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Next Meeting
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Picnic!

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More Sources of Free and Deeply Discounted Software and Apps

by Ira Wilsker

As happens a few times each year, earlier today I was the guest speaker for the local computer club. Before my presentation, one of the leaders of the computer club was answering some questions from a few of those present, and his answers led to one of the several websites that I visit daily to find the latest deals in software. The website that he

finished with, and the same website that I started with, was Ashraf"s ShareWareOnSale.com.

Old time personal computer users, even going back to the TRS-80, VIC 20, and Commodore 64 days, may recognize the terms "shareware" to mean software that was intended by its authors to be free copied and "shared" with others. The old, now long defunct, Commodore Computer Club had cartons full of 5.25" floppy disks, each containing a particular shareware program, which we busily copied during the meetings. In the early days of the local PC club, which is still bustling, the software library containing thousands of shareware floppies was the most popular attraction of the club. Members could copy whatever they wanted, or purchase copies already on floppies for a nominal fee. When the earliest CDs came on the market, we started trading CDs, as one CD could hold the contents of hundreds of the old floppies, and entire software libraries could be burned onto a single CD. Getting a new CD every few months with the latest updates and new software was the highlight of many of the club meetings. That is where and when the concept of "shareware" blossomed. While shareware still exists, it is no longer traded as it was in the past, because with the universal spread of the internet there is an abundance of software available for free download from countless online sources.

While its name may be slightly misleading, one of the first emails that I open every morning is from ShareWareOnSale.com. I choose to get the once daily email from them, and then check the website if any of their offerings are of interest to me. Rather than the classical shareware readily available elsewhere, ShareWareOnSale.com offers legitimate, complete, fully functional, licensed copies of commercial (paid) software either for free, or at a deeply discounted price. The apparent marketing concept behind this is that the free versions of the paid software often does not allow any updates or upgrades (with some notable exceptions), and often offered adjacent to the free version is the fully supported and upgradeable versions of the paid software at deeply discounted prices. By downloading and using the free version, the publisher hopes that the user will like it and eventually pay the fee for the upgradeable version of the same software.

The offerings at ShareWareOnSale.com are dynamic, in that they are frequently changing, as the software offered is only available for a limited time, and other titles take their place on the listings. ShareWare OnSale.com offers software for Windows (7, 8.1, and 10), and Mac computers. A companion website, HungryFor Apps.com offers similar deals on apps for Android, iOS phones, iPads, Windows, and Mac powered devices. As I type this, the leading offers on ShareWare OnSale.com for Windows PCs include a comprehensive encryption utility, CyberSafe Top Secret Ultimate, which retails for $95.90 for free without any future upgrades, or the exact same software with a lifetime license including free upgrades at a 75% discount, or $23.97. A very popular and competent comprehensive PC cleaner and management utility that may significantly improve PC performance, Wise Cleaner 365 PRO is available as a free download, or the same software is available with a lifetime license for three PCs, including all future updates and upgrades at a 70% discount off the direct sales price of $76, or $22.80, after the discount. A 6 month license, including all updates and upgrades for Avast Internet Security 2015, normally $19.99 is available for free; it is obvious that Avast hopes that the user likes the program, and will renew the license at the then offered price. A one year license, including all updates and upgrades for the AVG AntiVirus 2015, normally $39.95, is available for free for a limited time. A few dozen other Windows programs, including system optimizers, photo editors, instructional e-books and training lessons, media utilities, and other types of Windows software are also listed for free or deeply discounted. People interested in receiving a once a day "no spam" email listing the latest offering can sign up on the website for the service.

The companion site, which coordinates its offerings with ShareWareOnSale.com is the "app" site offering apps for iPhone, iPad, Android devices, Windows 8.1, and Windows 10 apps

is HungryForApps.com. As the sister site, these apps are normally paid apps, but are offered for a limited time for free or deeply discounted. The offered Android apps are all available for direct download and installation from the reputable sources such as the Google Play Store or the Amazon Android App Store. At any given time, hundreds of Android apps are available, with the listings available sorted by price, store (Amazon or Google), quality ratings (1 to 5 stars), and category, with "ALL" showing everything also being an option. The "category" menu is comprehensive, with user selectable listings of Games, "Books & Comics & Reference," Business, Entertainment, Finance, Kids & Education, "Medical & Health & Fitness & Cooking," News & Magazines, Shopping & Real Estate, Sports, Tools & Utilities, Travel & Navigation, Weather, and several other categories. As I type this, 540 normally "paid" android apps are available for free, with hundreds more deeply discounted. An identical menu is available for apps for the iPhone, iPad, and the newer versions of Windows that utilize apps. A once daily email subscription is available where the user can choose any one or any combination of operating systems, and receive an email with the latest offerings.

While ShareWareOnSale.com and HungryForApps.com are among the most comprehensive of the daily updated websites offering software "deals" available for only a limited time, they are not the only sources of similar software deals. With daily email notifications or website access, other sources of deeply discounted or free commercial software are Bitsdujour.com, AppGratis.com, and GiveAwayOfTheDay.com. On a typical day, Bitsdujour.com offers about a dozen deeply discounted commercial software titles, and an occasional commercial product is available for free. Unlike the other sources, AppGratis and GiveAway OfTheDay.com typically only offer one, and occasionally two, software titles a day. As is common for these deal sites, the offerings are only available for a limited time. The GiveAwayOfTheDay.com offering is always free, and AppGratis.com always offers at least one free app, and sometimes a second deeply discounted app. One especially nice feature of the GiveAwayOfTheDay.com is the ratings and evaluation given to the day's offerings, often by dozens of users who have already downloaded the daily offering. While most of the offerings have generally high ratings and reviews, there are also some offerings that have relatively low ratings, and as a matter of personal policy I will not download and install any of the poorly rated offerings.

Between these five resources for commercial software, on any given day, hundreds of commercial software products are available for immediate download. My preference is to subscribe to the once daily email for each of the five, having specified the operating systems that I have, and peruse the new offerings for that day. AppGratis offers an optional service that displays a notification of that day's offerings on my Android phone every morning. With these five resources, anyone who likes software and apps for Windows, Mac, Android, iPhone, and iPad will likely find products of interest.

Websites:

http://sharewareonsale.com
http://hungryforapps.com
http://www.bitsdujour.com
http://appgratis.com
http://www.giveawayoftheday.com

Courtesy of Mr. Wilsker.

Fun to Know

<canistream.it> is a web site that will check which service is streaming the movie you wish to see, whether it's free, and whether it's available now.

