Next Meeting
Tuesday, January 8

Demonstration of 3D Printing

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Free "Advanced Mobile Care" for Android
by Ira Wilsker

It should be no surprise that smart computing devices are outselling traditional desktop and laptop computers. There is an intensive battle for market share of operating systems for these smart devices, which includes smart phones, tablets, and related devices. The primary combatants for this market share are Google with its Android operating system, Apple with its iOS, and Microsoft with its newly released Windows 8 version for smart devices. While it may appear that Apple and its iOS seems to get the most media coverage, and has a large and very loyal user base, published reports indicate that Google's Android operating is

outselling Apple's product by a wide margin, with Microsoft barely getting an "honorable mention."

As smart devices become more powerful and more widely used, they are encountering many of the same types of software and security issues faced by their older cousins, the PC and laptop. Many of the traditional software and security companies have come to market with versions of their products for smart devices, while countless smaller companies and individuals have also created system utilities for smart devices. With their prolific numbers, and the fact that more of us are using our smart devices for daily transactions, including as an "electronic wallet," it was inevitable that cyber crooks, malware authors, and other miscreants would start to target smart devices of all operating systems. While there are many smart device security utilities that protect against malware, and there are many other system utilities to maintain and improve smart device performance, there are relatively few comprehensive utilities that perform both essential tasks. One well known software publisher, with many millions of loyal PC users, recently introduced just such a product for Android smart devices, IObit's Advanced Mobile Care, which is available as a free 3.1mb download from the Google Play store.

IObit calls its newest free product a, "...security and optimization app ... (that) gives Android users an excellent way to protect their smartphones from Android security and performance problems." Using a build of its respected anti-malware engine of PC fame, IObit provides significant protection from the malware targeting the Android platform with dramatically increasing frequency. Also integrated into the new Advanced Mobile Care is an Android optimized build of its wildly successful and popular Advanced System Care (over 150 million downloads of the PC version). This feature provides for a comprehensive system tune-up of the smart device, including memory recovery (cleaning), deletion of obsolete cache files, and the removal of useless junk files. By performing these system maintenance tasks, Android speed and performance may be improved, while minimizing the content of the limited storage capacity of the device.

In addition to protecting an Android device from malware and improving general system performance, Advanced Mobile Care also offers Android users additional functionality and features. In terms of usability, malware detection and removal, junk file cleaning and system improvement functions are all started with a "One Tap Scan." which commences the complete scanning and cleaning process. Many people have become avid game players on their Android devices; this IObit product includes "Game Speeder" which serves as a game launcher that can improve the performance and speed of the games.

Compared to PCs and laptops, most Android devices have much less built-in storage that can hold the apps and operating system which can restrict the number and size of apps that could be on the Android device at any time. Almost all Android devices can optionally utilize some form of additional storage, typically some variety of SD memory card that can hold many more apps (programs), music, videos, and other data. Coupled with the fact that there are nearly a million apps for the Android, many of which are free, Android users often download more apps than they can likely use. To better meet the needs of Android users, Advanced Mobile Care includes an App Manager which can display all of the apps on the device sorted by frequency of use, name, or size. The App Manager can also be used to uninstall unwanted apps as well as free up internal storage by moving apps to the SD card, freeing up the integral memory and storage for other functions.

One common complaint in the smart phone and tablet blogs, regardless of operating system, is limited battery life. On more than one occasion, my smart phone shut down unexpectedly when the battery power dropped below a predetermined level. I was initially unaware that many of the apps that I had loaded were continuously running (Facebook, Gmail, Groupon, and others) and were resource hogs, all of which combined to drain the battery faster than I had expected. Advanced Mobile Care offers a "Battery Saver" utility that offers three user selected battery management modes in order for the user to better control battery usage. With the Battery Saver integrated with a Task Killer, the user can easily decide which apps to kill. By stopping unnecessary apps from running, battery power is conserved, and memory

is freed, leading to improved performance and longer battery life. The Battery Saver displays the projected remaining battery life with different combinations of running apps, as well as the remaining time to recharge the battery during the charge cycle.

Because of their inherent portability, smart devices seem to be borrowed by others, and sometimes "misplaced" (lost or stolen). Many of us carry a large quantity of personal information on our smart devices which could be purloined by others in possession of our devices. Our personal information may be valuable to others, especially to identity thieves who may make illicit use of our sensitive data. Advanced Mobile Care includes a password protected "Privacy Locker" which enables the user to hide and secure sensitive information, as well as personal photos, family videos, and other content from those whom we do not want to share that information.

Advanced Mobile Care, available for free from the Google Play store, will run on almost all contemporary Android devices (smart phones and tablets) including Android 2.2 (Froyo), 2.3 (Gingerbread), 3.x (Honey-comb, both versions), and Android 4 (Ice Cream Sandwich and Jelly Bean). I downloaded and installed Android Mobile Care on my Android 4.04 smart phone, and it seems to run well doing precisely as advertised. The newly released version 1.0 is very well done and seems to run smoothly on my smart phone. This product would be a worthwhile download for any compatible Android device.

Websites:

http://www.iobit.com/advanced-mobile-care.php
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.iobit.mobilecare

Need a Throwaway Email Address?
by Dan Butler

I t's frustrating.
You find a website with some information you really want but they want your email address first. You already receive lots of email and do not really know. A client asked me about this recently.

Here are a few ideas I shared.

First, when a web site asks for your email don't just enter a random address. You may be signing someone else up to receive the email. Instead try using an Internet test address.

