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What's New in Computing

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FBI Warns About International "Ransomware" Email Scam

by Ira Wilsker

It never ceases to amaze me how creative international cyber crooks can be. There are countless online scams and schemes intended to enrich crooks at the cost of innocent internet users. We have all heard of viruses, worms, Trojans, and other variations of malware, as published warnings have been disseminated since the early days of personal computing. While many types of malware are nasty, one of the nastiest is known in the security industry as "ransomware," which requires the victims to pay ransom in order to recover the use of their computers. These ransom cases have caught the attention of the FBI,

which has posted a stern user warning online at www.fbi.gov/news /stories/2012/August/new-internet-scam/new-internet-scam.

In recent days, I have had several inquiries about locked computers with a strange warning official looking window with an FBI header that says "Your PC is blocked due to at least one of the reasons specified below:" The warning of the locked computer informs the user that the FBI has detected that the computer either had pirated "Video, Music, Software" or the user has, "…been viewing or distributing prohibited Pornographic content (Child Porno, Zoofilia, and etc.)." For the possession of the pirated software the penalty is listed as (note the poor grammar in the post), "…provides for a fine of two to five hundred minimal wages or a deprivation of liberty for two to eight years." The penalty for the pornography charge is listed as, "…a deprivation of liberty for four to twelve years." Just to increase the fear and worry of the user is an additional criminal charge, "Illegal access has been initiated from your PC without your knowledge or consent, your PC may be infected by malware, thus you are violating the law of Neglectful Use of Personal Computer. Article 210 of the Criminal Code provides for a fine of up to $100,000 and/or a deprivation of liberty for four to nine years."

With the benevolence of a cable TV pitchman shouting "But wait! -- there's more!," the FBI is allegedly offering the victims a deal, since it is likely the computer's first offense. This great deal is "Fines may be paid within 72 hours after the infringement. As soon as 72 hours elapse, the possibility to pay the fine expires, and a criminal case is initiated against you automatically within the next 72 hours! To unblock the computer, you must pay the fine through MoneyPak of 100$." Again, note the vernacular and wording, including the incorrect domestic format of "100$." The instructions on processing a MoneyPak trans-action to pay the "100$" fine are explicit, directing the victims to only purchase a "100$" prepaid GreenDot MoneyPak at a 7-Eleven, CVS, Rite Aid, Kmart, Walmart, or Walgreen's. There will be a $4.95 charge for the prepaid card, and then charge it with the "100$." In the original warning email is a place for the victim to enter the code from the prepaid card, along with a prefilled "100$," and a button that says, "Pay MoneyPak" which will instantly transfer the "100$" balance of the prepaid card to the cyber crooks. The email then states that, "When you pay the fine your PC will get unlocked in 1 to 48 hours after the money is put in the State' account. In case an error occurs, you'll have to send the code by email to fine@fbi.gov." If the victim pays the ransom, the computer is not released or unlocked; this is a complete scam. Some variations of the scam have recently appeared that have raised the ransom demand to $200.

Microsoft has posted a detailed description and removal instructions on its Microsoft Malware Protection Center website, referring to this malware as " Trojan:Win32/Reveton.A" or "Trojan:Win32 /Ransom.FL. "These Trojans, when they sneak on to a victim's computer, locks the computer, and displays a localized version of the warning. In the U.S. the warnings appear to come from the FBI, while similar localized warnings appear to be from national or local law enforcement agencies in the UK, Germany, Italy, and other countries, all requiring the fine to be paid in a similar way using a specific prepaid card sold at localized specific retailers; in Europe, the crooks demand payments via the Ukash or PaySafe prepaid cards.

The FBI has analyzed the malware, and warns that, "Reveton is described as drive-by malware because unlike many viruses—which activate when users open a file or attachment—this one can install itself when users simply click on a compromised website. Once infected, the victim's computer immediately locks, and the monitor displays a screen stating there has been a violation of federal law."According to Microsoft, the malware arrives on the computer as a DLL file with a random filename, and then creates a shortcut to itself in the Windows startup folder. Once loaded, the malware prevents the user from accessing the desktop, disables protective security software on the computer, and then downloads and

executes other malware, including the localized desktop window containing the ransom demand.

Variations of the Reveton malware, along with it companion Citadel malware, have been around for over a year, and most of the major anti-spyware utilities can detect and kill it. Microsoft has published a manual removal method on its Microsoft Malware Protection Center website:

1. Press CTRL+O
2. In the dialogue box that opens, type the following as is, then press Enter: cmd.exe
3. In the command prompt window, type the following as is, then press Enter: cd "%USERPROFILE%\Start Menu\Programs\ StartUp"
4. Still in the command prompt window, type the following as is, then press Enter:del *.dll.lnk
5. Still in the command prompt window, type the following as is, then press Enter:shutdown -r -t 0
6. Afterwards, run a full-system scan with an appropriate, up-to-date, security solution. The following Microsoft products detect and remove this threat; Microsoft Security Essentials, Microsoft Safety Scanner.