Net Neutrality 101

Q. It seems like lots of "experts " have varying opinions about Net Neutrality. Can you explain it in layman's terms? I am against the government sticking its nose into my business, but I don't understand the issue.

A. It's a complex subject about which volumes have been written, but in its simplest form, Net Neutrality is a principle that states that all information flowing across the Internet should be treated equally.

With more people streaming data-rich video, Skype (Internet telephone) playing online games, watching full-length movies, and using social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., the Internet itself faces significant traffic congestion, which can result in sluggish or even nonexistent access to Internet-based data.

Questions then arise such as, "Should Internet access providers be able to sell multi-tiered access to accommodate heavy users?" (It doesn't seem fair to me to single out overweight individuals, but what do I know?) "Should sites that generate massive traffic and thus contribute to the congestion pay additional fees which would undoubtedly be passed on to consumers? Should the historically free Information Superhighway become a toll road?"

The U.S. Government is examining Net Neutrality and its financial, legal and social implications. The debate then becomes, "Do we need federal intervention to ensure fairness, or is this an issue for the market to work out, bearing in mind that the Internet itself is global, so the U.S. Government's jurisdiction would be limited to U.S.-based providers?" The debate and discussion to follow promise to be heated and prolonged, so stay tuned.

The above constitutes a simplistic summary of a very complex subject and is by no means intended to be all-inclusive, but I hope that helps.

Q. How can I view what's on my Windows Clipboard?

A. The clipboard is an area of memory set aside for short-term storage of data. When you copy something, before you paste it in a new location, it is stored on the Clipboard. The last item copied remains on your Windows Clipboard until it is overwritten by the next item you copy.

If you would like to see the last item you copied as it resides on your Clipboard, simply go to any blank area – a blank document, email, Wordpad or Notepad screen – right-click and select Paste. Whatever is on the Clipboard at that time will pop right into the blank area.

Q. I know how to delete individual files, but I can't remember how you said we can use the keyboard to highlight a block of files for moving or deleting. Thanks, Mr. M.

A. To select multiple files, hold down the SHIFT key and click the first file to select it, then scroll down to the last file and click that. That will highlight (select) all files in between.

If the files you want to select are non-contiguous files – which is a fancy-shmancy way of saying files not located next to each other – use the CTRL key instead of the SHIFT key, to select specific files.

Q. When I go to Web sites, including my bank's, a message appears that says that the certificate has expired. How can I update these expired certificates? It 's always something, isn't it?

A. Yes, it sure is. The site-based security certificates you mentioned are probably fine. I notice that your email is dated 2019, so unless you 're emailing me from your time machine, the date on the computer is incorrect, which would account for all those certificates being shown as having expired, since they would have expired sometime before 2019.

The problem you 're experiencing is caused by the incorrect date. To correct this, right-click the time/date display in the System Tray in the lower right-hand corner of your screen and adjust the day, month and year to reflect the current date. Once you correct the date, restart your computer and all those expired certificate notifications will disappear.

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

ChubbyGrub.com

Ever wonder how many calories are in a McDonald's Big Mac? How about a Subway Club? Or Arby's Curly Fries? Me neither, but for anyone counting calories, here's a site that will either be of great assistance or will ruin your life. This site is dedicated to helping you figure out the nutritional value (no, seriously) of some of the most popular fast food chains. So how does a Jack-in-the-Box bacon ultimate cheeseburger, a large order of fries and a delicious Oreo ice cream shake sound? You might want to have paramedics standing by for this 3,180 calorie, 185 grams o'fat artery clogger. Bon appetit!

http://chubbygrub.com

Snapzu

Snapzu claims to aggregate the best content throughout the Web. When you arrive at the site, you can get a feel for the sort of things that appear by checking out the featured content on the main page. If you like what you see, you can register to create a customized feed which will allow you to select topics of interest that will then be displayed on future visits.

http://snapzu.com

To subscribe to Mr. Modem's award-winning weekly computer-help newsletter and also receive personal responses to your questions, visit www.MrModem.com.

BACK TO BASICS

Using the Internet

by Jim Cerny
Sarasota TUG, FL

The Internet is an almost unlimited source of information, news, entertainment, help, and, well everything. Most people, including you, probably have no problem using the Internet, but sometimes it is good to review some Internet-related terms and some basics. It helps us use the internet even better. Here are some Internet terms:

The INTERNET – a whole lot of computers sharing information. There is only one Internet, it does not come in parts. It is also called the World Wide Web. Anyone can put anything on the internet, it is not "policed" by anyone. Be careful what you see or read may not be true. You can connect to the internet using a wire to your computer or, more common today, without a wire, called a "wireless" connection or "Wi-Fi." All laptop computers and iPads and "smart phones" have the ability to connect to a wireless network IF one is available in the range of your computer. Hotels, restaurants, libraries, and some towns may provide free wireless connections for you. Desktop computers usually connect with a wire but you can purchase a device to make your desktop connect without a wire.

Internet PROVIDER – a company to whom you pay money to allow you access to the Internet. Companies like Verizon, Comcast, Brighthouse, or a satellite "dish" company are examples.
Internet BROWSER – a program on your computer which allows you to view internet web pages. These programs, such as Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari, are all free. The Internet Explorer program comes free with Windows but you can download others from the Internet if you wish. All these programs work the same way but may look a little different.
INTERNET ADDRESS – every web page on the internet has a unique address.
ADDRESS BAR – located at or near the very top of your Internet Browser program window, this "box" contains the address of the web page you are currently viewing in the window. You can go to another web page address by left-clicking your mouse on the current address (which will highlight the address) and entering, using your keyboard, any new valid web page address. (If you enter words or text in this box instead of an address, your web browser will search the Internet using a search engine. That's ok, but it may not be the search engine you want to use).
WEB PAGE – a "document" on the internet which has a unique address. You may also think of a web page as a specific "location" on the Internet. A web page can be any length or size. Look for scrollbars at the side of the window or the bottom to use to see the entire page.
HOT LINK – Almost all web pages contain "hot links" to click on with your mouse. These links will take you to another web page.
SEARCH ENGINE – a web page that you can use to search the Internet. The most popular is Google (www.google.com) but there are many others such as Ask.com, Bing, and Yahoo. They are free to use, just go to their webpage.

Now that we have reviewed some terms, we will look at the two ways to use the internet. The first way, if you know the exact web address of the web page you want to see, just enter that address in the address bar or box and hit the "Enter" key on your keyboard. Your Internet browser will go to that web page and the new address will be displayed in the address bar.