Any email addressed to @example.com will never be delivered. So you can try entering a@example.com into the box. Depending on the email provider behind the box this sometimes works. You can put anything you want in front of the @. I choose "a" to save typing. Some providers notice the example.com address and ask you for a valid address.

Another option if you are using Gmail is Plus Addressing. Lets say your email is bdekolta@gmail .com. With plus addressing you just add a "+" followed by anything you like. So when you signed up for TNPC you could be bdekolta+tnpc@gmail.com. The mail still comes to your inbox. Later you can easily set a filter on the email coming to that address. You can have as many "+" addresses as you like.

I know the Plus Addressing works with Gmail. Not sure how other providers handle it. I know some use a "-" addressing. Just check with your email provider. This is much easier than changing addresses and providers. This is a low tech, low hassle way to take quick control of your email.

If you know how this works with other email providers or have other ideas please comment at the blog:

http://www.TNPCnewsletter.com/blog/

User-Hostile and Out-Sourced Fibbing

by Edith Lank

Message on the screen this morning from AVG said security program is expiring, click BUY NOW. Took precautions (Practice Safe Computing). Clicked. No problem sending payment, extremely user-friendly.

Then it turned extremely user-hostile while activating, registering, downloading – whatever was supposed to happen next. I phoned a cordial woman in India, whom I could actually understand (since this impaired hearing business, the slightest accent usually throws me, can't listen to the BBC at all these days).

She said she'd transfer me to "a technician" and a question appeared on my screen – could he(?) take control of my computer?

"Yes, certainly!" At that point I would have been happy to give it to him altogether.

"Okay," he typed. "I will do."

And he did. Talk about a weird sensation! – to sit here and watch my cursor dancing around the screen all by itself, hitting the right buttons, efficiently downloading, installing, giving the right answer to all those questions. From half a world away it even told a lie for me, without any hesitation clicking that I had carefully read and accepted the Legal Agreement and Terms of Service.

Intercontinental lying – what a world we live in!

Edith Lank is a Rochester based real estate columnist and blogger. Her blog can be found at: www.86andholding.blogzpot.com/

Is a Minimized Windows Safe?

Q. Let's say I am composing a message to you when I think of something I need to check, before I forget. I minimize my email to the Taskbar and open a new window. I proceed to do what I need to do, then close that window before pulling my unfinished message to you back up on screen. My question is this: Is leaving the first screen minimized to the Taskbar as secure as the new window I'm visiting? Does it even matter if I do not minimize it, and merely switch to the new screen? You can probably tell that I've become rather paranoid about security and this is just one of the things swirling around in my old gray cells.

A. When it comes to security, there is no difference between a minimized window and one that's open full screen. Both are operating within Windows, so the security protection afforded both is equal. Think of it in terms of turning on your home security system at night. Once it's activated, it doesn't matter whether you're in one room or another, or sitting, or standing, or asleep in a chair. It is the house itself that is protected, no matter what you're doing within the house.

Q. Sometimes when I try to add or edit a Gmail contact, it doesn't show up although I added it to all three Groups that I created. Shouldn't there be an "All Contacts" category? How should I properly add a contact?

A. When you add contacts to Gmail Groups (mailing lists), it's best to add them from your main My Contacts list which serves as the "All" category that you mentioned. The idea is to have one

centralized repository for all contacts. From there you can move any contact into any individual Group.

To add contacts to a Contact Group in the newest version of Gmail, click Mail at the top-left corner of your Gmail page, then choose Contacts. Click to select the contact(s) you want to add. Next, click the Groups button and select the name of the group you would like to add these contacts to, or select Create New to create a new Group.

Here is a link to Gmail's Help Information about Groups (http://bit .ly/RGUmy3) which you might find interesting and informative—perhaps both. (Okay, that might be pushing it.)

Q. Firefox has started blocking pages when I click links from an email or Web page. The message reads "Firefox prevented this page from automatically redirecting to another page." Can you help me get rid of this irritating thing?

A. That's actually a safeguard designed to protect you. You really DO want to know whenever a redirection attempt occurs so you can approve or reject it. Otherwise, your browser could easily be hijacked to a malicious site and without even knowing it, you could think you were on a legitimate site, provide a credit card number or other personal information, and wind up in deep guano.

I definitely do not recommend the following, but if you really want to disable that protection, the wording or path may vary slightly depending on the version of Firefox you're using, but go to Tools > Options > Preferences > Advanced tab. Locate the box next to the text that displays, "Warn me when Web sites try to redirect or reload the page." Remove the check mark, close your Preferences, then hope for the best.

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

Entanglement

A semi-relaxing game that requires you to manipulate tiles to create a Zen-like path, making it as long as possible without connecting it to any walls. A helpful two-minute How-to-Play video is accessible on the right side of the page, under Menu, should you be running low on Zen. The accompanying music is somewhat soothing, right up to the point that it becomes annoying.

http://bit.ly/hVIekc

Rock, Paper, Scissors

The New York Times created this application that demonstrates the concept of Artificial Intelligence by inviting you to play Rock, Paper, Scissors against a computer. In the Novice version you will teach the computer how to mimic human reactions by building up a database of moves that it will analyze statistically to plan its strategy to beat you. It requires a minimum of five games for the computer to start predicting what you will do. If you choose to play the Veteran version, the computer will draw from a database of 200,000 moves in its efforts to defeat you. Trust me: It will defeat you.

