details and serial key is then sent to you to complete your installation. Simply run the executable file as you normally would, and answer the required setup questions. If you choose to use the defaults, installation takes only a matter of minutes.

Unlike some other software packages, the license key is valid for only one machine. If you have multiple machines you need to image, you need to purchase licenses for each machine. More on this later...as well as a way to get them for a much lower price.

In my case, installation only took about 5 minutes. I chose all defaults, and it went without a hitch. Once installed, double click the icon to launch the program.

Operation

When you first open the application, you are greeted with a generic tasks window, which gives you some basic information on how to perform a backup, restore, or sync. It might not be a bad idea to review these hints, as well as look at the online materials at the Acronis website to get you started.

You want to be at the backup functions, so click on the Backup and recover tab at the top to open the backup functions dialog. Once there, click on the Drive and partition backup icon in the menu bar, and you will be presented with the following window:

Select your source and destination drives here. You may switch between Drive and Partition views, in case you have a multiplication drive...you can select only the partition you need imaged, instead of doing the entire drive.

You also need to select the backup style as well...whether it be full, incremental, or differential. There are also a multitude of options available to let you tweak the backup to your requirements, giving you the freedom to choose how the program works...and the peace of mind that it does what you need it to do for you.

There is also an option to set the options you choose as defaults, so you don't need to reselect them with each new backup job you create.

Once you have the parameters of your backup job set, click OK to get back to the main backup window, and click Backup Now. That's all there is to it. The process will start by enumerating your files needing backing up, and then starts the image process.

Depending on the size of your data and speed of your drives and interface (if USB) or media (if going to CD or DVD), this can take some time to accomplish.

As an example, my first test backup was sized around 160GB, and took over an hour to complete, using an external USB 2.0 drive. As this is a somewhat antique system (1.3 GHz CPU and 1GB memory), the throughput is somewhat slower than an up-to-date system. As with anything, your results may vary...but an image based backup will take much less time to complete than a filebyfile backup method.

If you just need to back up a set of files or folders, that can be done without doing an entire drive image. On the backup window, click on the Other backups icon, and choose File backup. A window will appear which will allow you to select the files and folders you wish to back up. When completed (and you've chosen your destination drive), simply click on the Backup now button once again, and your selected items will be backed up.

Pricing and availability

Acronis True Image Home 2012 is available directly from the developer's website, www.acronis.com. A single PC license is priced at \$49.99 as of this writing. If you need a 3 PC license, it will run you \$79.99. Delivery is via electronic download. There is also a 30day free trial download available, if you want to try before buying.

However, there IS an alternative available exclusively for user group members. A single copy license is available from Gene Barlow at User Group Relations (www.ugr.com) for only \$25. This is the full, noncrippled program ... no features are missing. He has made arrangements with Acronis for this special user group member pricing, and it is available to you now ...but you MUST order from Gene's website. If you should need the three license package, he has it available as the Family Pack for \$60, a savings of \$20 from the Acronis store price. And as an additional bonus, Gene

will ship you a physical CD with your program on it for the same price, plus shipping and handling. Ideal if you don't have a broadband connection (the download is over 200MB, which can take some time on slow connections).

Even more good things come when you purchase through Gene. First, he provides better support for the product than you'd usually get from Acronis as far as operation goes. He will provide you with a copy of his Starter Guide on the CD, or a link address with your serial number. This 21 page document has stepbystep instructions on installing and using the product the best way possible to get you off on the right foot.

Another bonus is technical support. Acronis only gives you 30 days free support from the date you purchase. Gene will give you support as long as you own and use the product, at no additional charge. With the price of tech support companies are charging now, this is a highly attractive offer, one that can save you a lot of your hardearned money. And this all comes with a 50% savings from the manufacturer's pricing. A bargain that actually works for you!

Final thoughts

I have been using a competitive product to True Image for many years, and thought I had found the only backup application I would ever need. But recently it has become more unstable, and not getting any better with subsequent versions (I was beta testing the product, and saw what was happening). I set out to find a new solution, and had heard good things about True Image.

I'm glad I decided to take the plunge and make the switch. The time savings alone from the failure of the hard drive in this machine, and the recovery that was provided by this product would make up ANY price they decided to charge for it. But for the price, it is a definite must have for your toolkit, if you need to ensure reliable and accurate data preservation.

Don't pass this one up. You'll be glad you have it at some point. Hard drives DO fail ...and usually at the time you need them most.

From the March 2012 issue of Horizons, newsletter of the Computer Users of Erie, PA.

Using Windows Task Manager to Get Out of Potentially Harmful Situations

by Terry MacLennan

Sauk Computer Users Group, IL

There is an easy method of getting your computer out of two situations of potential harm. To do this, we will use the operating system's built-in program called the Task Manager.