The second way to use the Internet is when you do not know an address and just want to search the internet for something. So, you use a search engine like Google. At the Google web page you will see your insertion point waiting for you to enter your search words in the search box. Use regular English words separated by spaces. You can even ask a question. Google will search the whole internet in a fraction of a second and give you thousands of results, usually ten or fifteen on a page. On the results, you can click on any web page title to go to that web page.

Here are some very helpful things to consider when using the internet. You can find out more about them by using Google.
FAVORITES – If you like visiting certain web pages often, keep it in your "favorites" list. The next time you want to visit that web page again, just click on "favorites" and click on the one you want in the list. You can organize your favorites into FOLDERS too. So you could have a folder of your favorite medical web pages or games or whatever.
The Left and Right ARROWS at the top of the window of your web browser program can be clicked (with your left mouse button) to go back to a previous web page or to go forward to see a web page you have already seen. When you use your web browser you are building a chain of web pages that you have visited and these arrows allow you to move up or down that chain.
OPTIONS – Your web browser program will come with many options some of which you may want to understand and use. For example, do you want to keep in memory your history of web pages visited? You should use the "help" option on your browser program (mine is a small blue circle with a white "?" in it) to learn what you can do. You will not want to try everything, but you will find some things you will want to try.

TABS – Most browsers are able to use "tabs" which are, simply, a web page that is kept active. Years ago you could only view one web page at a time. But by using tabs, you can set up your browser to have several web pages available to you at once (without opening another web browser program window). I don't use tabs very much, but sometimes when you click on a hotlink it may open the next web page in a new tab.

GOOGLE HELP – Remember, you can ask Google any question you want. If you want to know something about your browser program, you could enter in Google something like: "How do I save favorite web pages in Internet Explorer?" Be as specific as you can with your question.

Hopefully this has been a good review for you and maybe will inspire you to try something new with your browser program.

Everything Google

by Jim Cerny
Sarasota TUG, FL

Why consider Google at all? Google never seems to sit still. They are constantly offering new free tools and actively improving the ones they already provide. Using what Google has to offer has many advantages, here are the "pluses" in my book and I am sure there are many more. You can find out more about any of them by, well, "Googling" them!

I started by converting my email to Gmail. Gmail helped me forward my old email to my new Gmail address and copied over my contact list as well. But the sweet thing was, now that I had a Google account (your Gmail address is your Google account) I now had access to everything Google.

Google Drive (formerly Google Docs) allows you to create, from scratch, new spreadsheets, documents, presentations and more, all for free and saved on the Google Drive in the "cloud". Their tools are every bit as good as Microsoft's and easy to use. When you create a file on Google Drive it is available to you anywhere on any computer via the internet. These files are now also available to anyone else (who also has a Google account) to access them if you give permission for them to do so. It is an easy way to share files and photos with others. You can also give them permission to update or change the files if you wish. And no one has to purchase any software. If you (or anyone) already has files (spreadsheets, documents, presentations) in Excel or Word or PowerPoint you can copy them to your Google Drive and it will convert them to the Google format. Likewise, you can copy a file from Google Drive and save it as a Microsoft file type.

Google Earth is really an amazing and fun exploration tool. It is great just to explore other cities, countries, or any place on earth. There are many options and ways to use this app, but I just cannot get over how it amazes me. When it started the images taken from satellites were wonderfully detailed and you could zoom in and see even people walking in the

streets. But more recently Google Earth has improved to include 3-D images showing the differences in elevation of mountains and even individual buildings in cities. When you learn to use the easy controls (mouse or fingers on touch-screens) you can "fly" over the earth and zoom in on anything you want. If you zoom in close enough, Google Earth changes to "street view" which gives you views as if you were standing on the street on that exact spot. If you are an engineer-type, you will enjoy learning how they did all this.

YouTube is a place to find videos. You will probably not find the latest movies here but most anything else you can. Enter the name of your favorite entertainer and you will find many videos of them doing a show or their spot as a guest on another TV program. Want to learn how to do something? – enter a question such as "How do I replace a window?" and get hundreds of videos showing you how to do it. Now think about this for a moment – you can ask YouTube "How do I create a group mail on Yahoo mail?" it will provide you with videos showing you how. It helps to be very specific with the product or version of what you want to learn more about. You can also view things such as classes recorded at major universities, cooking food, travel, movie trailers, old TV and radio programs, and, well, there is just no limit. Just think of YouTube as the "Google search" for just videos.

How many products, applications, and tools does Google have? I have no idea. Probably several more than they did a week ago. I think the key is to want to explore and find out. Get into the habit of "Asking Google" anything and you will be amazed.

From the December 2014 and January 2015 issues of Sarasota Technology Monitor*, newsletter of the Sarasota TUG, FL. Courtesy of APCUG.*

The AMD A10-7800 CPU

by Daniel Woodard
Dayton Microcomputer Association, OH

Is your computer bogging down, perhaps not powerful enough to handle daily tasks or games? You've surely heard the old adage: "Take two aspirins and call me in the morning." In the same vein, folks often would upgrade both a video card and the processor to try to speed up their PC. Recently, processors began arriving that combined both a traditional CPU and video card (GPU) into one unit. The recently released AMD A10–7800 is one of these, called an APU, or accelerated processing unit.

Although my computer had a fairly competent processor (Phenom II x4), the motherboard's onboard graphics were very weak, to the point where I was seeing huge amounts of lag when I or my kids were playing some basic browser games. I'm one of those folks who like simplicity, so I've enjoyed watching as LAN cards, sound cards and even video cards have been integrated onto the motherboard. This was fine at first, but eventually I found myself wanting to upgrade the video capabilities, and I'd rather be able to do this without having to pull the motherboard or add a video card. I've had video cards in the past, but prefer the fanless variety since they don't add background noise, and there's no fan that can go bad. Silent video cards with huge heat sinks are more of a niche market today, so prices for better performers have climbed up between $75 and $100.

The AMD A10 range of processors offered exactly what I wanted, using the FM2+ socket. (first released earlier this year) The A10–7800 has what is probably the best built in graphics on a very competent but energy efficient processor. Since the graphics are built into the processor, there is no additional heat sink or fan required — it just uses the same heat sink fan that every CPU has anyway. Another advantage is that if I eventually decide to upgrade in a year or two, I can simply and quickly upgrade both the CPU and video elements of my system just by pulling the CPU and inserting a new one — no muss, no fuss.

My prior CPU was the Phenom II X4, running at 2.8 GHz. It drew 95 watts and put out

quite a bit of heat. The first thing I noticed about the new A10 CPU was that the heat sink was about half the size of that required for the old Phenom II. I hadn't expected it to be much smaller, considering that now there was also essentially a video card crammed in there as well!