http://nyti.ms/bn8zB6

YouTube TestTube

Are you an avid YouTube user? Do you want to test a bunch of really cool upcoming ideas for the world's largest video site? If so, check out TestTube, which is what YouTube folks call an "idea incubator" for features and services currently under development. YouTube is owned by Google, and TestTube is reminiscent of Google Labs. (In Gmail, Labs can be found as a tab under Settings.)

www.youtube.com/testtube

For more information about Mr. Modem's technology-tips eBooks and award-winning weekly computer-help newsletter, featuring his personal answers to your questions by email, visit www.MrModem. com

Look Back Tech

by Greg Skalka
President, Under the Computer Hood User Group, CA

No matter how modern your technology may be, you usually can't escape your past. The introduction of the personal computer 30 years ago started a revolution in how we deal with correspondence, communications, photography and music. This revolution resulted in an evolution of capabilities over three decades, culminating in the Ultrabooks, tablet computers, personal music players and digital and video cameras we have today. In the fast-paced and ever-changing world of computers and consumer electronics, the past, as defined by different features and capabilities, can be as recent as yesterday. And unfortunately, something new and improved usually means something else just became obsolete, sometimes before its time.

Unless you just came out of a 30-year coma, you probably have computer files, media, and devices that are not fully compatible with the latest in computers and electronics. For those of us that have been using computers and technology for even a short time, moving to the next, newest, latest and greatest will involve change. How do we bring along the content we have created and used in the past? How can we continue to use our favorite old devices?

Fortunately, there are a number of devices available to address these issues. They are often called translators, converters, or copiers, but I like to think of them as "look back" devices. They can help us look back to an earlier time, bridge the divide between technologies and bring our content, be it music, photos, video, documents or information, along with us as technology evolves. And boy, does it ever evolve.

Imagine archaeologists stumbling upon an undiscovered ancient library. Despite alphabet and language translation issues, they could probably eventually learn quite a lot about the time period in question, as ancient civilizations typically used information recording technologies we can still easily use today. Assuming they are in good condition, carved stone tablets are still as readable now as they were when carved thousands of years ago. Even the information in paper books preserved from a hundred years ago is still easily accessible. That may not be the case, however, with information stored from only ten or twenty years ago.

Imagine instead opening an unclaimed storage locker that has been closed for 10 to 20 years, and finding it contains lots of important and interesting information. Unfortunately, it is stored on Betamax, VHS, and cassette tapes, LP records, 8 inch, 5.25 inch, and 3.5 inch floppy disks, SmartMedia flash memory cards, and bare Parallel ATA (PATA) hard drives. You might feel the archaeologists have an easier task in obtaining their information. Even if you could come up with functional hardware to read all these old media types, how could you provide the data to someone that wants to access it on an iPad?

Fortunately, there is look back technology available to access and translate a lot of that old media. Although current computers no longer have drives to read removable magnetic disks, and the latest Ultrabooks, Chromebooks, and iPads don't even have optical disc drives, there are a lot of USB external drives available for these older media types. I have not seen (at least recently) any USB external drives for reading 8" or 5.25" floppy disks, so for those you might have to rely on an old working computer. USB external drives are readily available for 3.5" disks, however, and are great when you have older equipment (like electronic test equipment) that can only store to its built-in floppy drive. There are also plenty of USB external optical drives available to read and write CD, DVD, and even Blu-ray discs.

There are a number of options when it comes to getting information off of older computer hard drives. If you don't have a computer that supports the older drive, there are plenty of hard drive external enclosure kits available to interface all sizes of PATA and SATA hard drives to USB. The Apricorn DriveWire Universal Hard Drive Adapter is one of several similar products that can easily connect any size or type of bare hard drive to USB for data transfer. It is great for transferring files you forgot you needed from those old computers that won't boot anymore

or have no removable media in common with your new computer. For bare SATA drives, there are also quick-change docks available to easily access them through USB or eSATA.

A lot of laptops and tablets have slots for reading the removable flash memory cards commonly used in digital cameras, but most can only accommodate SD (Secure Digital) cards. Many of the older or less popular media formats, like CompactFlash or SmartMedia, are not supported in new devices. There are a lot of USB adapters available for almost any memory card format that has ever existed, allowing these cards to be read again. I have one USB media adapter that claims to accommodate 56 different types of memory cards.

Though almost everyone now captures and enjoys audio-visual entertainment through digital means and devices, including digital still and video cameras, personal digital music players, and streaming audio and video, the all-digital era is at most only two decades old. Many of us still have music, pictures and video in an analog format, which makes them more difficult to enjoy in our digitally-oriented world and makes the originals more vulnerable to loss or degradation over time. Fortunately, there are many look back devices available to help bring these analog items into the digital world.

For printed materials like photographic prints, a good flatbed scanner can make excellent digital scans. For less critical material, a hand-held scanner can digitize much quicker with good results. Where the original is a film negative or slide, there are a lot of reasonably priced film and slide scanners available to allow those old memories to be more easily accessed and permanently preserved in digital form. At one end of the spectrum are precision film scanners that make high-resolution scans but require more time to scan. There are also lower-cost film scanners based on digital camera sensor technology that make very fast scans of reasonable quality. These scanners, such as ones made by Wolverine Data, make it possible to convert large collections of slides or negatives to digital files in a reasonable time. There are services available to perform these conversions for you for a fee as well.