I have also had good success removing this ransomware using the free portable version of SuperAntiSpyware (www.superantispyware.com portablescannerhome.html).The free personal edition can be down-loaded using another uninfected computer, and copied to a USB flash drive; detailed instructions are given on the webpage. This portable version is complete when downloaded, and does not require internet access in order to run and kill the malware; since the portable version is updated periodically prior to downloading, later scans may require a more recent copy of the software. Completely turn off (shut down or power down) the infected computer, and then reboot it into "Safe Mode" by pressing the "F8" key immediately after turning the power on, and every few seconds until the safe mode screen appears; select either the basic "Safe Mode" or "Safe Mode with Networking" (not required). Plug in the USB flash drive containing the portable version of Super-AntiSpyware, and run the downloaded file directly from the flash drive. While a quick scan may only take a few minutes, a full scan will take much longer, but is more comprehensive; remove or quarantine whatever the Super AntiSpyware scan finds. Remove the flash drive, and reboot the computer.

If the computer reboots properly, without the ransomware window, it is still possible that there is some deeply hidden malware still on the computer. While it is highly likely that the portable version of Super-AntiSpyware will detect and remove the ransomware, no cleaning utility is 100% effective at removing all malware, so I always perform a redundant scan with another security utility. If the computer appears to boot properly, go online and download the free version of Malware Bytes from www.malwarebytes.org/products/malwarebytes_free. Install the MalwareBytes, update it, and perform a full scan; if it says that you are clean, and SuperAntiSpyware says that you are clean, your computer is likely clean. Since the ransomware may have disabled or destroyed your security software, it would be a good choice to reinstall a good quality security suite, keeping one fact in mind: If the ransomware was able to easily penetrate your previous security soft-ware, it is quite possible that your security software was either inadequate or not properly updated, which allowed the ransom-ware to infect your computer. Now may be the time to install a different, probably better and more comprehensive security suite, one that provides protection from compromised websites; once the new security software is installed and updated, it may be very appropriate to perform another full security scan.

It is sad that international cyber crooks can easily extort money from innocent victims anywhere in the world, but being proactive, and knowing how to deal with the threat before

it occurs may mitigate the stress, grief, and expense of dealing with this ransomware. It is nice to know that the FBI and other international law enforcement agencies are trying to deal with the threat. If these guys are caught, I hope that they are severely punished, but I am not so naive as to think that it will not happen again; one thing certain is that it will happen again, so be prepared! Knowledge is power, and now, you have the power.

Websites:

http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2012/august/new-internet-scam/new-internet-scam

http://www.microsoft.com/security/portal/Threat/Encyclopedia/Entry.aspx?Name=Trojan%3aWin32%2fReveton.A&ThreatID=-2147315638

http://www.bleepingcomputer.com/virus-removal/remove-fbi-monkeypak-ransomware

https://www.superantispyware.com/portablescannerhome.html

Windows Q & A

by Mary Phillips
Icon Users Group, MO

Q1. What are the differences between Data Backup, System Restore, Disk Image, System Recovery Disc, and System Repair Disk?

A1. Data Backup – Making copies of personal data files that may be used to restore the originals in case of data loss or simply to restore data from an earlier time. Backed up folders/files may include Documents, Pictures, Music, Videos, and/or Downloads – files it could be difficult or impossible to replace.

Options for backing up your data depends on the hardware you have available and the amount of information you need to back up – DVD's, flash drives, external hard drives or online storage in the "cloud". An external hard drive may provide the most flexibility because they are relatively inexpensive and can hold large amounts of information.

In Windows 7, in the Control Panel, click on Backup and Restore. In this window, you have four main options: Backup, Restore from the Backup, Create a System Image and Create a System Repair Disc.

1. Choose Set up Backup and click on the Backup Destination. In the picture below there are two choices: DVD RW Drive (D:) and My Book (K:). Click Next.
2. What do you want to back up? If you choose Let Windows choose, Window will back up data files saved in Libraries, on the desktop, and in default Windows folders.

It will also create a system image (described later) which can be used to restore your operating system AND data files in the case that your computer quits working.

Backup for my computer took approximately 2530 minutes, was 49 GB and was saved in a folder automatically Mary-PC. (See below)

Backups are created in sets; the folder "set" in Mary-PC folder, is named Backup Files 2012-03-20 110818. It contains eight compressed folders that can be opened and individual Files retrieved.

System Restore involves Windows system files, programs, registry settings, and most drivers. It does nothing with personal files, such as e-mail, documents, or photos.

Windows creates what are called Restore Points or "date and time specific snapshots" automatically unless for some specific reason the feature has been turned off. Users can also create restore points manually. The benefit of a Restore point is that it allows the user to "roll back" the system settings and installed programs to a date before a problem existed. Sometimes an update will create a problem or a piece of malware makes things go haywire. Those are good times to use System Restore. A system restore can also be undone if it doesn't fix a problem.

System Restore automatically recommends the most recent restore point created before a

significant change, such as installing a program. However, you can and choose from a list of restore points if you check in the box beside Show more restore points (Win 7).

In Windows 7, go to the Control Panel, click on Backup and Restore, click on the link recover system settings to select a restore point. Then you'll see this window.

To create a restore point manually in Windows 7, do the following:

1. In the Control Panel, click on System—System Protection. At the bottom of the window, click on the Create button.
2. Type a description, like "Before Sample program installation." Click Create and System Protection creates the restore point.

In Windows XP follow this path: All Programs—Accessories—System Tools—System Restore.

1. Choose whether you want to 1) Restore the computer to an earlier time, or 2) Create a restore point. Click Next.
2. If you chose Restore a computer to an earlier date, on the calendar, the dates in bold are the dates that restore points were created. Click on the preferred date. Click Next.
3. If you chose Create a Restore Point, you then will need to give it a description. Click Next and the restore point will be created.