AMD's press release mentions that the processor supports UltraHD (4K) monitor resolutions. The A10–7800 (formerly known as Kaveri) also is touted as having 12 compute cores — 4 CPU and 8 GPU. It runs at a base clock frequency of 3.5 GHz, activating a turbo frequency of 3.9 GHz if an application is demanding. It has 512 video shader cores and a listed 65 watts of drawn power. Also incorporated is AMD TrueAudio, a built in DSP processor that provides dedicated positional sound effects calculation (including echo, etc.) for games. At the time of this writing, the processor is available for around $140.

As I had mentioned, my main reason for wanting an upgrade was extreme slowdown/lag when playing browser games. I had also noticed an occasional lockup once or twice a month, and decided it was time to install new components. I used Browsermark and PCMark 8 to compare my system before and after the upgrade. Originally I had the AMD Phenom II x4 925 CPU and onboard Radeon HD 4250 video.

Phenom II x4 925 (4 core, 2.8 GHz, 95 watt)	A10-7800 (4 core, 3.9 GHz, 65 watt)
Winrar 156 Megabyte compress 109 seconds	114 seconds
Hyper Pi 8m calc., 22 iterations 5 min. 26 seconds	4 min. 26 seconds
142 Watts full load, 83 W at rest	
115 Watts full load, 60 W at rest	
# of transistors: 758 million	# of transistors: 2.41 billion
PCMark 8 casual Gaming 7.8 fps	28 fps
Browsermark Score 1,888	3,758

(full load *vs.* at rest tested using Handbrake, h.264/mpeg4 video, doesn't include monitor)

I performed a variety of benchmarks, such as using Winrar to try to compress a 156 Megabyte video file. This may not have been the best choice of file, since they are already highly compressed, but the resulting times were very close, even though the newer CPU clearly uses a lot less power to do the same job. Hyper Pi, which calculates Pi using as many cores as the CPU possesses, showed a marked improvement over the old Phenom II.

If you'll refer to the chart above, you can see that the A10–7800 has roughly three times as many switches/transistors as the Phenom II 925 did. To put that in perspective, my first computer, a TI 99/4a from about 1982, had a CPU with 8,000 transistors, while my first IBM clone in around 1990 had 275,000. Put another way, let's say that each switch represents a person. In that case, my first PC had close to the equivalent of my home town's population toiling away in there, while today it is roughly the equivalent to the population of Asia. Clearly, it won't be too long before there are more switches in my computer's processor than there are people alive.

I was also able to borrow a "Kill A Watt" energy testing outlet device from my Dad to get some interesting readings. For example, now I know that my monitor uses up about 27 watts, with the PC using another 60W when the system is not doing much of anything at the desktop. Without the monitor, the new A10 based system uses 115 watts when doing mpeg4/h.264 video file encoding, vs 142 watts on the old Phenom II system. With the side of the case cover off, I definitely could hear the APU fan become a bit noisier during the video encoding, (when the processor kicked into 3.9 GHz turbo mode) but it wasn't noticeable at all with the case closed. Considering the performance per Watt used, this would be a great choice for a power limited system — if you want to upgrade capabilities without having to upgrade a system's power supply, for example.

Browsermark showed roughly a doubling of ability, while PCMark 8 showed nearly a

quadrupling of casual gaming frames per second. Ultimately, I got what I wanted out of the upgrade — browser games are playable again, with no lag for detailed animations in games and such. The system now also has the capability of playing various games with 3D effects, such as mrst and third person shooters — something I definitely could not have done on my old system.

It wouldn't be fair to finish this review without at least trying a few games. The A10–7800 was able to handle a game called *King's Bounty* that needed a video card upgrade to play about three years ago, due to numerous rendered battle animations. For the past decade, many of the first and third person shooters and other 3D games have used the Unreal Engine. (UE) I downloaded game demos using the UE2, which was used to make many games from about 2003 to 2008, and the system worked flawlessly. I tried another game that was made with UE3, which was used from about 2009 to present, and again, it did a decent job, but not at the highest resolutions.

The next version of the Unreal Engine is UE4, which is currently being used by developers to make games that will come out starting in 2015, and probably for the next 5 years or so. Using a recently released demo of UE4, I was only able to get frame rates of about nine to fourteen frames per second, which is not playable. However, it is still orders of magnitude above what I would have gotten with any motherboard's onboard graphics, and probably about 15% better than a stand-alone R7 240 video card.

To be fair, the UE4 development system is meant to push even high end video cards at this point—cards that probably cost more by themselves than this processor does. It makes sense for them to do this, because it usually takes at least a couple of years to develop the games. Also, today's $350 Radeon R9 or Geforce GTX video cards will be equivalent to a middle of the road $120 card 3 or so years from now.

APU's such as the A10-7800 are very unlikely to ever interest either of these two groups: overclockers or video card enthusiasts. AMD wasn't going after either of these markets, so it shouldn't be a surprise. What AMD wanted to do was to offer a relatively inexpensive option for people who like to have what you might consider some mid-range graphics built into the processor. Intel has also started doing this, with Intel graphics built in to a number of their processors now. At least for present, AMD definitely has the upper hand as far as video game framerate on these, however. Looking over numerous online benchmarks, I found that the Intel processors could crunch numbers a bit faster, but that the AMD APU's often had double the game framerates. I guess if you spend most of your time compressing files or doing intensive calculations, Intel might be a better choice. However, if anyone in your house plays games, the AMD APU would probably be a better investment.

In a nutshell: I give the A10-7800 a 9.5 out of 10 for energy efficiency and for being able to cram this much video processing ability into an APU. It would probably play 95% of the games out there currently, and you could easily spend $60 to $70 on a stand-alone video card that would not outperform this. That said, this is probably a better choice for those who occasionally try first person shooters, considering that it is unlikely to perform well in graphics heavy titles coming out in 2015 and later. For those who leave their PC's on all the time, the savings on an electric bill alone would likely pay for the cost of the A10-7800 in one or two years. This is especially true if your current system has older (released 2010 or before) stand-alone video cards or processors that draw 90W or more.

From the November 2014 issue of The Databus*, newsletter of the Dayton Microcomputer Association, OH. Courtesy of APCUG.*

Dump Adobe Flash NOW?

by Bob Rankin
askbobrankin.com

Adobe Flash has a long history of security vulnerabilities; over a dozen have required patching in 2015 so far. Three more zero-days in Flash that were discovered and fixed recently have some in the tech industry crying, "Enough! Time to kill Flash forever!" But is it?