For those that have large collections of vinyl audio records, cassette tapes or even 8-tracks, there are devices that can be connected to your computer through USB to digitize from almost any audio source. These devices take in right and left channel audio inputs, and so require that you still have an appropriate and working player available. There are also USB players for vinyl records and for cassette tapes, which allow those media to be played and digitized through your current PC or laptop. These are great when your record or tape collection was preserved, but you no longer have a turntable or cassette player that works. There are also many devices available for digitizing analog video, such as from camcorders or VCRs, but these all rely on you having a working player to provide the analog electrical signals.

The look back devices so far described allow legacy data storage to be accessed by current computers and analog media sources to be digitized. But what do you do when you have legacy hardware, like a parallel port printer or a hand-held GPS receiver with serial port interface, that you still want to use? There are USB to parallel converters, so that you can electrically connect that parallel port printer to your Chromebook. There are also USB to serial converters, which provide me a way to connect my old Magellan hand-held hiking GPS to my laptop (which has no serial port) and download tracks. Computer technology seems to advance much faster than some other electronics, and it seems a waste to have to buy a new GPS simply because your new PC doesn't support the interface it uses.

The last look back application is in telecommunications. Today all computers have either a wired Ethernet connection, a WiFi capability, or both. It was not too long ago, however, that the only way to get on the Internet was through a dial-up connection with a modem. Unfortunately, there are still parts of the rural U.S. where dial-up may be the most reasonable option. Since modems disappeared from new computers many years ago, the best way to connect your Ultrabook to the Internet in these locations may be through an external USB modem.

The problem with advancing technology is that it makes everything obsolete eventually. This means there will be a bright future for these "look back" devices to handle the things we

expect in our current computers at some point. While USB is pretty universal, I don't expect to find a cloud with a USB port on it.

From the October 2012 issue of Drive Light*, newsletter of the Under the Computer Hood User Group, CA. Courtesy of APCUG.*

How to Override Acrobat's Security Block

by Linda Gonse
Editor/Webmaster, Orange County PC Users' Group, CA

It came as a surprise to me that the link I was clicking on in the newsletter's pdf did not open. Nearly all of the newsletter's web addresses have been shortened to make it easier for readers that prefer to type them into a browser.

My next surprise came from the error message (image on right) that popped up. First, I checked my version of Acrobat Pro. It is 10.1.3. I had recently upgraded and prior to the upgrade was able to click on the bit.ly links with no problem. Then, I went online to check what other people were saying and doing about this security block. http:// adobe.ly/ OVYSbAI discovered that they were not all happy with it, but there is a way to make the links work that are from domains that you know and plan to visit. You will need to open Acrobat and go to Edit and to Preferences. In the Preferences dialog box, select Trust Manager in the list on the left side. The dialog box on the right side automatically changes to show you the options available. Click on the button to Change Settings .Find the URL that you want to open from a link. In my case, it was bit.ly. To the right of it were the words Always Block. Click on the domain name and click the Delete button. Then, click OK, and close the program.

I reopened Acrobat and the newsletter. Then, I found a bit.ly link in it and clicked on the link. A message came up telling me that the document was trying to connect to bit.ly and asked if I would allow it. Before I clicked on Allow, I checked the box to "Remember this action for this site for all PDF documents." Then, I clicked Allow. To see the change you made by this action, retrace your steps to the Trust Manager and Change Settings. Look for the URL you wanted to change and you will note that the words to the right of it now say Always Allow. In this box, you could also type in the URL you want to change instead of clicking on a link. I found it easier to have the program add the domain name for me and it was less hassle in the event that I misspelled it.

Acrobat will prevent you from opening links to domains that have been blocked. You can tell Acrobat what sites you want to open from a link in a PDF. Check "remember this action" and press Allow. Check that the words to the right of the domain now say Always Allow.

From the August 2012 issue of nibbles & bits*, newsletter of the Orange County PC Users' Group, CA. Courtesy of APCUG.*

Staying Connected While Working Remotely

Proper tools and processes help organizations overcome stumbling blocks to telecommuting

by Gabe Goldberg

While telework and telecommuting—usually just different terms for the same practice—have been discussed widely for years, rarely have they been practiced successfully. In fact, many mainframe-centric companies have had distributed employees for decades, allowing the best experts to support customers worldwide. Still, some organizations and managers steadfastly resist even considering this job-enhancing flexibility, no matter the benefits to them and their employees.

Why? Two main reasons emerge:

1. Explicit or implicit reliance on kindergarten-style management that values "all in their places with bright shiny faces" above matching work environment to real-world requirements and preferences

2. A lack of understanding of modern mainframe connection technologies

Of course, for telework to work, it requires attitudinal and technical accommodation. The larger challenges are sometimes softer issues—cultural and mental—rather than technology problems. Starting with organizational issues, consider the following tips to address cultural and technical stumbling blocks:

Cultural

• Don't improvise. Establish consistent long-term telework policies covering technology and personnel issues in terms of facilities/services provided, costs subsidized, connectivity, security, work hours, office workflow, cross-training and task backup, home/office days balance, salaries, evaluations, promotions, etc.

• Plan and manage telework implementation. For inspiration, read case studies of successful projects.

Integrate telework with disaster and business-continuity procedures. Periodically assess progress and problems from worker/manager viewpoints.

• Educate employees, clients/customers, suppliers on telework plans and goals. Internally, be clear and objective about who's eligible. Support those not eligible, and don't create disparities between in-office and remote staff.