System Image – A system image is an exact copy of a drive. By default, a system image includes the drives required for Windows to run. It also includes Windows and your system settings, programs, and files. You can use a system image to restore the contents of your computer if your hard disk or computer ever stops working. When you restore your computer from a system image, it's a complete restoration —you can't choose individual items to restore, and all of your current programs, system settings, and files are returned to the condition it was in when the System Image was created.

Although this type of backup includes your personal files, it is recommended that you back up your files regularly using Windows Backup so that you can restore individual files and folders as needed. When you set up Windows Backup, you can let Windows choose what to back up, which will include a system image, or you can select the items that you want to back up and whether you want to include a system image. *You will need to create the System Repair Disc to use with the System Image disks.*

System Recovery Discs – Return your computer to its original purchased condition. The manufacturer most often provides an option to create these disks the first time you turn on your computer. When you click on Create System Recovery Disks, you need to have CDs or DVDs ready.

You will end up with a series of CDs (a bunch!) or several DVDs (mine took two DVDs.) These disks are created from a special partition on the hard drive and usually can be created only once. However, the manufacturers are happy to sell you a set of Recovery disks or the technology store where you buy your computer will offer to create the recovery disks for you.

On the good side, System Recovery Discs come in handy in an emergency. Just feed your PC the System Recovery Discs, and your PC regresses into the same machine you originally brought home from the store.

On the bad side, however, you'll lose every program, photo, and file you've stored on that PC since you bought it. System Recovery Discs only care about returning your PC to its original, first purchased, condition. Everything else is swept away. So you'd need to reinstall and get updates for every program added since you bought the computer.

System Repair Disc – In the Backup and Restore window of Windows 7, Microsoft built a System Repair Disc option that works quite differently from the PC manufacturer's System Recovery Discs. (Creating the System Repair Disc takes only a few minutes and it only takes

up 142MB of space so a CD will work fine. Label the CD as Repair Disc Windows 7 32 or 64 bit.)

When your PC no longer runs properly, insert Windows 7 's System Repair Disc into your PC, and press the On switch. Instead of returning your PC to its original condition, the System Repair Disc offers several menu options: Startup Repair. This examines Windows 7 's most integral files, then repairs any missing or damaged files that may be keeping Windows 7 from starting.

System Restore. Just like the normal System Restore option, this restores your PC's system files to an earlier point in time, hopefully fixing any recently developed problems. It doesn't affect your personal files, like e-mail, documents, or photos. There's one key difference between this version of System Restore, though: When run from the System Repair Disc menu, System Restore doesn't have an undo option. (However, you can run System Restore again and choose a different restore point, if one exists.)

System Image Recovery. If you've created a "System Image" in Windows 7's backup options, this option returns your PC to the condition it was in when you made the System Image backup. It's truly a lifesaver, but only if you create System Image disks regularly.

Windows Memory Diagnostic Tool. Designed to ferret out hardware problems, this examines your PC's memory for errors.

Command Prompt. This lets techies dig deep into Windows' internal crevices. It's designed for people comfortable typing in commands, not moving around a mouse.

In short, the System Recovery discs return your PC to the state it was when first purchased, scrapping all your data while along the way. The System Repair disc, by contrast, offers tools to help bring your ailing PC back to life, keeping all your valuable files safe.

When in major trouble first try your System Repair, as it may solve your problem. Only use the System Recovery Discs as a last resort, as they wipe out everything you've created since buying your PC.

What should I do about System Restore if I get a virus? If you know that your system is infected by a virus, you should temporarily turn off System Restore. Otherwise, the virus could be saved along with other system files in a restore point and reintroduced to your system during a restore operation at a later date.

To turn off System Restore in both Windows 7 and XP, press and hold the Windows key and press the Break key to bring up the System Properties dialog box. Then, click on the System Restore tab, select the Turn Off System Restore check box, and click OK. In Win 7, as soon as you do, you'll see a confirmation dialog box warning you that turning off System Restore will delete all existing restore points. Click Yes to continue.

From the April 2011 issue, The ICON*, newsletter of the Interactive Computer Owners Network. Courtesy of APCUG.*

Windows 7 Program Compatibility Mode

by Lynn Page
Crystal River User Group, FL

P rogram Compatibility Mode allows you to run programs writ ten for earlier versions of Windows. If an old program doesn't run correctly, use the Program Compatibility troubleshooter to simulate a version of Windows that it ran well on.

Problems Installing a Program

The Program Compatibility Assistant detects compatibility issues when trying to install a program that does not support Windows 7. If a compatibility error is found during installation, after closing the error message, the Program Compatibility Assistant notifies you that the program might not have installed correctly. It prompts you to Reinstall using

recommended settings.

Program Compatibility Troubleshooter

Some programs install, but don't work properly with Windows 7. The Program compatibility troubleshooter may solve the issue. Or right click the program icon and select Troubleshoot compatibility. In search box type Program compatibility troubleshooter and select it. Click Next, select the program from the listing and then select Try recommended settings.

Manually Select Compatibility

You can bypass the Program Compatibility troubleshooter and manually set the Compatibility Mode. Right click the program icon and select Properties. Select the Compatibility tab and check Run this program in compatibility for: In the drop down list select the version of Windows that the programs runs on. Then the program will always run in Compatibility Mode for the version of Windows selected.

From the April 2012 newsletter of the Crystal River User Group in Tampa Bay, FL.