The first situation is when you have too many programs running at one time and the computer locks up. This lockup can also be caused by a single program that for one Reason or another, fails to run properly. Reaching over and hitting the power button may seem to be your only option but there is a much better choice.

The second situation occurs when you are on a webpage and one of those realistic

looking but totally phony “security alerts” pops up on your monitor screen warning you of imminent danger of viruses and other malware that “it” has detected on your computer. These scare popups trick many naive people into clicking on them only to find out that now their computer truly is infected and control has been lost. You are totally helpless when you have clicked on one of these so-called “security” scam programs.

You absolutely must not click anywhere on these pop-ups including buttons that say something to the effect of “No Thanks,” “Decline” or even “Continue Unprotected.” But, instead of clicking one of those, you may decide, almost instinctively, to click the “X” in the corner of the pop-up box. Doing any of these actions is almost like turning your house alarm off, opening the door and saying “come on in” to the masked bandit standing outside. Paying the “bandits” for their “security program” which is holding your computer hostage is an extremely poor choice. Do you really want to pay the thieves with your credit card and it’s number?

But you are now stuck in a situation where you may try to click off the web page by clicking on its “X” in the upper right hand corner. But you soon find out that that won’t work as you first need to close the window (the pop-up in this case) that is on top.

Hard shutting down the computer by using the power button may seem to be your only option but again there is a better alternative.

Your best friend in both situations is the Task Manager. To open this built-in program, press and hold the CTRL and ALT keys with your left hand, then tap the DEL key with your right hand.

In Win XP, this will automatically open the Task Manager while with Windows 7 it will take you to a page with a list of options. Click the bottom option and it will open the Task Manager which looks nearly identical to the XP one. From here, everything is the same for both systems.

Along the top edge of the Task Manager is a row of tabs. Click the Applications tab, if it doesn’t happen to automatically be on that tab. When you have opened it up, you will see a listing of all the programs and web pages that are running.

If your computer is locked up, look for any programs that are “Not responding.” Click the program one time to highlight it then click on End Task at the bottom. This should close the nonresponsive program and free your computer.

If the computer remains locked up, use the same method to close all of the remaining Programs that are running then shut down as you would normally. Everything should be back to normal when you reboot the computer.

A hard shutdown with the power button is absolutely the last resort as this could potentially damage files.

To close a web page with the dangerous fake security warning pop-ups, use the same method by highlighting the web page in the list then clicking End Task. This will safely shut down the web page with its pop-up without installing the malware “security program.”

Originally published in The Computer Connection, the newsletter of the Sauk Computer Users Group

GIMP 2.8 - Freeware Alternative to Photoshop

by Ira Wilsker

There are many excellent and free image editors available that are fully capable of easily performing most simple image editing tasks. My personal favorite simple image editor is the free IrfanView (irfanview.com) which is totally capable of the common imaging editing tasks such as cropping, removing red-eye, and performing color corrections and related enhancements. Sometimes it is useful to be able to do much more than simple photo editing, such as producing creative enhancements and other artistic effects. The granddaddy of high end sophisticated image editing and enhancement software is Adobe's popular Photoshop, which just introduced a new version, Photoshop CS6, which is now available (Amazon) for \$699. The previous version, the two year old Photoshop CS5, is available "marked down" to about \$550. Many of us would like much of the power of Photoshop without the expense, and that is where GIMP comes in.

In early May, 2012, a stable version 2.8 of GIMP was released. According to Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GIMP), "GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program) is a free and open source software image retouching and editing tool and is freely available in versions tailored for most popular operating systems including Microsoft Windows, Apple Mac OS X, and Linux." According to the GIMP website (www.gimp.org), "(GIMP) is a freely distributed program for such tasks as photo retouching, image composition and image authoring. It has many capabilities. It can be used as a simple paint program, an expert quality photo retouching program, an online batch processing system, a mass production image renderer, an image format converter, etc.

GIMP is expandable and extensible. It is designed to be augmented with plug-ins and extensions to do just about anything. The advanced scripting interface allows everything from the simplest task to the most complex image manipulation procedures to be easily scripted." For those interested in making animations, such as animated GIF files, GIMP has that ability when used with one of the many free plug-ins that can expand its capabilities. GIMP is available for free for most operating systems including GNU/Linux, Mac OS X, Microsoft Windows, Free BSD, Solaris, and AmigaOS 4, with documentation and desktops in 52 languages.