• Host occasional all-hands team or company-wide virtual meetings, allowing unstructured Q&A with managers/executives, to ensure that everyone has the same correct information. An added benefit is people getting to know colleagues they may never meet or even work with directly.

• Avoid implicit/explicit deprecation of invisible employees. Evaluate results and productivity rather than face time.

• Ensure top-to-bottom compliance with mandated telework procedures. Don't let unfounded claims of team/project uniqueness undermine telework benefits and avoid "studying" telework to death.

• Creatively, fairly and consistently subsidize work-related employee home-office expenses. These might include added or enhanced Internet connectivity, an extra telephone line or added services.

• Use telework to recruit best-qualified staff without requiring relocation, and to retain key employees who are moving.

• Develop new and flexible management skills to evaluate objectives and output, rather than employee visibility.

• Compensate for distance by formalizing critical but casual hallway and water cooler communication channels.

• Be a good corporate citizen by supporting a greener workforce. In urban areas, increased telework improves traffic and reduces demands on infrastructure, and therefore government spending.

Technical

• Provide enterprise-quality instant messaging, audio and video teleconferencing, integrated home/office telephone, and email services.

• Use reliable VPN allowing split tunneling, so local network devices, such as printers and file servers, are available while remotely connected.

• Provide network/mainframe session manager to simplify employee logon and reduce impact of connection interruptions. A System z remote computing benefit, of course, is 3270 data stream efficiency.

• Within practical limits, enable BYOD—bring your own device—for maximum employee productivity and flexibility.

• Understand the promise and reality of cloud computing. Evaluate it for linking office and remote staff/resources, enforcing security/backup policies, reducing employee hosted/maintained resources, etc.

For employees looking to work remotely, consider these tips as well:

Technical/Logistical

• Craft supportive workspace with ergonomic furniture, etc. Don't suffer a permanent "temporary" or just good-enough setup.

• Use large or multiple monitors to enhance productivity, perhaps including a docking station or full-size monitor connected to a laptop.

• Create professional voicemail greetings on home and mobile phones.

• Use robust communication/connectivity. A second broadband service will most likely cost less than commuting, and—even if rarely used—it prevents you from being unavailable at critical moments. Such incidents frequently cause peers or managers to grumble about telecommuting.

• Beware using bleeding-edge technology. Home office operation is mission-critical for you and your employer, so it isn't appropriate for experimentation. Consider using a second computer for testing/ experimentation.

• Be secure by separating work from personal computing, running and updating quality anti-malware tools, and using appropriate encryption. Follow company computing policies, and don't let others use your work computer.

• Be reliable by using company backup tools supplemented by on-site procedures and offsite media.

• Have facility for sending and receiving files—encrypted, of course—that are too large to transmit via email. Examples include YouSendIt or Dropbox.

Mental/Attitudinal

• "Go to work," in whatever way works for you. Shaved/coiffed or not, dressed for success or in pajamas, have your mind 100-percent work-engaged and focused. Resist distractions such as personal email and general news updates. Emphasize to family and friends that working at home does not mean "at leisure."

• Set limits. Working from home doesn't mean being available 24/7. Still, exploit it when inspiration strikes. Highlight how home access allows quick response to critical situations, and working when you might otherwise have taken sick days.

• Above all, don't be invisible, inaccessible or mysterious. Accommodate time-zone issues and publicize predictable work hours with a regular lunch break. Let colleagues know about absences, and use informative "out-of-office" messages for email, instant messaging and telephone.

• Be flexible about short-notice requirements for office visits.

• Use connectivity to monitor system alerts and check for problems—perhaps on Sunday nights, checking for system misadventures that would make Monday morning a catastrophe.

• Keep your manager informed about projects, status, plans, needs and concerns—especially if your company has few teleworkers. Establish and revisit productivity measures.

• Learn colleagues' and managers' communications preferences and proactively provide information. Send good news as well as gotchas; avoid surprises. Share information, articles, links, pointers, thoughts and feedback. Engage the team by participating in meetings and discussions; emphasize your availability for voice/video teleconferencing. Take leadership opportunities.

• Stay on good terms with the company help desk and tech/network support staff. Make their lives easier by sharing responsibility for working technology, reporting problems clearly, and assisting in problem resolution.

• Seek occasional face-to-face team encounters and gatherings, especially when new people join. Meeting in person, dining and socializing greatly facilitate collaboration. Understand company/team culture and, of course, politics.

• Anticipate isolation and potential loneliness. Develop professional online and neighbor-hood/community contacts. Remember that at work, online and offline, you're not really alone.

• If appropriate, log your activities. No matter how productive you are, without seeing you every day, colleagues and managers might forget your contributions. You might even forget them, so a log will facilitate progress/status reports and be useful at reviews.

• Remain current, valuable and employable through continuing education, which is often available online.

• For health and sanity, walk around a bit every hour or two; stay well hydrated.

Working Together

In addition to obvious employer savings, such as reduced office /power/heating/cooling expenses, federal and state tax breaks are sometimes available. Several organizations can help with planning, logistical and financial information for teleworkers, managers and organizations. One such program, Telework!VA, an initiative of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, assists companies in that state.

Ultimately, it's best to structure telework as a partnership benefiting workforce and employer. Success comes from joint objective analysis of personalities and work requirements.

Gabe Goldberg has developed, worked with and written about technology for decades. This article originally appeared on the destinationz.org website. Courtesy of APCUG.

