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Next Meeting
Tuesday, January 13

Jerry Seward on
How the Domain Name System Works

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Tech-News

from Bob Rankin
askbobrankin.com

What's the most important thing to remember when stealing cash from an ATM machine? Why does Computer Engineer Barbie need a MAN to help her finish a software project? And what's behind Google's plan to launch dozens of huge helium-filled balloons every day? Get answers to these burning questions, and the scoop on the latest tech news, in this edition of the Geekly Update. It's guaranteed to make you 146% smarter. Read, think and comment!

Khaled Fattah and his friend figured out a way to hack ATMs using only the keypad on the cash machine. Fattah's trick caused the machine to spit out \$400, while debiting the account

for only \$20. The amount of cash the pair was able to withdraw before getting caught: \$400,000. Using your own ATM card to commit bank fraud: Priceless.

Google's driverless car is being trained to be more like human drivers in order to operate effectively among them. For instance, at a 4-way stop when it's a Google car's turn to go, the car will "inch forward decisively" to assert its right-of-way. "If you're always yielding and conservative, basically everybody will just stomp on you all day," says technical team leader Nathaniel Fairfield. Even MORE human would be a "roll down the window and shout obscenities" option.

The Barbie: Computer Engineer doll trolls every living geek girl with a storybook that includes lines like, "I've only created the design ideas... I'll need Steven's and Brian's help to turn it into a real game." And she thinks the library will let her hook up her virus-infected hard drive to its network for cleaning!

Google is launching 20 huge helium-filled Internet balloons per day as part of Project Loon, a loony scheme to encircle the globe with 7,000 airborne wireless Internet access points. The longest a balloon has remained aloft is 130 days, so expect to see lots of wildlife trapped in Google-branded "raincoats."

Telephone monopolies would no longer be obliged to provide landlines in certain areas as early as 2018, under a provision of a bill approved by ... the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee? Discontinuance of landline service would still require approval of the FCC and local public utilities commissions. Yes, it is part of a deeper conspiracy to pry that hardwired phone from ours cold, dead hands.

Detekt is free software that detects whether your Windows device is infected with FinFisher or Hacking Team RCS, two commercially available spyware suites. Detekt is aimed at activists and journalists in the human rights fields, and is brought to us by Amnesty International, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, and Privacy International, and Internet-rights group Digitale Gesellschaft.

Maybe you should be glad that your cellular carrier is slow to roll out new versions of Android. Owners of Nexus phones sold by Google itself are reporting many serious bugs after updating to Android v. 5.0 (Lollipop). Phones crash, contacts are wiped out, and nothing written in Adobe Air survives or can be re-installed.

Yahoo! Search will replace Google Search as the default search engine in Firefox. Of course, anyone who cares strongly enough to open their Settings can restore Google Search as the default search engine.

China is blocking thousands of foreign and domestic websites in one go by partially blocking the EdgeCast content-delivery network with the "Great Firewall" erected by the Chinese government. The reason seems to be that political activists have been using cloud services like EdgeCast to host forbidden information.

SnapChat will now let you send money to anyone using Square Cash, the free debit card to debit card payment service provided by payment processor Square, Inc.

An additional \$2 fee would be tacked onto your phone bill if an FCC request for another \$1.5 billion to provide broadband to schools is approved by Congress.

Facebook is reportedly working on a competitor to Microsoft Office, in hope of completing its mission to utterly destroy workplace productivity.

OTG Cable/Adapter (On-the-Go)

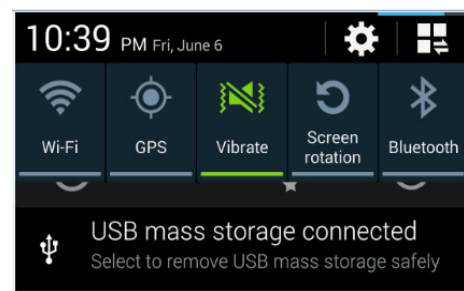
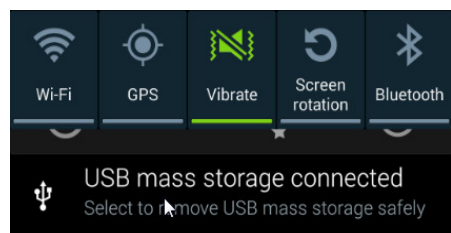
by Frank Ramsey
Akron Canton PCUG, OH

How do you accomplish the transfer of files between a mobile device and your PC?