System Suite Professional 2012

reviewed by Bart Koslow
Thousand Oaks PC Club, CA

System Suite Professional (SS) is a comprehensive utility program that will tune up and repair your PC and provide malware, virus, spyware, and firewall protection. Unlike most programs today, it comes with a printed manual of 174 pages that guides you through the many aspects of the software.

I already had SS version 2011 installed on my computer. SS removes prior versions before installing the latest one. When I first installed SS, Net Defense, which is the firewall, did not install. After three back and forth emails with Avanquest support and three differing attempts to re-install it, I finally got everything up and running properly.

This is the first time I encountered an installation problem with SS. The installation CD comes with two bonus programs, AutoSave Essentials, and Power Desk 8 Standard. Avanquest sells AutoSave Essentials and Power Desk Pro for $39.95 each. I installed Power Desk 8 Standard, but not AutoSave as I have plenty of backup software already. Power Desk is an augmented Windows File Manager. I have used it for years and highly recommend it. I also noticed that the SS now comes with a license for 5 PCs that will work with all versions of Windows XP and Windows 7.

Opening SS, I saw a new program interface page that was improved over that of version 11. One of my favorite parts of SS is System Recovery where you may create a System Restore Point and a Check-point in the event you have a problem and have to go back. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the restore point creation was much faster than in the prior version. I cannot tell you how many times I have used this feature to recover from a major problem. I have used the included anti-virus, anti-malware-spyware and firewall in the past, and have found them to work very well. A part of SS that I especially like is the Registry Cleaner which has been excellent in the past, and has never created a problem for me. Another feature I like is to view "Problems" that SS has found, and selectively determine which one to fix.

If you are a person who does not wish to fiddle with the individual parts of the program, there is an easier way. Just select One-Click Fix All and SS will do the rest. Another way is to select One Fix Wizards of which there are three, one for each segment of the program -- Optimize, Security and Fix & Maintain -- and run them selectively. There is a lot of flexibility in how you may use this program. Working in the back-ground you have Active Intelligence Technology which continuously, silently and automatically monitors and fixes all your PC problems. It tracks hard drive status, available disk space, hard drive fragmentation, registry errors, excess temp tiles, startup applications, and more. Regular use of Active Intelligence

reduces start up times, improves read-write performance and prevents data loss by identifying hard drive problems before they happen.

What's new in this version:

1. Patent-pending PC Analyzer Technology -- Identifies why your PC is slow
2. 400% Faster Registry Repair -- Fixes registry problems and optimizes Windows
3. Program Optimizer -- Speeds program launch and response by fixing slowdowns

System Suite will completely Optimize, Protect, and Fix & Maintain your computer effortlessly and silently in the background while you work. I have used it for many years and find it to be one of the essential programs that I use with my computers. I recommend this program for all users, from beginner to advanced.

Amazon sells System Suite 12 Professional for $49.99 delivered. There is a $20 upgrade or competitive upgrade coupon that comes with the program, so your net low cost will be $29.99. Avanquest provides unlimited support for registered products. You can also check the User's manual and online help (included within the program menu) for answers to many common issues. Email & Phone support is available if you cannot resolve your questions.

Light Housekeeping for a Safe and Healthy Computer

by Mike Morris

Front Range PC Users Group, Fort Collins, CO

T he Front Range PC Users Group (FRPCUG) provides free computer help to the community and to several other local non-profit organizations. As a result of these efforts, we have concluded that there are two tasks and several free and reliable utilities that help to maintain a safe and healthy computer.

Without a doubt, the two most important safety and security tasks for every Windows computer user are:

1. Keep the Operating System up to date
2. Keep the security software up to date

In addition to those two tasks, there is some computer "house-keeping" required to keep your computer healthy (for those of you who consider yourselves not knowledgeable enough to "maintain" your computer, think of these utilities as cleaning tools, not maintenance tools). For housekeeping, these utilities are recommended:

Revo Uninstaller

This free utility does an excellent job of uninstalling unwanted software—even better than the Windows utility.

You can use the default settings of Revo.

It is important to note that Revo first runs the uninstaller program provided with the program you want to remove. At the end of that process, you are asked if you want to restart your computer. At this point, *Do Not Restart Your Computer*. Click on "No" or "Restart later" (or whatever similar message is displayed). That will allow the rest of Revo to run. It will check for left-over files in the Windows Registry and the directories. Whatever files or file remnants it finds, select everything it finds and delete them.

You can download Revo from http://www.revouninstaller.com/revo_uninstaller_free _download.html. The free version is the one in the left column (see the graphic at right).

When installing this (or any program), proceed carefully, because very likely there is additional software "bundled" with what you want—that additional software is usually unnecessary. Examine each screen as it is displayed and uncheck or refuse any of the extra unwanted software.

Sometimes, even Revo needs some help. When combined with a registry cleaner, unwanted software can be effectively removed. The registry cleaner we recommend is:

2. CCleaner

This is another free, excellent utility. There is much debate in the computer world about registry cleaners. Since the Windows Registry is so crucial to correct operation, one viewpoint is that no one but an expert should use them. It is true that modifying the Windows Registry has the potential to create problems. However, those of us in FRPCUG have used CCleaner on many computers without problems. When using the registry cleaner option of CCleaner, you will be asked if you want to backup your registry. It's a safety factor that is up to you.