Since GIMP is considered as an advanced photo and imaging program, it is not as intuitive and user friendly as the more basic programs, such as IrfanView, but with a little practice and following some of the online tutorials (www.gimp.org/tutorials), it is not difficult to master many of the features of GIMP. Not being graphically gifted, I decided to try GIMP and downloaded the new GIMP 2.8 for Windows which was a large 72.7mb download. There are also several hundred GIMP plug-ins, all of which are free, that can add additional features and enhancements to GIMP; these plug-ins are available at registry.gimp.org/node.

After I downloaded the GIMP installer for Windows (requires XP SP3 or higher),

I installed the program, which other than selecting a language, had no other configuration items to select. There were no add-on toolbars, search engines, or other “revenue enhancements” offered during the install process; it was a clean install, free of any forms of advertising. After the install, which took about a minute, I opened the program which opened three windows; two of the windows are referred to as “Docks” and included a Toolbox, and a Brushes & Layers dock, with the third window being the program window.

In total, there are about two dozen “docks” which provide hundreds of image editing and creation tools. On the menu bar of the main program is a standard menu arrangement with 11 common menus such as File, Edit, Select, and View. Each of the menus offers a relevant selection of choices, which offer hundreds more image options.

As an experiment for my first use of GIMP 2.8, I opened a recent JPG image of my youngest granddaughter. The first item that I noticed was that the window has a grid displaying the image size in pixels. Just to get some experience in manipulating images in GIMP, I selected the Colors choice on the menu, and changed the hue, saturation, color balance, posterize, and other options. I then selected Colors - Auto - Color Enhance and in a few seconds the image was modified with richer colors. I selected Tools - Text and was able to select fonts and size, and was able to add text to the image. I tried several of the special effects under the Filters - Artistic menu, including Cartoon and was able to modify the image. One function that I was able to master was Red Eye Removal, found under the Filters - Enhance - Red Eye Removal menu. I selected the location of the eyes, which had a moderate case of red-eye, and GIMP changed the colors of the pupil such that the red-eye disappeared from the image. I am well aware that I am artistically challenged, but I found that GIMP has dramatically greater functionality than I have artistic ability.

Since GIMP offers much more than just photo and image editing, I decided to attempt to create my own artistic creation; I clicked on File - Create - Patterns and selected a camouflage pattern. While the colors in the patterns could be individually selected, I tried my hand at some other creations and patterns, including “Land” which created a topographical map-like pattern, and a variety of other interesting patterns. I tried File - New - Template and created CD labels, web banners of various sizes, and images in standard screen sizes and paper sizes.

GIMP is a very powerful and comprehensive image creation and editing utility, requiring that the user has creative abilities in order to use any but the most basic functions. I found the tutorials to be a tremendous help in learning how to use GIMP, as well as some of the other GIMP free tutorials and lessons available from “Make Use Of” at www.makeuseof.com/tag/5-websites-learn-gimp-photo-editor-online and www.makeuseof.com/tags/gimp. A free “cheat sheet” with the basic GIMP commands and shortcuts can be downloaded from www.makeuseof.com/pages/gimp-shortcuts-pdf.

For those who would like to try a free sophisticated image editor and creator that can also make web banners and animated GIFs, GIMP would be an excellent choice.
WEBSITES:

<http://www.gimp.org>

<http://www.gimp.org/about/introduction.html>

<http://www.gimp.org/tutorials>

<http://www.makeuseof.com/pages/gimp-shortcuts-pdf>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GIMP>

<http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/5-websites-learn-gimp-photo-editor-online>

Adding Disk Space to Windows 7

by Dick Maybach

When buying a new PC, it's usually wise to equip it with the largest possible hard disk.

Despite this, it's not uncommon to find that eventually it becomes uncomfortably full, leaving you with four options:

1. Save all your user data on an external disk, replace the system disk with a larger one, install Windows and all your applications from scratch, and restore your user data from the external disk,
2. Make an image of the current disk on an external drive, replace the current hard disk, and restore the image to it,
3. Add a hard disk and move some data folders to it, or
4. Enable dynamic disk management, which makes multiple disks appear as one, thus increasing the available space.

If your Windows 7 installation is corrupted by file system errors or malware, you must use option 1. If your system is working well, use option 2 (using the Windows 7 *Backup and Restore* tool), which is substantially easier and faster than 1. If your current system is working well, option 3 looks attractive, but there are significant issues, which I discuss below. I don't have the resources to test option 4, and I've learned from sad experience not to write about things I haven't done. If you are interested in dynamic disk management, see a good book, such as *Window 7 In Depth* by Cowart and Knittel. However, this approach appears to be complex enough to make it useful only in a professionally-staffed computer center. I don't recommend it for home users.