The Tip Corner
by Bill Sheff
Lehigh Valley Computer Group, PA

If you notice that your laptop is starting to run sluggishly and pages load slower, along with other general slowness it could be the battery. So before you run out and replace your laptop battery try this trick first.

First, charge your laptop's battery all the way to 100%. After being fully charged, unplug it and let the battery drain. Using the laptop during this period will help it drain more quickly. Once you see that the battery is almost empty, save your work and close any open pages. Then let the laptop shut itself off. Let the dead battery sit for about 5 or 6 hours, or overnight. This will help eliminate any leftover charge the battery may have, and lets the battery start over from zero. After you've let your laptop sit, plug it back in and let it charge all the way to 100% before using it again. This can extend battery life and possibly postpone purchasing a new battery Energy Consumption Since we started with the battery lets continue with some energy consumption hints for both laptops and PCs.

Conserving laptop battery power or simply managing the energy consumption of any PC can easily be accomplished by making adjustments in Windows Power Options. To access the Power Options you can use Run and type in powercfg.cpt. However in Vista and Win7 run can be skipped by just typing in power options in the Start search. In the Power Options dialog box, the three choices are; Balanced, Power saver, and High performance.

Power saver offers the most conservative use of energy; Balanced combines the Power saver plan and High performance. High performance is the gas guzzler of the three. Other settings options are available at the left. Clicking the Change plan settings link opens the Edit Plan Settings dialog box for the selected plan. There, settings can be tweaked to provide the desired mix of effectiveness and efficiency.

In Power Options, you can also control what happens when the lid on a laptop is closed. Just click the Choose what closing the lid does link.

Settings can be individually adjusted for when the laptop is running on battery, or for when it's plugged in. The choices are Do nothing, Sleep, Hibernate, or Shut down. (We discussed these choices in our July 2012 Tip Column). Clicking the 'Change settings that are currently unavailable' link offers the opportunity to change what happens when the computer wakes up.

It is also possible to make more advanced power settings. Be a little cautious here since it is for the more advanced user. Any changes made, can be undone by clicking the Restore default settings for this plan link.

What does a smart phone replace?

Since tablets are now appearing like rabbits in a hutch, ready to replace laptops and smart phones with a plethora of apps and lots of battery life, let's take a nostalgic look back at the many things smart phones have replaced.

- MP3 Players - When was the last time you carried a digital music player that couldn't do a dozen other things, too?
- Portable Game Consoles – Nintendo 3DS and DS as well as the Sony PSP are still selling, but these portable game gadgets seem like relics from an era when people used cell phones strictly to make and receive calls. Today's smartphone, of course, is a gaming juggernaut: App stores for Apple and Android handsets offer tens of thousands of games.
- Point-and-Shoot Cameras - The pictures in your smartphone are positioned to match or surpass the photographic prowess of the point-and-shoot cameras.
- Personal Video Players - Remember the lineup of portable media players? This capability has also migrated to the jack-of-all-trades smartphone.
- Voice Recorders - "Note to self: Buy jacket with extra pockets to hold voice recorder, PDA, cell phone..." That's a voice memo from a digital recorder, circa 2001. Okay, not really--but the point is that stand-alone voice recorders were yet another digital device to carry around. No wonder they've gone the way of the PDA (see below). Some dirt-cheap recorders still persist, but a smartphone with an app like the free RecForge Free (for Android) or the $2 Voice Record (for iPhone) is the sensible choice for any pocket challenged gadget lover.
- Portable GPS Navigation Devices - Why buy a separate GPS device for your car when your smartphone can perform the same tasks? Portable navigation hardware from major GPS players such as Garmin, Magellan, and TomTom are have grown more powerful and more affordable, but GPS-enabled smartphones deliver similar functionality. Interestingly, GPS vendors may be contributing to the demise of their portable devices by offering apps like Garmin's StreetPilot, which provides turn-by-turn directions for smartphone users. Hey, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.
- Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) - A now-classic PalmPilot PDA. It manages your contacts! It has a todo list! It tracks expenses! Yes, the PDA was a handy contrivance back in the day when a 25-pound desktop PC and a 50-pound CRT monitor seemed welded to every workstation. But as cellphones began to acquire PDA capabilities in 2001, it became obvious that the phoneless digital assistant's days were numbered. Today, the term "PDA" sounds as anachronistic as "Pocket PC." Then again, today's smartphones are pocket PCs, aren't they?
- Wristwatch - Is a wristwatch a necessity or a fashion accessory? The smartphone has become the 21st Century pocket watch, while the wristwatch has become, well, your father's timepiece. This may change, since new tech-savvy watchmakers have now put the time on the wristband. But the truth is the smart phone gives great time, and dates.
- Paper Maps - When's the last time you bought a paper map? Do you still use them? A smartphone devotee may unfold a map every now and then, but only as a navigational tool of last resort. Mobile map apps from Google, MapQuest, and Bing provide directions, satellite images, and search tools that paper can't match. But it's wise to keep a paper map on hand as a backup, especially if you're driving in an area where wireless signals are weak. And GPS mapping tools have been known to give bad directions every once in a while.
- 411 Directory Assistance - Google Mobile's Voice Search. A News-paper article once lamented the lost art of the phone call, but what about the 411 call? A savvy smartphone user is more likely to access free online tools such as Google's voice search than to make a traditional directory-assistance call. But old habits die hard, however.