Can the Web Survive Without Flash?

The most recently discovered holes in Flash were being exploited by The Hacking Team, an Italian cyber-spying firm that claims to sell its services only to government agencies. The Hacking Team's own network was hacked in late June, and 400 GB of internal documents were released via Bittorrent.

Among the embarrassing emails, invoices, and other evidence that the company helps repressive governments, were the recipes for exploiting three previously unpublished Flash vulnerabilities. Hacking Team's staff described one of them as the "most beautiful Flash bug for the last four years" in a leaked email.

It's unclear how long Hacking Team kept these bugs a profitable secret instead of helping Adobe fix them. Audaciously, Hacking Team blames the unknown data thieves for exposing the bugs' existence, as if they were safely in HT's hands alone.

The tech community's response has been pretty standard, despite journalists' efforts to hype it up. Apple quietly continued to ignore Flash, which it has not supported on mobile devices since 2010. Internet Explorer and Google Chrome automatically patched their built-in Flash players. On July 13, Mozilla Firefox took things a step further. Instead of automatically updating the plugin like its competitors, Firefox disabled the Flash plugin. Users could re-enable it in Firefox's settings, if they knew how. When Adobe released a patched version the very next day, savvy users who downloaded and installed it could view Flash videos, games and other missing content again.

Setting a Date

Last year I called for (most) users to stop using Java, in my article Time to Boycott Java? So why am I not joining the chorus of pundits saying "Kill Flash" today? The problems with Java were different, more pervasive, and more acute. At the time, 91% of all Web exploits targeted Java vulnerabilities. And only a tiny percentage of websites were still using it.

Facebook's security chief, Alex Stamos, Tweeted on July 12, "It is time for Adobe to announce the end-of-life date for Flash and to ask the (developers of) browsers to set killbits on the same day." Stamos added that it doesn't matter if the kill-date is 18 months in the future, as long as it's taken seriously and developers begin now to prepare for it.Flash has been in decline since 2010, when the late Steve Jobs published a widely-cited blog post explaining why Apple banned Flash from iOS. Jobs said that Flash is inherently unstable, a system resource hog, lacks touchscreen controls, and worst of all is proprietary. "New open standards created in the mobile era, such as HTML5, will win on mobile devices (and PCs too)," he wrote. Today, Adobe claims more than 500 million devices are "addressable today with Flash technology."

Flash is still used on 23 percent of the 483,000 Web pages tracked by the HTTP Archive, down from 39% three years ago. NBC and Major League Baseball are among the high-profile sites that still cling to Flash technology. But untold numbers of smaller sites use Flash to display content, or offer games.Even Facebook still uses Flash, despite the wishes of its chief security officer. Mobile users get HTML5 videos, but desktop browsers are stuck with Flash.

Stamos has taken the reasonable position: announce an execution date for Flash at a reasonable time in the future, and pull the trigger as scheduled. The holdouts at NBC, MLB, and other sites will get busy converting to HTML5 when they believe there's a credible threat to their click-streams.

The rub is that for users, there's no magical way to switch to some other method of viewing or playing Flash content. And almost one quarter of all web pages contain Flash elements. Website developers will have to re-code those Flash-based videos, pages and games in the HTML5 language. That's not a trivial undertaking, and some legacy content will never be converted.

Should You Panic?

As of this writing, all known Flash vulnerabilities have been patched. So if your version is up to date, you can continue to use Flash safely. As I mentioned earlier, Google Chrome and Internet Explorer keep Flash updated automatically.

If you use some other browser, you should make sure that you have the latest, patched version of Flash installed on all of your devices. Go to the Adobe Flash Plugin Update page to get it. (Uncheck the "optional offer" checkbox in the middle of the page.) And during installation, be sure to set the plugin to update itself automatically in the future.

If you're worried about future Flash bugs popping up, go ahead and remove it via the Control Panel. You may find that you don't miss it at all but if you do you can always reinstall it.

Blocking Spam With Gmail

by Bob Rankin
askbobrankin.com

Google estimates that nearly 60 percent of all email it processes is spam. But like most Gmail users, I rarely see any spam in my inbox. Google claims that Gmail now blocks 99.9 percent of all spam. Read on to learn how you can get near-perfect spam filtering, even if you don't use Gmail...

Machine learning, an application of artificial intelligence, has been part of Gmail's spam filter program since Gmail's inception. On July 9, Google announced three new improvements to Gmail's spam filter.

Every time a user clicks the "Report Spam" or "Not Spam" button on a message, Gmail learns something that helps it filter spam better. But now, Gmail is attempting to learn on its own, without the user's clicks.

The spam filter now uses the same artificial neural network that Google Now and Google Search use to detect and block the "especially sneaky" spam that sometimes slips past users' radar.

What's an "artificial neural network," you ask? The oversimplified answer is, a lot of computers connected to each other in an attempt to simulate the interconnections of human brain cells. It's expensive to build an artificial neural network; most are tiny, with 1 to 10 million connections.

Google has built an ANN with over one billion connections using the processors in its vast and far-flung empire of data centers. That sounds awesome, until you learn that the human brain contains several trillion connections! None the less, Google's ANN is capable of rudimentary human-like self-learning. That means you don't have to teach it what spam is.

In one experiment, Google's ANN was fed millions of still images of cats culled from YouTube videos. The images were not labeled as "cats" and programmers did not tell the ANN what a "cat" is. The ANN figured it out for itself, learning to recognize cats in virtually any

image. If it can do that, it can recognize spam with greater accuracy than most humans can.

Unidentified Frying Objects?

You don't have to do anything to use Gmail's spam filtering – it's automatic. But you can add your own filters to funnel messages into folders, forward to another address, and other actions. See my article Tame Your Email With Filters for help adding filters to Gmail, Yahoo, Outlook.com, iCloud Mail, or AOL webmail.

But the ANN is still not perfect. Just as humans see UFOs in pictures of streetlights, Google's ANN sometimes sees spam in legitimate messages and mistakenly consigns them to the spam folder. Google claims that only about 0.01 percent (1 in 10,000) of legitimate emails are falsely labeled as spam these days. As the ANN learns more about email, that figure should fall even further.

Take a look in your Gmail spam folder, and see how it's working. If you do find certain messages are being incorrectly flagged as spam, you can create a Gmail filter for them, with a "Never send to Spam" action, so they'll be delivered to your inbox.

How does Gmail's spam filter compare to other free Webmail services, such as Microsoft's Hotmail/Outlook.com and Yahoo? I haven't been able to find any independent, rigorous studies of this question. I'll just note that Microsoft seems to think it's acceptable if less than 3 percent of the messages that reach your inbox are spam.