There are a number of methods, including connecting the device to a PC/MAC via a USB cable, use an application to connect over Wi-Fi and others.

An additional method would be to transfer files to a USB Flash drive. Since few Android devices have a full-size USB Type A port, how do you connect a flash?

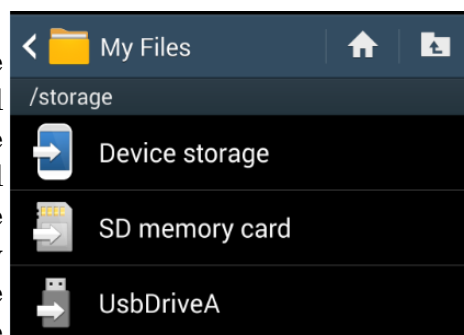
Enter the OTG Cable. A typical OTB cable is shown above. One end is the USB Type A female, the other end typically USB micro male. These are available from a number of sources including eBay for prices ranging from under a \$1 to \$5 or more.



Courtesy of APCUG.

You plug the flash drive into the Type A female connection and plug the USB micro male into the Android device.

Typically the Android device will recognize the flash drive and eventually it will show up in File Manager. I say eventually because the flash drive must be scanned by the Android device. Depending on the size of the flash drive and the speed of the Android device, it may take a little time for the USB drive to show up. Be patient.



Now you can copy files to/from the flash drive.

How to Recover a "Crashed" System, Windows 7 and 8

by Ira Wilsker

Yesterday I received a frantic phone call from a distraught individual. He had a fairly new Windows 7-64 desktop PC not covered by warranty, and it would not properly boot up. It would briefly show that manufacturer's splash screen, and then nothing else; the screen was black. After a period of time, the power saving feature appeared on the otherwise black screen and stated that the computer was going into hibernate mode. Nothing typical could bring the computer back to life; a full repeat of the "power on" cycle only produced a repetitive black screen and shutdown. The computer would not even boot into safe mode using the F8 key, and it took several boot attempts to get to the BIOS setup using the F10 key (this varies by computer model); the BIOS appeared to be properly configured. There was no practical way to get to the "System Restore" function, and rollback the PC to an earlier date and time.

Immediately prior to this boot failure, the individual had installed a new paid (renewal) version of a popular system maintenance utility which he allowed to perform a full diagnostic. Intentionally selecting the "Power down if no problems are found" function, the diagnostic utility went through a lengthy series of tests, found no errors, and dutifully shut

down his computer. That was the last time it ran satisfactorily.

Fortunately, he had another Windows 7-64 desktop in his home, so he had the ability to research his predicament, and create some bootable rescue CD discs. If we can remember the joy and excitement of setting up a new PC, one of the procedures presented during the setup, but still available later, is the creation of a set of bootable recovery discs or with newer computers, a recovery bootable USB flash drive. While this bootable rescue disc set is often vital in recovering and restoring what many call a “crashed” computer, very few PC users ever create the set, even when prompted during setup, and at other times by the integral “PC Action Center.”

If you are one of the majority who has never created a Windows bootable recovery disc utilizing the function built into Windows 7 and 8, the process is relatively fast and easy. In Windows 7, the bootable recovery disc can be created by going to Control Panel – System and Security – Backup and Restore – Create a System Repair Disc. A window will open instructing the user to insert a blank CD, which the system will use to create a bootable recovery CD. In some cases it may take several CD discs to create a complete recovery set, so be sure to have several blank CDs available. Windows will proceed to create the bootable set. When completed, label the discs with a permanent marker (I use a “Sharpie”), put them in a case, and store them somewhere safe where you can quickly find them if needed. Most modern factory built Windows computers do not come from the factory with recovery or system CDs (or DVDs), but instead have a second partition on the hard drive with all of the critical operating system files; it is many of these files that will be used to create the recovery set. In some cases, where this second partition was never created, or it was deleted (some users do this to get more space on the hard drive), it may be necessary to insert an original Windows 7 installation disc. To use the system repair or recovery disc, insert the bootable CD in the drive, and then reboot the computer, following the on screen prompts to run the restore and recovery.

The process of creating a set of restore bootable discs in Windows 8 is similar to that of Windows 7, except some of the instructions are worded differently. Using the keyboard shortcut “Winkey+W” to open the Start screen Settings search, and type “recovery.” One of the choices will be “Create a recovery drive.” Windows 8 supports creating recovery media on a USB flash drive (minimum of 256MB free space required, much more if a backup partition is created), or blank CD or DVD discs can be used. Follow the onscreen prompts, and the rescue media will be created. Label the media, and store it in a safe place where it can be readily found when needed. If needed, simply insert the USB or DISC, and reboot the computer, then follow the on screen prompts.