According to Snopes.com from October 2010, U.S. consumers were still placing about 6 billion calls to 411 services per year, even though phone companies had switched to charging $1 or more per call. Nevertheless, the directory assistance of the future seems likely to be automated, online, and (maybe) free. And the prologue: All of this will be included in the tablets coming out today. Will we have to widen our pockets or start carrying man-purses?

But one more thing you might want to carry with your smart phone. A spare battery. I have just finished testing how long my extra battery lasts since last charging. Well, it has been over a two weeks now and the battery is still over 60% charged.

So if you listen to a lot of music on your smart phone, it might not be a bad idea to have a charged battery in your pocket just in case. And yes they are very cheap on ebay.com. Play a lot of music, make a lot of calls and then switch. A really good assist when you are on the road and can't plug in to a charger.

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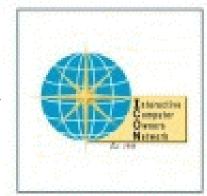
Maps, Maps, and More Maps

by Mary Stewart
ICON Computer Users Group, MO

Google Maps is an aide to locating and pinpointing places our ancestors lived. It is another helpful tool to unraveling our past.

For more help in locating our ancestors, or if you just like maps, try The David Rumsey Map Collection. This collection contains more than 150,000 maps. The collection focuses on rare 18th and 19th century maps of North and South America, although it also has maps of the World, Asia, Africa, Europe, and Oceania. The collection includes atlases, wall maps, globes, school geographies, pocket maps, books of exploration, maritime charts, and a variety of cartographic materials including pocket, wall, children's, and manuscript maps. Items range in date from about 1700 to 1950s.

There are now over 33,000 items online, with new additions added regularly. The site is free and open to the public. Here viewers have access not only to high resolution images of maps that are extensively cataloged, but also to a variety of tools that allow to users to compare, analyze, and view items in new and experimental ways.

The website is http://www.davidrumsey.com/about

From the October 2012 issue of The ICON Newsletter*. Courtesy of APCUG.*

The Desktop is Dead. Long Live the Desktop!

by Bob Rankin

It's true that mobile computing devices are gaining market share at the expense of deskbound PCs. But the number of PCs sold per year has remained remarkably stable. (See the bottom, dark blue bar in this IDC Research chart. There is steady demand for PCs, and it's unlikely to go away. Here are five reasons why desktop PCs will not die:

Ergonomics:

Tablets and smartphones literally cause pains in the neck when used for extended periods. They're harder to use for typing than a desktop with an expansive keyboard. Their displays are smaller than those of typical desktop PCs. Fine cursor control is difficult or impossible on tablets and smartphones. When faced with a choice between mobility and comfort, mobility often wins. But when people don't need mobility, they usually choose comfort over saving space.

Compute Power and Storage:

Desktop PCs can accommodate faster, more powerful processors than mobile devices, and can control more peripherals simultaneously. They are almost infinitely expandable. If you need several terabytes of storage in a PC or Mac desktop, it's not a problem. Tablets and smartphones can't even come close, in either raw power or storage capability.

Work habits:

When you really need to buckle down and crank out work, a desktop PC helps you get into the groove. It stays in a specific space called a "workspace" at home or office; just going there

and sitting down at your "workstation" helps put you in a productive frame of mind. Conversely, when it's time for a break you can escape your immobile desktop PC easily. You needn't take time to pack up it and its cables, and you don't have to lug it around while you're not using it.

One of the must-haves in my computing environment is dual-screen capability. Mobile devices are designed to be small and portable. So you're never going to replicate a dual 24-inch monitor setup on a smartphone or tablet. Once you've had the experience (and productivity boost) of working on dual screens, you'll find a single monitor setup (even with one large screen) very restrictive. I typically work with a web browser on one screen, and a word processor or spreadsheet on the other. Programmers benefit from having source code one monitor and the actual running program on the other.

Expandability/Repairability:

If your desktop PC needs more RAM, you can open the case and pop it in. If you've outgrown your hard drive, you can swap in a larger one or just add a second one. Desktop computers use mostly commodity (off the shelf) parts, so if one component fails, you can find replacement parts and fix it yourself—usually with just a screwdriver. Hard drives, RAM memory, video cards, power supplies, monitors, the CPU and even the motherboard can be replaced without too much hassle. You can even use a different brand if you like.

But mobile devices such as your iPhone, iPad, or Android tablet are sealed up tight. You can't replace or upgrade the SSD hard drive in your iPad. If the screen cracks on your smartphone or tablet, you can't just buy a new one. If any component breaks or fails, you'll have to send it away for repairs, which may be more expensive than buying a new one.

Finally, consider external peripherals. Try connecting a scanner, or an external hard drive to your mobile device. What about a second monitor? Where are the USB ports? Heck, it's a hassle just to print something from a mobile phone or tablet.

Cost:

Miniaturization is always more expensive. You will never see a tablet that costs as little as a PC of comparable capabilities. And as I mentioned before, getting a PC serviced is cheaper than comparable repair of a tablet, or even a smartphone.

I know I promised five reasons, but it's always good to exceed expectations right? So here's one more I thought of while putting together my thoughts on this topic.

Security:

Have you noticed how many news reports of massive data losses involve laptops, portable hard drives, and other mobile devices? Public WiFi is a security risk that most users don't even understand. And it's much easier to lose a smartphone than a desktop PC. Many employers restrict the loading of data onto mobile devices, and constantly struggle with network-connected mobile security risks.