Another new spam-fighting technique that Gmail is introducing doesn't really tackle spam, in my opinion. Gmail now attempts to learn individual users' reading preferences and filter out even legitimate mail that goes unread. The company gives the example of email newsletters. One user reads them assiduously while another just lets them pile up unread, or deletes them without reading. Why people don't just unsubscribe from newsletters is one of life's mysteries. Hopefully, Gmail can distinguish between legit opt-in email newsletters and the ones that just arrive without your consent.

Finally, Gmail is providing help for legitimate, large-volume email publishers whose communications are sometimes wrongly condemned as spam. The Gmail Postmaster Tools will help airlines, banks, credit card companies, and other well-known firms analyze the fate of their emails and improve their delivery and reading rates.

Even if you don't use or like Gmail, you can still use it to filter spam. Here's one technique that some people use to "pre-filter" their incoming emails. Instead of providing your actual email address when asked, give out a Gmail address that you've created. Configure that Gmail account to simply forward everything to your actual address. Gmail does spam-filtering BEFORE forwarding, so the messages that do get forwarded are virtually spam-free.

Gmail's spam filter is so reliable and accurate that I hardly ever check my spam filter for false positives anymore. I get hundreds of emails daily, and in 2015, I estimate I've clicked on the "Report Spam" or "Not Spam" button less than a dozen times. The spam filter just works.

Voice Recognition Hacking

by Bob Rankin
askbobrankin.com

Voice-activated technology is so easily hacked that it should be disabled on all devices that support it, according to the chief technology officer of AVG, a leading Internet security firm. Here's what you need to know, and do...

Are You Vulnerable to Voice Hackers?

In a recent Forbes magazine interview, Yuval Ben-Itzhak, CTO of AVG, made these rather surprising comments about devices with voice recognition capability:

"Microphones should be disabled immediately and our current recommendation is that the user switch off features [involving voice commands]… At the moment, leaving biometric technology as it is today is like leaving a computer without a password and just allowing anyone to walk by, click and take an action."

The problem is that current voice-recognition tech has no provision for authentication; it does not require proof that the speaker is who he or she sounds like. In fact, the "speaker" doesn't have to make a sound, or even be human.

Ben-Itzhak and his team proved their point by creating an Android game that secretly recorded a player's voice and synthesized voice commands that Google Now would accept. The "voice" was able to direct Google Now to send emails to contacts stored on the device. It's a spammer's dream come true. For instance, "Help, friends! I'm stuck in a small town with a blown engine. Need money to get home. Please Paypal whatever you can spare to me@example.com"

Another experimental app used a smartphone's built-in accelerometer to guess when the owner wasn't paying attention. While the phone was in motion, synthesized voice commands caused it to dial a premium rate number. The call was dropped when the phone stopped moving. Such a rogue app could run up huge profits for phone scammers. (The assumption that a moving phone is not glued to its owner's face is a bit naïve, but this is proof of concept stuff.)

Siri, We Thought We Knew You

Even without rogue apps and synthesized voice commands, Apple's Siri will betray you to just about anyone. While looking for security flaws in a preview of iOS 8, Jose Rodriguez discovered that the Siri voice-activated PDA will let a user bypass an iPhone's password-protected lockscreen. After Siri let him in via the side door, Rodriguez was able to view contacts and call history on the iPhone, post to Facebook, and even hijack a WhatsApp account without knowing its password.

Oddly enough, Apple considers this a feature, not a bug. But there is a way to disable it. On your iOS device, go to Settings, then Passcode, then look for the "Allow access when locked section." Set Siri to the off position so it can't interact with users from the lock screen. (Siri will still work the same when the phone is unlocked.)

Voice-activated tech is the next big thing. It's in phones, tablets, and cars. It's in the newest TV sets, game consoles, and even beer coolers. And according to AVG, it's leaving users exposed to an ever-growing number of attack vectors.

Ben-Itzhak doesn't know of any actual voice input exploits, but is calling for some sort of authentication for voice-activated tech. He says AVG is not working on any software solution to the authentication problem. It's up to the industry (specifically, those who create mobile operating systems) to create a standardized authentication protocol that does not diminish the convenience of voice commands.

Should You Take Action?

Ben-Itzhak's advice is a relevant heads-up to Apple, Microsoft and Google. They are the ones who create the software in question. But do users like you and me need to take any defensive action right now? It seems to me that this vulnerability is (for now) limited to rogue apps. So if you're not downloading from third-party app stores you should be safe. I find voice input incredibly useful on my Android phone when composing text messages or using Maps, so I don't plan to change my habits.

If you don't use voice input anyway, it's probably a good idea to disable it. But I have no idea what the AVG CTO means by "microphones should be disabled." That would make it impossible to make a phone call, and after doing some digging, my conclusion is that there is

no way to completely disable voice input on Android or iOS devices. But there are some steps you can take to limit it.

On Android devices, open the "Google Settings" app. Tap "Search & Now" then tap "Voice." Tap "Ok Google detection" and turn that setting off. On the iPhone or iPad, you can disable Siri by going to Settings, then General, then Siri, and turn Siri off.

My car has voice input, but every time I try to use it for navigation, it wants to send me to a non-existent town in Oregon. So maybe I'm better off disabling that feature, or learning to speak with a German accent.

From Gizmo's Freeware: The World's Best Collection of Free Culture And Education Resources

Sometimes the web seems devoid of sensible grown-up content. If you, too, occasionally yearn for something a little more cultural and educational than the typical web site, then Open Culture is the place for you. This single web site, which is free to access, contains hundreds of thousands of intelligent articles, links and more. You'll find details of thousands of free online courses and books, language lessons, movies, advice on writing, and loads more.
http://www.openculture.com/
http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/find-my-phone.htm

Free Apps That Can Save or Make You Money

by Ira Wilsker

On one of the morning talk shows earlier this week, a guest was "Kurt the Cyber Guy," also known as Kurt Knutsson. His topic was "5 Apps That Can Help You Earn Extra Money." All of the apps that he mentioned were free, and available for both Android and iOS devices. A few of the apps that he mentioned, I was already familiar with, and already using some competitive apps that in my opinion were equal to or better than those that he was showing on TV. Basically the apps that he referenced offered digital coupons, automatic digital rebates, and even the opportunity for the user to earn money as an automated "secret shopper" for several local stores.