There are two parts to cleaning your computer of unwanted/left-over junk using CCleaner: Cleaner and Registry. Use both—once a week is recommended, but at least once a month.

There are cases where, after running Revo, it may be necessary to run CCleaner 3 or 4 times before all of the junk is removed. For example, if you have Norton security software installed on your computer and want to remove it, it will take Revo and possibly 3 or 4 passes of CCleaner (restarting your computer after each CCleaner run) to completely remove the Norton software (more on Norton in a moment).

You can download CCleaner from http://www.filehippo.com /download_ccleaner/. Use the "Download Latest Version" button with the green background at the right side of the page.

For computer security:

Virtually all new Windows computers are delivered with a trial version of one brand or another of security software installed, usually good for up to 90 days. Once that trial is over, you need to pay for an annual subscription for updates.

In today's world, there is no need to pay for security software. There are a number of excellent, free security software programs available. And, there are cases where the free software might actually be better than security software that you buy. For example, in the past, Norton security software acquired a reputation for slowing down the computers on which it was installed (my own experience with Norton software—at least the older versions, based on helping other computer users, is that it is not as good at catching malicious software (malware) as other programs).

Of the many free security software applications available, FRPCUG members have used these four, and found them to be reliable and effective (just because the software is free does not mean it is less capable):

One is Microsoft Security Essentials (MSE). You can download MSE from http://www .microsoft.com/download /en/details.aspx?id=5201. Note that there are 2 versions available, depending on whether your computer has an AMD or an Intel processor.

Another is Avira Free. This application received excellent reviews from the independent security software testing organization, AV-Comparatives – Independent Tests of Anti-Virus Software, http:// www.av-comparatives or/

A third choice is Avast Free, and a fourth choice is AVG Free. We suggest you read the reviews on these products (enter: review of—and the application name—into a Google search, or use the AV Comparative website mentioned above). If you decide to use one these applications, download it from http://www.filehippo.com. You are less likely to en-counter excess, unnecessary additional software (sometimes called "bloatware" or "sneakware"). Once you connect to the filehippo website, just enter the name of the application into the search box.

Another area of debate regarding security software is the number of different security software applications that should be installed and running and one computer. With one exception, described below, you are probably going to be better off with only one. Since these applications are always running (in the background), it is very likely that two or more security

applications running simultaneously will cause conflicts (and/or slow down your computer). It is possible, with a lot of experimentation, to find multiple security applications that do not conflict (one FRPCUG member has done so), but for most computer users, one application is sufficient.

The best way to change security software is to download, but don't install, the new security software. Then use Revo (and if necessary, CCleaner) to remove the old security software. Finally, install the new security software.

A supplementary security software program that works extremely well is Malwarebytes. You can download this program from http:// www.filehippo.com/search?q=malwarebytes. The free version does not run continuously in the background, as do other security software applications. That means Malwarebytes does not conflict with any other security software. The only disadvantage to this program is that you have to remember to run a manual scan (say once a week). It's worth it—Malwarebytes finds problems other security software does not.

The best way to keep your computer secure, as mentioned above, is to keep the operating system and security software up to date. You can set Windows computers for automatic operating system updates. Virtually all security software programs, including the free ones can be set up for automatic updates.

For more information on this topic, connect to http://frpcug.org/presentations /BB_Present04.pdf and http://frpcug.org/presentations/comp_maint_security.pdf.

One other suggestion:

Another free, useful utility is Belarc Advisor. The program provides a detailed list of the hardware installed in your computer. You can download Belarc Advisor from http://www .belarc.com/free_download .html. While not crucial, like security software and maintenance utilities, Belarc is a helpful program to have on your computer.

We have installed and run these programs on many computers without any problems. There is, however, always the chance that some unusual combination of hardware and software may result in a problem. So you should backup at the very least your important data, even if it is just copying that data temporarily to a flash drive. Please read our disclaimer at http://www.frpcug.org/k-byte/current.pdf (page 19).

Happy Computing!

Evernote 4

Reviewed by Hewie Poplock
APCUG Director; VP, Central Florida Computer Society

I like to share information, especially with members of my user group. I read a lot of articles about computer hardware & software. When I find an article of interest, which may be news, pricing, reviews, or tutorials, I have to decide how to keep that information. I often save it as an Acrobat PDF file, or I may copy and paste the article and email to myself, or send the link to myself.

I frequently forget where I stored them, to follow through with a link, or to go back later to save it. Many times I do not even remember the article or how I tried to save it.

I have actually created an email address to send myself articles to keep track of them in one place. I have begun to save other articles in several folders in an attempt to become organized.

Recently I was asked about a free program that I tried a few years ago, Evernote. I decided to once again take a look at it and discovered that it is an organizational tool that I need to be using. Since I have started using it, I find it to be an important part of my everyday computer life.

As I read an article, an email, a webpage, I just highlight the information that I want to

save, right mouse click add to Evernote 4.0, and I have the article. It is clean and usually just the information that I want, usually eliminating ads or other information that is not part of the article. If any of it does get into the note, I can delete it. I can also add something that I missed or was on a different part of the screen. I can edit the formatting, and other typical text edits. I can even change the font or font size.

Evernote does include a link to the original document and links in the article are live. I always like to include a link to the original make sure that the author is cited and given proper credit.

Once I have created an Evernote, it will sync with all of my other devices that are signed into my account. So when I read an article on my desktop, I can create a note and it will almost immediately be available on my notebook, my iPad, my iPod, and my netbook. I can share the article with others via Twitter, Facebook, or email directly from Evernote.