Option 3, add a second hard disk and move some of the data folders from our home folder to it, looks attractive. Here, some data will reside on a different drive, call it D:, and unfortunately, some programs, for example *iTunes*, cannot access data on it. You can edit *iTunes'* preferences to declare that, *iTunes Media*, the folder that holds its music, resides on D:, but *iTunes* apparently doesn't look outside your home folder. There are probably other applications with similar flaws.

A procedure called *grafting* appears to offer a solution. It maps all the files on an auxiliary disk into a folder in your home folder, and any files you later add to that folder are stored on the grafted disk. The basic procedure is as follows:

- Copy all the files in the selected folder to the auxiliary disk;

- Delete the selected folder on the main disk; and
- Graft the auxiliary disk to a folder on main disk.

This indeed works on Windows 7, and after I did it, iTunes was able to find its files on the auxiliary disk, but operations were so flaky (see below) that I wouldn't do this on a PC that I actually used.

If you would like to experiment (not on the PC you use for TurboTax please), here is the procedure. Log into an account with administrator privileges, and open the *Disk Management* tool. (The easiest way is to tap the *Windows* key or click on *Start*, type ...disk manage ... and select *Create and format hard disk partitions*.) The screenshot below shows the result.

In this example, I graft NTFS-2 (F:) onto a folder in my home folder. Right-click on NTFS-2 (F:) and select Change Drive Letter and Paths ... Click the *Add ...* button, select Browse ... navigate to the folder where the original folder appeared (in my case C:\users\n2nd), click the New Folder button. The result is shown below.

Click the *OK* button and the *Browse for Drive Paths* window will close, then click *OK* in the *Add Drive Letter or Path* window, and close the *Disk Management* window. The disk NTFS-2 (F:) is now grafted on the folder *C:\Users\n2nd\New Folder*. If you had to log in as a different user to obtain administrator privileges, log out and then log back into your home account, in my case n2nd.

This seems straightforward, but there are several traps. The Disk Manager is quirky and not well documented. I needed several attempts to make the above procedure work, which isn't good for a tool that modifies your folder structure. Since you can graft an entire disk only to a single folder, if there are several large folders, you must partition the auxiliary disk and graft a separate partition to each folder. This is unfortunate, because you can't graft your entire home directory, as it contains system files that are always in use. Most disturbing is that when I finished and tried to make a full backup, including a system image, the procedure failed. Even if it had succeeded, I'm not sure I could have restored my system. Would the software try to put everything on the original (now too small) C: disk, or would it be smart enough to restore to both C: and F: and graft F: to a folder? This isn't something about which you want to be surprised when you have to restore your files.

My conclusion after all this is that Windows 7 is designed to operate from a single disk, as are some of its applications. In this respect, it's made a step backward from XP, where you could locate your *My Documents* folder on any disk, and even *iTunes* could find its files there. You can add additional disks to a Windows 7 system, but accessing files on them will be somewhat less convenient than if everything resided in your home folder. As a result, if you run out of disk space on a Windows 7 PC, the best course is to replace the disk with a larger one and port your system to it.

From the March 2012 issue of BUG Bytes, Brookdale Computer Users' Group, NJ.

Q: A member is running a software package that uses an internal PDF generating option. When using it, the PDF request causes the system to stop in one out of four tries. Restarting the system allows the PDF to be generated just fine.

A: It sounds like it is internal to your application. Sometimes Windows 7 OS can respond differently. He needs to contact the application vendor, for sure. He may also want to install a separate PDF generator (such as CutePDF) and use that outside of the application.

The Lighter Side

The company where this tech works has just upgraded to a new email service, and as part of the process, he has provided users with printed instructions on how to access email through a web browser.

“One of our sales executives was trying to follow these steps in a web browser on his personal home PC and wasn’t having any luck,” reports Tech. “Not being very technical, he had his wife call me to ask for help in getting him logged in.”

He easily remotes into the exec’s PC, navigates to the webmail site and types in the user name. But the password is a problem.

Tech: OK, now please type his password into the password field.

Exec’s wife: “Can you just type it? The password is ‘A B C dash dash 1 2 3.’”

He types in the password and clicks the login button. It doesn’t work. He tries again. Still no dice.

Tech: Can you check on the password again? This doesn’t seem to be working.

Exec’s wife: “No, that’s it – it’s ‘A B C dash dash 1 2 3.’”

He tries again without success. Are you *sure* the password is “A B C dash dash 1 2 3”? he asks.

Exec’s wife: “Yes, I am absolutely sure, ‘A B C dash dash 1 2 3.’ But...”

Tech: But?

Exec’s wife: “Well, the dashes are not next to each other. They’re on top of each other.”

Sighs Tech, “Once I typed in the equals sign, I was able to log into the webmail site just fine.”