Desktop PCs still have an important role in both home and business environments, and I just can't see that changing for many years to come. For many, a good laptop is the ideal compromise between mobility and the advantages of a desktop PC. Of course, nothing prevents you from owning a desktop PC, a laptop, a tablet, and a smartphone—except your budget.

Five Common WiFi Security Mistakes
by Bob Rankin

WiFi networking is convenient and liberating, and essential if you have a laptop or tablet. But if you aren't careful, using wireless Internet can leave you open to hackers and unauthorized moochers of your Internet service. Here are five of the biggest mistakes that people make with WiFi, and how to avoid them. Read on!

Is Your WiFi Wide Open?

Several years ago, I got a new high-speed Internet service at my home. And then something curious happened. Cars were stopping in front my house, and staying for 10 or 15 minutes.

There's no reason for anyone to stop there, so my spider sense began to tingle. After checking my wireless router, I found that Verizon had left it wide open. Without a WiFi password, anyone could connect! I locked it down with an encryption password, and the daily stream of cars stopped.

Mistake #1:

Failing to enable encryption on your WiFi network lets anyone within range of your wireless router join your network. If file and printer sharing are also enabled, random passersby may be able to sift through everything on every computer on your home or office network. Unencrypted WiFi also allows eavesdropping on your Internet traffic even if the snoop is not connected to your network. Data passing between a computer and a wireless router is broadcast in all directions as far as several hundred feet.

Moochers on unsecured WiFi networks may slow the traffic of authorized users, or even download illegally while leaving the network's owner with the legal consequences. For these reasons, it's vital to set up your wireless network to use one of the encryption methods built into all wireless routers.

Mistake #2:

Weak encryption keys (passwords) are a related mistake. Strong encryption is of no use if a hacker can obtain your password by brute

While you're locking down your WiFi signal, don't make the mistake of choosing WEP, the oldest and weakest encryption method. It can be cracked in about two minutes using software easily found online. Unfortunately, WEP is often the first option on a router's list of available encryption methods, so don't be lazy and choose it for that reason. Use WPA2 encryption with the Personal (PSK) option, for the best protection.

(See my related article *Is Your Wireless Router REALLY Secure?* to learn how a couple in Minnesota almost got framed for harassment, trafficking in child porn, and threatening the Vice President—all because they used WEP encryption on their wireless router.)

Mistake #3:

Weak encryption keys (passwords) are a related mistake. Strong encryption is of no use if a hacker can obtain your password by brute force attempts or by guessing it. Some wireless routers come with a default (factory set) password like "admin" or "password". And sometimes, internet service providers will set your WiFi password to your home phone number. Passwords like these are trivial for even the most clueless hackers to guess.

Strong passwords should be at least 12 characters long and include a mixture of upper/lower case letters, digits, and special characters. For example, the password "M@ry Had a L1ttl3 L4mb" is a much better choice than "123456" or "qwerty." You needn't worry about entering this password over and over. Typically, you'll only need the WiFi password when setting up a new device such as a laptop, tablet, smartphone, or wireless printer. (See *Hey, Is This Your Password?* to find out if your password is one of the 25 most common and easily guessed.)

Mistake #4:

Disabling the firewall built into most modern routers in hope of getting faster Internet is a fourth mistake. Firewalls keep unauthorized outsiders from getting into your network. They do not appreciably slow your Internet connection. Do not disable your router's firewall. (See *Do I Really Need a Firewall?* to learn more about firewalls.)

Mistake #5:

Relying on stealth alone to escape hackers' attention is a mistake that some people make. Some people think that they can get away without encryption or a password on their WiFi, just by hiding their WiFi router's SSID. Yes, most routers have a setting to disable the broadcasting of the router's SSID (name) so that other WiFi users within range won't "see" it on the list of available wireless connections.

Disabling the SSID isn't a bad idea. It will make your WiFi signal invisible to most casual passers-by. But the SSID is included with many kinds of Internet traffic, so a hacker with free "sniffer" software can intercept and discover your router's SSID.

Similarly, using MAC address filtering to allow only specific devices to connect to your network isn't a reliable method either. MAC addresses are easily spoofed and, like SSIDs, are embedded in Internet traffic that can be intercepted. MAC address filtering is a good supplementary security precaution, but do not rely on it alone.

If you want some additional tips on wireless security, or information about how to login to your router to change security settings, see my *Wireless Network Security Checklist.*

Bob Rankin is a translator for the technology impaired—a writer and computer programmer who enjoys exploring the Internet and explaining technology in plain English. Bob is also publisher of Internet TOURBUS, author of several computer books, and creator of the Lowfat Linux tutorial. He can be found at askbobrankin.com

Society News
Help's Half Hour Notes
by Jan Rothfuss
Led by Carl Schmidtmann

Q. A question about Word 2003. On the tool bar there is a right, center and left but the center is no longer appearing. Justify seems to be there.
A. It may be a change that is possible through the tools menu.
Q. After downloading Flash, it also downloaded McAfee. How come?
A. Sometimes you have to be sure to read the wizard window to make sure that you do not authorize anything in addition to what you want.
Q. There was an item in today's newspaper saying that apps are used to harvest marketing information.
A. Yes, even though they originate with honest intentions, it seems that they evolve into security risks.

Carl described working on bringing up the new supercomputer at the University of Rochester, its size and capabilities.

The Lighter Side

Wife texts husband on a cold winter's morning:
"Windows frozen."
Husband texts back:
"pour some lukewarm water over it."
Wife texts back:
"computer completely messed up now."