The program is available for mobile devices with iOS, Android, Blackberry, Windows Phone 7 and WebOS as well as computers with Mac OS X, Windows, Safari , Chrome, and Firefox.

There are some limits to the program which can be addressed with a premium account for $45 a year or $5 a month. Evernote can be downloaded from http://www.evernote.com and for info comparing the free account verses the premium account, see http://www.review sync.com/evernote-pricing.html. The iOS & Android versions can be found in their respective Apps Store.

Media Sharing & Devices

by Jerry Grommes
Editor, Sandwich Computer Users Group, IL

As many of you know I feel strongly that my media, whether it's pictures, videos, music, recorded TV, etc., should be available to me on whatever device I own and not just tied to a computer, CD/DVD player or a DVR. With the increasing number of different kinds devices coming to market, each with its own niche, I have finally resolved myself to the conclusion that there is not going to be a one size fits all anywhere in the near future.

About three weeks ago Bob Dell sent me a quote from the Tribune's business section (Visions of technology's future):"Five years from now," says Nate Williams, Motorola Mobility's senior director, head of product marketing for the Converged Experiences group, "you're going to see a dramatic increase in the number of connected devices. The number is about five in the average home now is a tablet, gaming console, PC and it's going to 15 to 20. You're going to have a home with more technology and, hopefully, it will be managed in a way that's a lot more efficient." I thought that over a bit and started counting. I have eight, which puts me a little above average but less than half of where they are predicting us to be at in the next five years.

Where are you at? Start counting, (Desktop PC, Notebook, Digital Camera, MP3 player, Smart phone, Smart TV, Tablet) that's 7, so you can see, they are adding up fast. Do they all share your media? The answer is yes, but not easily. In my opinion the industry has a long way to go to make it seamless for end users to have their content available across all devices and platforms.

All this lead in was to get to the point of sharing recorded TV and device #9. Ever since migrating from the Commodore to a PC, I have had a TV tuner card in every one of my PCs and if I want to record TV that's how I do it (record it on my computer). From there I can convert the recording to various formats for different devices or burn to DVD. This worked well until the arrival of digital TV. I have cable and they gradually kept dropping the analog channels till it got to the point where I had to add a DTA (Digital Transport Adapter) to the TV tuner in my computer in order to get most of the basic channels again. This happened about the time that I migrated to Windows 7. Since most versions of Windows 7 include MCE

(Media Center Edition), I decided to try MCE and found it to be an excellent avenue for watching TV in a little window or for recording TV. The programming guide makes it a snap to schedule recordings.

Device #9

So on to device #9. Two weeks ago I was surfing the channels and found a program that I wanted to record to watch later, problem was it was a High Definition channel which is not broadcast on an alternative digital channel thus I could not record it. Comcast seems to be doing more of this High Definition-only thing lately (not because you get a better viewing experience but rather they can rent you more HD boxes). While watching the show I couldn't record, I grabbed my tablet and started searching for a solution for recording HD on my computer. In a few clicks I was at the Hauppauge web site reading the specs on the WinTV-DCR-2650, a dual tuner CableCARDÖ receiver for your Windows 7 PC. I then clicked on the "Features" tab which stated:

WinTV-DCR-2650 is just like a cable TV set top box (a "DVR" box) in that it can be used to watch and record TV from digital cable. There are a couple of differences:

WinTV-DCR-2650 needs a PC to work. Currently, only a PC with Windows 7 Media Center is compatible with the WinTV-DCR-2650.

WinTV-DCR-2650 does not have any internal disk storage: it uses your PC for storing recorded TV programs. The nice thing about using your PC for storage is that if you fill up your hard drive with TV programs, you can easily add a new hard drive to your PC.

WinTV-DCR-2650 records in the original transmitted quality. For example, if you record from an HD channel, the recording will be HD.
There is no monthly fee for the WinTV-DCR-2650. Once you buy it, it's yours to use forever. But you still need to sign up for cable TV service, and you will still need to rent a digital cable card from your local cable operator.

After reading the 3rd bullet point, that it could record HD channels, I changed my search to a shopping search and had my order placed before the show I wanted to record was even over. How's that for impulse buying?

As you can see from the Quick Setup Guide instructions, there is not much to the setup and installation, it took approximately a half hour to complete the 1st time through. However, I had to repeat step 4 three additional times before everything was fully functional and that took over three hours because after every call I was instructed to wait 45 minutes or more before all the channels would be available. Overall, approximately four hours from out-of-the-box to watching and recording High Definition TV on my computer.

Installation instructions for the WinTV-DCR-2650
Step 1. Run the Windows Digital Cable Advisor to make sure your PC is compatible with the WinTV-DCR-2650.
Step 2. Plug the WinTV-DCR-2650 into your PC via the USB cable. Connect cable TV. Insert the cable card you received from your cable operator into the back of WinTV-DCR-2650.
Step 3. Run the Windows Media Center TV Tuner setup and select your cable TV operator.
Step 4. Call your cable TV company to activate your cable card and "pair" it to the WinTV-DCR-2650

Four calls

In each of the four calls to Comcast a different support person was on the other end, each was very courteous, spoke very good English and seemed very knowledgeable. In the first call the support person activated the card and told me to wait 45 minutes or more before all the channels would be available. After 45 minutes I had all of the digital channels but only the basic (2, 5, 7, & 9) HD channels.