While the “official” system recovery discs may be very useful in recovering and restoring a system that will not boot, or boots with significant errors, there are also several third party bootable discs (mostly free) that can be created to detect and repair most common errors, or to scan and delete most malware that may have taken over the computer. Detailed instructions and recommendations on resolving most of these crashes are available from Gizmo's TechSupportAlert.com atttechsupportalert.com/best-free-security-list-part4.htm?page=0,2.

Another very large list of recovery and repair utilities that can create bootable CDs or USB flash drives is at technibble.com/large-list-of-useful-computer-repair-cds. One of my personal favorites is the “Ultimate Boot CD” available for free download from ultimatebootcd.com. This “Ultimate Boot CD” when burned to a bootable CD using an ISO burner (another readily available free utility) or to a USB flash drive (instructions are included in the download), contains dozens of utilities to diagnose and repair hard drives, memory tests, BIOS diagnosis and repair, CPU diagnosis, hardware diagnosis, video and keyboard diagnostics, malware scan

and removal, and many diagnostic and repair utilities. For those who like a variety of competitive utilities, another free comprehensive bootable CD or USB flash drive containing several dozen diagnostic and repair utilities is the Falcon Four Ultimate Boot CD, available for direct download at falconfour.wordpress.com/tag/f4ubcd. It should be noted that the latest build of Falcon Four Ultimate Boot CD works fine on Windows 7 and Vista, but does not currently work on Windows 8 systems.

Gizmo's TechSupportAlert.com recently had an updated feature containing detailed but easy to follow instructions for creating a bootable recovery CD or USB flash drive. These instructions can be viewed at techsupportalert.com/create-bootable-rescue-cd.htm. Included with these directions are links to six of the most popular (free) bootable recovery discs.

While apparent “crashes” do occasionally happen, it is more common that an error may appear on the Windows screen while running indicating that one or more critical system files may have been corrupted or cannot be found. To remedy this situation, all recent versions of Windows have a built in “System File Checker” that can check for missing or corrupted system files, and quickly and easily replace most of them.

Probably the most efficient way to detect and repair almost any necessary system files is to do it from a command prompt in safe mode. Getting to safe mode in Windows is simple; starting with the computer off (turned off, not hibernating or sleeping), turn on the computer with its power button then immediately start tapping the F8 key in the top row of the keyboard. Keep tapping the F8 key every second or two until the computer opens a black screen with white fonts; one of the choices will be to boot into “command prompt” which can be reached with the up and down keys on the keyboard. The computer will rapidly complete its very limited boot process, and when done, will only show a single command prompt on the screen, such as “C:\.” At this prompt type, “SFC /SCANNOW” (no quotes). It can be in upper case or lower case, and will check the system files. While the SFC /SCANNOW function can normally detect and repair most missing or corrupted system files with the first pass, there are cases where the command must be run several times in order to repair or replace a badly damaged system. Alternatively, the SFC /SCANNOW command can be run from within Windows, while Windows is running. Click in the menu on “RUN” and then enter SFC /SCANNOW in the box; be sure that it is being run with “administrative privileges.” The process of running SFC /SCANNOW in Windows 8 is very similar to that of Windows 7, with

both Windows 7 & 8 specific instructions available from Microsoft at support.microsoft.com/kb/929833.

For most of us, it is not the proverbial question of if we will suffer a computer “crash,” but more likely “when” we will have that problem. Computer crashes are often different, and mostly unrelated to hard drive crashes, as computer crashes are mostly software based, but can also include the failure of hardware components. At a minimum, we should all have a set of



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bootable recovery discs (or USB drives) created by our operating systems. It would also be a wise idea to periodically create one or more (I have several) of the free third party repair and recovery discs. By personal choice, being cognizant that utilities are often frequently updated, I periodically download newer, updated versions of the third party products, and burn them to CD, discarding the older versions. Blank CDs (and new USB flash drives) have become very inexpensive, so cost is not an issue. While it may take several minutes to download or create a set of bootable recovery media, the investment in time and money is but a shadow of the fiscal and emotional cost we pay if our computer crashes, and we do not have appropriate recovery media. Along with good contemporary backups, both of our data and “shadow” or “image” (complete) backups of our hard drives, it is better to have them than not.