While many local stores, such as Kohl's, Macy's, and Kroger have their own proprietary apps which offer sales information and digital coupons that can be scanned or otherwise digitally applied at checkout, other apps aggregate the coupons and sales of hundreds of stores in a single app. My personal favorite coupon app which I have been using for a while is RetailMeNot, available as a webpage at retailmenot.com, or as a free download as an app directly from the Google and Apple app stores. At any given time, RetailMeNot claims to have over a half-million coupons available from over 50,000 stores! Many of these coupons are intended to be used for online purchases, applied at the "enter coupon code here" box at checkout for online purchases, while many other coupons are digital in nature, often in bar-code format, which can be scanned at the register at checkout. On Father's Day, at one of the local well known restaurants, my extended family used a "20% Off" coupon, saving us a tidy sum off of a sizeable check. A few days earlier, at one of the local "national chain" soft goods stores, again with the RetailMeNot app, we used another 20% coupon at the checkout, which the clerk simply scanned from the screen on my phone. As do most of the competitive coupon

apps, RetailMeNot can use the location feature of the device and display an interactive map showing the local businesses that currently have coupons or sales listed on the app.

Many people are aware that many manufacturers and retailers offer rebates on individual item purchases, but those sellers know that only a small percentage of purchasers actually send in the rebate coupons. Likewise, many manufacturers and retailers offer "cents off" or similar coupons for merchandise in their respective stores, and except for a small handful of "ultimate couponers" most of us are blissfully unaware of those coupons, or otherwise do not take the time and effort to clip them, sort them, and hand them to the checker; in terms of courtesy, the customers in line behind us may be irritated with the extra time it takes for the checker to process large numbers of paper coupons. While stores such as Kroger have heavily gone to digital coupons, which they call "E-Coupons," there are many more coupons available for use in the grocery stores and other retailers that we can possibly be aware of, thus losing the benefit and savings that those unknown coupons could have otherwise provided us. Now, there are several free apps available that automate the coupon task without having the checker scan individual paper or digital coupons, and the coupons can also be leisurely processed after returning home by simply using the phone's camera to take a picture of the receipt. The app's host server will use sophisticated OCR (Optical Character Recognition) to read the receipt, searching for a coupon for each of the identified items, and crediting any found coupons to the user. At specified intervals or amounts, the app will automatically transfer the coupon proceeds to the user as a PayPal deposit, prepaid gift card, or other specified form of payment.

Some of the apps that can scan register receipts and remotely process coupons are "Snap by Groupon," IBotta, and Receipt Hog; each of these apps are available for Android and iOS. While all of these apps work somewhat similarly, there are some differences between them. As I write this column, "Snap by Groupon" (snap.groupon.com) is showing 37 current items that are offering significant cash back for the purchase of any of those items; these items, most of which each offer a rebate between $1 and $3, include coffee, baby food, fiber supplements, greeting cards, ground beef, hair care products, almonds, magazines, breakfast cereal, soups, and many other grocery products. If any of these items appear in the photo of a grocery receipt, Snap by Groupon will deposit the proceeds into the selected account. Another similar automated rebate service is IBotta (ibotta.com) which has an extensive list of individual products which will generate significant rebates, as well as a sizeable list of retailers who offer larger rebates (many $10 or more) for shopping in those stores, both local and online. IBotta will deposit rebate proceeds into a PayPal account, or as prepaid gift cards good at a wide selection of retailers. A third competitive rebate app is from Receipt Hog (receipthog.com), which in addition to processing rebates from photos of receipts, also offers contests and games based on purchases which award additional points; Receipt Hog pays the proceeds into the user's PayPal account or as prepaid Amazon gift cards.

A heavily advertised rebate or "cash back" service available online or as an app is Ebates (ebates.com), which primarily offers rebates and coupons for online purchases; these rebates can be for a specific number of dollars, or a percentage of the total order, ranging from 1% to 40%. Periodically, some of the participating retailers offer "double rebates," which can greatly increase the rewards given to the users. According to the Ebates website, "You get Cash Back at over 1,800 stores every time you start your shopping trip at Ebates. There are no points to redeem, no forms to mail in and no fees. Stores pay Ebates a commission for sending you their way, and Ebates shares the commission with you as Cash Back. That same website says that the total real time rebates already paid to Ebates users is currently $338 million. Ebates also

offers a variety of incentives to join, typically a $10 gift card to any one of a variety of popular stores, sent to the member after a minimal amount of purchases.

Many of you readers are likely aware that there are several legitimate (and some not so legitimate) "mystery shopper" services, that pay individuals to visit particular stores, maybe to make a small purchase, and then send an evaluation of the store and the employees. For those who would like to earn some money while shopping by performing mystery shopping services, using the app from Mobee (getmobee.com /mobeeapp) can totally automate the process. The results of the mystery shop can be sent directly from the phone, earning points which can be converted to cash or to gift cards for stores of the user's choice. A typical successful mystery shop awards points worth $5 or more. According to Mobee, "Earn huge rewards and tons of cash to go to places you already know and love! Mobee is the easiest way to make money while helping local businesses improve their service! We connect you to thousands of businesses near you that want to hear your feedback on their stores, and in return you get rewarded with awesome prizes, gifts, and cash. ... With locations like Starbucks, McDonalds, CVS and more, chances are you'll find a place to earn cash and enjoy doing it!" The Mobee app can generate a local map displaying those businesses participating in the program; selecting a business will describe the mystery shop duties, and the compensation for the project.

Since most of us carry a smart phone with us while we shop, we might as well use that smart phone to save us money, or even make us money while we shop. Wouldn't it be great to convert our expensive smart phones from an expense to a profitable revenue source? Something to think about.

Society News

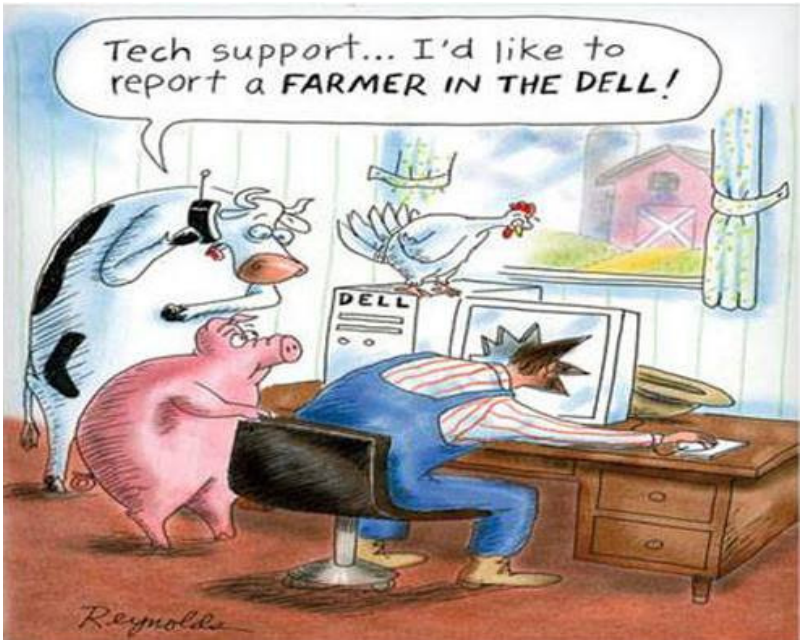
President's Message

I am sad to tell you that last month our Vice President, Dan Rothfuss, lost his battle with cancer. Dan and his wife, Jan, were and are vital members of the club's board. With club permission I'm asking Jan if she will stay on the board as a member at large. Mark Lawson will take over as Vice President.