Second call

In the second call the support person said she would resend the activation to the card and told me to wait 45 minutes or more before all the channels would be available. This netted the same results so I ran the Hauppauge diagnostic program that was included on the installation CD. It reported that the firmware on the CableCard was out-of-date and not supported.

Third call

On the 3rd call I gave the diagnostic information to the support person who put me on hold while he collaborated with another technician. When he returned he stated that he would have to flash the firmware of my CableCard and told me to wait 45 minutes or more before all the channels would be available. He also gave me a different phone number to reach a higher level of support if flashing the card didn't work. After my 45 minute wait I retried and had all digital channels but no HD channels (lost ground). I reran the Hauppauge diagnostic and it reported no errors and said all is well.

Fourth call

The 4th call was to the new number given by the last rep and the support person on the other end had all my information from the previous calls and said she would run some diagnostics on the card from her end, after which she said she would reactivate the card asked me to tell her what lights were flashing while she was doing it. While this was going on she said that if this didn't work she would schedule a service call. By the time we were done talking the reactivating had completed and I had all channels (including the HD Channels) that I subscribe to and I didn't have to wait for 45 minutes.

All Channels

I am very pleased with the Hauppauge WinTV-DCR-2650 picture quality; it is very good and since I was already using MCE there was no learning curve. I can receive every channel on my computer that I can get from the Comcast HD Box except On Demand and Pay Per View. With two tuners built-in you can watch one show while recording another. As for media sharing I give it a thumbs up because I can now record a HD TV show and use Windows Live Movie Maker to save it to a format that can be viewed on my Android Tablet.

Hauppauge is headquartered in Hauppauge, NY and has been bringing TV to the PC since 1992. The Company is the worldwide leader in developing and manufacturing PC based TV tuners and data broadcast receiver products. Hauppauge's products allow PC users to watch television on their PC screens, videoconference and create both still video images and digital TV recordings. Hauppauge's flagship product, the WinTV, is the leading branded TV tuner card for PCs.

File Recovery Strategies
by Dick Maybach
Brookdale Computer Users' Group, NJ

Using home computers affords many opportunities for errors and malfunctions. You probably have experienced at least one of these mishaps.
- Shortly after emptying the recycle bin, you realize it contained a file you should have restored.
- A CD, CD-ROM, or DVD is scratched and unplayable or unreadable.
- You formatted the memory card for your digital camera with vacation pictures you hadn't yet moved to your PC.
- Your computer won't boot, and you haven't backed up all your files.
- Your hard disk is beginning to report errors, and again it isn't backed up.
- You had a fire, a flood, or a power surge, and your hard disk is dead.

Surprisingly, you can probably recover some and perhaps most of your data in each of these cases, as you will see in this article and the two that follow it: Windows graphical tools, and command-line tools. As will become apparent, by far the best approach is prevention in the form of a good backup regimen, and if you haven't already, reading this series may inspire you to begin one.

Regardless of what happened, the first step is usually the same – turn off the equipment that contains the damaged medium. Don't power it up again until you have collected any equipment and software you need and have developed a good plan. If the plan involves using unfamiliar software, practice the procedures on a test medium until you are comfortable with them.

It's most important that you not write anything to the device from which you hope to recover the files. This implies several things.

- If the device is your system disk (C: for Windows users), you must not install any software before you have recovered the files. Ideally, you shouldn't even reboot from it.
- To recover files from your system disk you must remove the disk and mount it in a different PC (unless you have recovery software installed) or use a Linux live CD.
- When you recover files from a device, you must rewrite them to a different device.
  The general approach depends on the nature of the problem.
- *Complete device failure or physical damage from fire, water, electrical surge, or physical shock* – You can't do anything and neither can your local shop; instead, you must send the device to a specialist. Expect the fees to start at above $1000, and they could be much higher. Reputable firms don't guarantee success, but many charge you only for what they are able to recover.
- *Problems resulting from a gradually failing system disk* – You must either move the drive to a new computer or boot from a live CD (which doesn't use the internal hard drive). Regardless of your approach, your first task is to move all the data from the failing device to a good one. The preferable way to do this is with a program such as gddrescue (discussed in part 3), which is designed to recover as much as possible from a corrupt filesystem.
- *Problems resulting from a gradually failing storage device that is not a system disk* – Since your system disk is fine, you can use your computer to salvage the data. Again, the first step is to move all the data to a good device.
- *A computer that won't boot* – Most likely, your data isn't affected, but you should move all your files to an external device before you try to repair the operating system.
- *Problems resulting from malware or a software malfunction* – If this occurs on a system disk, you must not boot from it, as this would allow the problem software to continue its mischief. Thus, you must use either a live CD or attach the disk to a clean computer. Once you do this, there will be no new damage, which means you can recover files at your leisure.
- *Problems resulting from user errors* – If these occur on a system disk, you should not boot from it until you have recovered the data. This is because each boot causes files to be written, which could overwrite what you are trying to recover. The best time to recover that data is immediately after you delete it, providing you had already installed the recovery software you need. Thus, this case is an exception to the rule that your first step should be to shut down your computer.

Your first decision is whether to attempt the recovery yourself or pay a shop to do it. If the data is very valuable or belongs to a business, strongly consider having a competent professional do the work. Also consider a professional if the medium is failing; here, you have little time, as data losses will continue. Ask what approach they will use, and if their strategy

is different than what I discuss here, they should be able to justify it.