“How Can I Cheat at Solitaire?” (Really?)

Q. I’ve heard there is a way to cheat when playing Solitaire. I hate to ask, but can you shed any light on this?

A. I don’t know why as many people ask about this as they do, particularly since Solitaire (Programs > Games) is a game you play against yourself, but Mr. Modem is here to answer questions, not to judge. Well, okay, I judge, too, but I keep my opinions to myself. Well, okay, maybe I don’t keep my opinions to myself, but I only share them with my cats. Here’s how to extricate yourself from Solitaire when you need a card, but it’s just not coming your way:

If you find yourself in that virtual pickle, hold down the SHIFT + CTRL + ALT keys and click the “draw” stack of cards. This forces the game to flip the remaining cards individually, as opposed to the traditional three at a time. Do this as many times as it takes to reach the card you need. You’ll amaze and astound your friends and family how proficient you are at Solitaire. (Either that, or they will know instantly that you’re cheating.)

Q. When I purchased my computer two years ago, I also purchased an extended warranty for one year. It is time to either renew the extended warranty or let it lapse. Is it wise to renew the extended warranty for another year? Thanks, Mr. M.

A. Statistically, extended warranties aren’t worth the dollars spent on them. Countless Consumer Reports studies reveal that while extended warranties are very profitable for the companies offering them, the return to consumers is minimal. I never purchase them myself, but some people feel more comfortable having them, so ultimately it’s a matter of how much value YOU place on the peace of mind (if any) you receive from having such a warranty.

Historically, the number of claims presented under extended warranties are far fewer than the dollars collected, so paying for repairs as needed, is statistically more cost effective in the long run.

That being said, there are certainly exceptions and stories of people who purchased a “lemon” product and were able to replace it at no cost because they had an extended warranty. But for a computer that you have been using for two years, presumably using it without any major problems, you will probably be fine proceeding without an extended warranty at this point. But there are no guarantees. (Oh, the irony.)

Q. A friend recommended checking for updated drivers by using a free Web-based service. I quickly discovered that checking is free, but it costs \$29.95 to download any drivers needed.

I'm not having any problems with my PC, so do I need to spend this money?

A. My often-expressed philosophy can best be summed up by the adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." As long as everything is working fine, you are not going to make it run finer by doing anything to your computer, so I would leave well enough alone.

If a printer, for example, stopped working at some point, I would go to my printer manufacturer's Web site, locate the area where I can check for updated drivers and download them for free. There is nothing inherently wrong with a site such as Driver Agent (driveragent.com), which is one of the more popular driver-checking sites, but it is rarely necessary to pay for updated drivers. My recommendation: Save your money.

Q. How does one detect if a keylogger is installed?

A. A keylogger is a program or device that surreptitiously (Mr. M's big word of the day) records (logs) every keystroke entered on a keyboard. Parents, employers, suspicious spouses and private investigators are the primary users of keyloggers, but criminals also use them in order to steal password and other personal information.

Now that we know what a keylogger is, unless it is a physical device that is attached to the keyboard – which would be easy to spot – there isn't any definitive way to detect a keylogger. Keylogging software is designed NOT to be detectable, which is precisely why it is installed in the first place.

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

EarthCam

The Internet's largest WebCam site featuring live, streaming video from hundreds of cities throughout the world.

www.earthcam.com

FEMA Disaster Center

Learn about various types of disasters ranging from chemical emergencies to earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, wildfires and more. Each disaster provides a list of potential hazards as well as items you can do before, during and after disaster strikes. (Trust me, you will never sleep again.)

www.fema.gov/hazard/types.shtm

PhotoBucket

Similar to ShutterFly (shutterfly.com) and Picasa (<http://picasa.google.com>), but with a bit more flexibility for storing and editing photos online. At this free site, you can share photos, create albums, organize your pictures, search, create a slide show and even combine photos.

www.photobucket.com

Use Promo Code MODEM when entering your six-month subscription to Mr. Modem's award-winning

Stinger

by Bob Rankin
askbobrankin.com

The “free virus scan” offer is a favorite hacker ploy to get unsuspecting victims to download and run malware disguised as security software. Such traps are so common that users are very reluctant to try any free anti-malware tool. But not every sheepskin contains a wolf. Here's a bona fide, effective, and totally free anti-malware tool that you should know about.

McAfee, of course, is one of the oldest and largest anti-malware developers. McAfee Stinger has been around since at least 2006, but it's still alive and well. A surprising number of people turned to Stinger in April 2014, when the Heartbleed vulnerability threw the world into a panic.