Our August meeting will not be a St. John's Meadows. Our August meeting is the club picnic. The second Tuesday is August 11 and it will be at the Henrietta Memorial Town Park. Please arrive about 5 pm and we plan to eat at 6. The park is on Calkins Road at the old Monroe County Fair Grounds. E-mail me what you want to eat red hot, white hot, hamburger, cheeseburger, or spicy Italian sausage. We are also asking everyone to bring a dish to pass (salad or dessert).

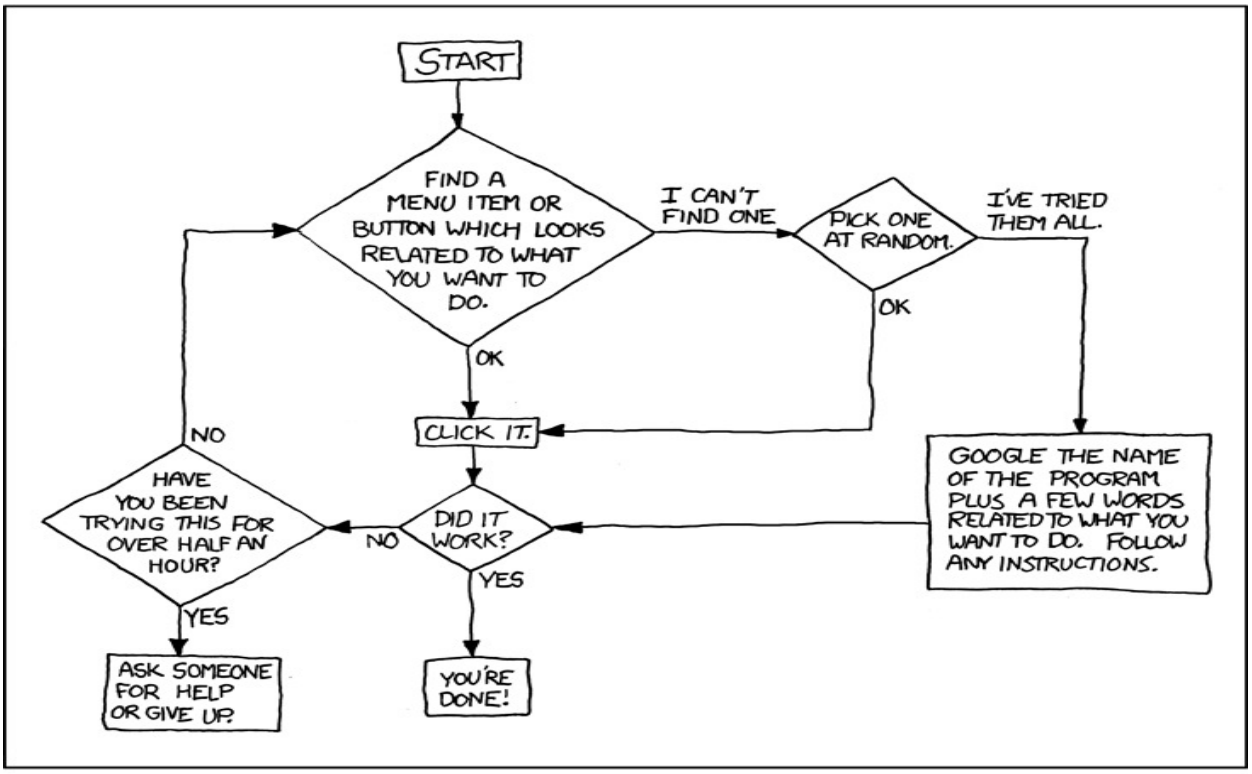
We will have our usual silent auction so please bring something to sell. The items do not have to be computer related. We will be closing down about 8:30 pm before it gets dark. Hope to see you at the picnic or any of our monthly meetings.

–Steve Staub



DEAR VARIOUS PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS, CO-WORKERS, AND OTHER "NOT COMPUTER PEOPLE."

WE DON'T MAGICALLY KNOW HOW TO DO EVERYTHING IN EVERY PROGRAM. WHEN WE HELP YOU, WE'RE USUALLY JUST DOING THIS:



PLEASE PRINT THIS FLOWCHART OUT AND TAPE IT NEAR YOUR SCREEN. CONGRATULATIONS; YOU'RE NOW THE LOCAL COMPUTER EXPERT!

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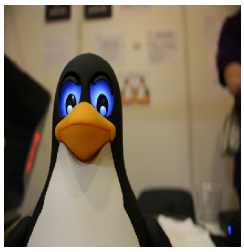
Planning Meeting

The meeting will be held on August 4th at 7 pm at Sally Springett's house. Everyone is welcome.

Linux SIG



The next workshop is the third Saturday in August, the 15th, at Interlock Rochester, 1115 E Main St. Enter through Door #7 on the end of the building near Goodman. Go upstairs to suite #200.

Come to get your questions about Linux answered. We have experts on hand to fix problems and answer questions about Linux and FOSS. Bring your system in so we can help you get the most out of it.

Enter through Door #7 near the Main Street end of building. Find Interlock on the intercom directory to get buzzed in.

Hope to see you there!

Standing Committees

Programs: . . . . . Tony Dellelo
Membership: . . . . . Steve Staub
Monitor: . . . . . Sally Springett
Webmaster: . . . . . Bob Avery
webmaster@rcsi.org
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Newsletter Production

Saturday, August 15 at 9:30 am

Steve Staub

Reward: Vital job well done, donuts, and sometimes pizza!

Tax Accuracy, Inc.

The newsletter team for the July issue was Tony Delello, Dennis MacMahon, Sally Springett, Steve Staub, and Chuck Wells. If you would like to help, you need only call Steve. directions.