You must next decide whether you will use a tool in your native operating system or a Linux (probably command-line) tool. A strong advantage of working in your native environment is that it reduces the likelihood of serious errors. However, to recover files from a Mac or Microsoft system disk, you will have to remove it and connect it to a separate, healthy computer that has the appropriate recovery software. Rather than opening the healthy computer's system case to install the hard disk in it, consider buying a IDE to USB, a SATA to USB, or a laptop disk to USB adapter (depending on the drive you're working on). (Of course, this isn't necessary if the problem is on a removable medium, such as a memory stick or CD-ROM.) An alternative is to use a Linux live-CD, which runs from a CD-ROM or memory stick without accessing the hard disk at all, except to recover files from it. As a result, you don't have to move the hard disk to another PC. Even die-hard Windows users should consider acquiring and experimenting with a Linux-based maintenance disk, such as Parted Magic, to be ready in case of difficulty. (See my article in the April BCUG Bytes, available at http://www.bcug.com)

Next month we'll look at recovery tools that run under Windows. (I'm not able to test Mac procedures, but a Web search will find graphical recovery tools for the Mac.) The following month, we'll look at Linux command-line tools, two of which also run on both Mac and Microsoft operating systems. To decide between graphical and command-line tools, consider the following.

Graphical tool pros:
- familiar environment and
- intuitive procedures. (You probably don't need a manual.)

Graphical tool cons:
- need to remove the system disk from the PC,
- need a second PC and probably an adapter to work on the system disk, and
- you can work only on native filesystems (FAT and NTFS for Windows).

Command-line tool pros:
- handles a greater range of problems and
- if used with a live-CD, allows working on a system disk in place and on many different filesystems.

Command-line tool cons:
- user needs more expertise and
- if used with a Linux live-CD, the environment is probably unfamiliar.

From this I recommend that if you are familiar only with Windows or the Mac and are recovering files from a removable medium, use graphical tools that are native to your operating system. However, in part three, we'll look at two command-line tools (TestDisk and Photo Rec) that run on both Windows and the Mac as well as on Linux, and both are almost as easy to use as the graphical tools. If you have a system disk problem, use a Linux live-CD (such as Parted Magic), mount the disk in a second PC that has the proper recovery tools, or take the PC with the problem disk to a good shop. Of course, by far the best approach is to use an effective backup program, which lets you avoid this whole mess.

From the May 2012 issue of BUG Bytes*, newsletter of the Brookdale Computer Users' Group, NJ. Courtesy of APCUG.*

POyNT
by George Harding
Tucson Computer Society, AZ

This is a nifty app for your iPhone or Blackberry. It points you to various services or places of business. The choices are Businesses, People, Movies, Restaurants, Gas, Events and Offers.

For Businesses, you can enter a business name, such as "Wendy's" which produces a list of Wendy's restaurants sequenced by distance from your position. The list also includes other entries which include the name Wendy, such as a dentist, a veterinarian and a hospital! But it does show the fast-food restaurants you wanted to find. When you touch one of them, you get location information, including a map and directions.

If you choose People, you can search by name, phone or address. I tried the search by phone, using my phone number and got my name and address, along with directions and a map for location.

For Movies, you can search by theaters nearby, movies, top 10 and genres. You get a list of theaters with the movies currently being shown, times, phone, location and the availability of a trailer.

You can search nearby Restaurants or by cuisine. You get a list of restaurants sequenced by increasing distance from your location, with info about location, phone, map and website.

Searching for Gas or Events gives the same sort of information, in a helpful and easy-to-use format.

I recommend this app highly. It's fun to use and very helpful in finding the sort of item you're looking for without having to resort to the Yellow Pages.

www.poynt.com Free

From the April 2012 issue of eJournal*, newsletter of the Tucson Computer Society, AZ.*

Gizmo's Freeware:

How to Use the Keyboard to Move or Resize a Window that is Too Big for the Screen

Did you ever suddenly find yourself with a window that is so large that part of it, including the title bar, is off the screen? For example, maybe somebody sent you an oversized picture taken with one of those many-megapixel cameras. With no title bar visible, you can't move the window with the mouse. But there is an old trick that goes all the way back to Windows 3. It allows you to use the keyboard and a menu called the system or control menu to move or resize a window. Here how you do it: http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/how-use-keyboard-move-or-resize-window-too-big-screen.htm
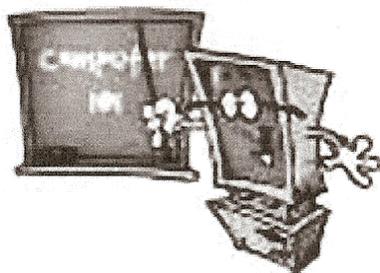
Society News

Art Trimble (our longest serving member), Dan Rothfuss (vice president), and Bob Avery (webmaster), awaiting their dinner at the 30th Anniversary Celebration. We had a great time.

The Lighter Side

Yesterday

Yesterday,
All those backups seemed a waste of pay.
Now my database has gone away.
Oh I believe in yesterday.
Suddenly,
There's not half the files there used to be,
And there's a milestone hanging over me
The system crashed so suddenly.
I pushed something wrong
What it was I could not say.
Now all my data's gone
And I long for yesterday-ay-ay-ay.
Yesterday,
The need for back-ups seemed so far away.
I knew my data was all here to stay,
Now I believe in yesterday.