According to McAfee, Stinger was run daily on more than 200,000 computers during the first week after Heartbleed hit the headlines. That daily use number plummeted to 50,000 the following week, indicating how quickly panic subsides.

But those numbers are impressive for a utility that isn't marketed and isn't even supported by its developer. Stinger must have something going for it; let's see what that is.

McAfee Stinger

First, Stinger is not a vaccine that wards off malware; it is an antibiotic for killing infections you've already caught. So Stinger does not run constantly, chewing up system resources. It's best to keep a copy of Stinger on a CD or USB stick along with other rescue and disinfection tools.

Second, Stinger is dead simple to use. It's a standalone, one-file program that you just click to run; no installation is required. There are no tricky "opt-in" screens that try to sneak toolbars onto your system, either. Instructions for downloading and running Stinger are here.

Stinger's default scan (Medium sensitivity) option is quick and superficial. It scans for rootkits, pokes around in the Windows registry, and looks at the favorite hiding places of malware. Stinger scans for about 6,000 known malware varieties and their variants. The "Raptor" component of Stinger analyzes the behavior of currently running programs to check for suspicious activity. Raptor updates its knowledge of new and emerging threats by consulting an online McAfee database, which enables it to detect zero-day malware.

Targeting Malware: Locked and Loaded....

For a more thorough scan, you can set the "GTI File Reputation" sensitivity level, which requires a bit of explanation. McAfee, like other large anti-malware developers, gathers real-time intelligence on emerging threats from the many installations of its security software on computers all over the world. A "threat report" includes the name of the file that is suspected of bearing the threat and the strength of the suspicion. When Stinger encounters a file on your device whose name matches one on the GTI File Reputation list, it evaluates the threat and decides whether to take action or not.

In my experience, no anti-malware program will find every possible threat. So I recommend that you run a Deep Scan with two or more of the security tools listed in my companion article HOWTO: Deep Scan for Malware. Do this a few times a year, or if you suspect a malware problem.

The action that Stinger takes when it finds an infected file is also under the user's control. A file may be simply reported as suspicious, quarantined for later inspection, deleted immediately, renamed to a non-executable form (e. g., *.bak), or a repair may be attempted.

A quick scan of my desktop machine using the default settings took only 7 minutes, looked into about 28,000 files, and turned up nothing. I don't stash a lot of stuff on my primary work computer, so I asked a computer-savvy friend with a large collection of files to run a full scan of his system with the highest sensitivity setting. He reported that Stinger took 9 hours, 13 minutes to plow through 3,782,218 files (about 250 GB) and found one that contains a Trojan. (A quick scan didn't find that file.)

Customize Your Malware Scan

You can customize a scan to something in between these extremes, specifying where to scan, how deeply to scan, and what to do when an infection is detected. But since Stinger is a tool that you'd use only once in a while, or if you suspect a problem, I recommend that you use the highest sensitivity settings and choose the Repair option. (Click the Settings link at the top right of the Stinger screen.)

IMPORTANT: Make sure you click the "Customize my scan" link on the main screen, and select the C: drive and any other drives you want to scan. If you don't, Stinger will only scan

the folders it thinks are most likely to contain malware. I also recommend that you temporarily disable your primary anti-virus protection while Stinger is running, to avoid any conflicts between the two. This should also make Stinger complete its scan faster.

Remember that Stinger is not a substitute for real-time anti-malware and security software shields. But as a malware detection and remediation utility, it does a good job. See the sidebar above for some other on-demand “deep scan” tools you can use for additional peace of mind.

Why You Should Never Login with Facebook

by Bob Rankin

askbobrankin.com

Mari Sherkin has been happily married for over 25 years, so she was more than a little surprised to learn she had a dating profile on matchmaking service Zoosk.com that she never created. Find out how it happened, and how it could easily happen to you.

What is OAuth, and Why Should You Care?

According to Mary, a popup ad on Facebook invited her to take a look at Zoosk. She says she didn't want to, so she clicked the X in one corner of the ad to close it. But suddenly she was whisked to Zoosk.com's home page; she wanted none of that, so she closed the browser window. Mere minutes later, she says, emails from Zoosk members began flooding her inbox, expressing interest in her Zoosk profile – which Mary says she never created.

That profile included her name, Facebook profile picture, and postal code. Mary lives in a small town 2.5 hours from Toronto, and she is understandably concerned about the damage that could be done to her reputation by this apparent evidence of in-fidelity.

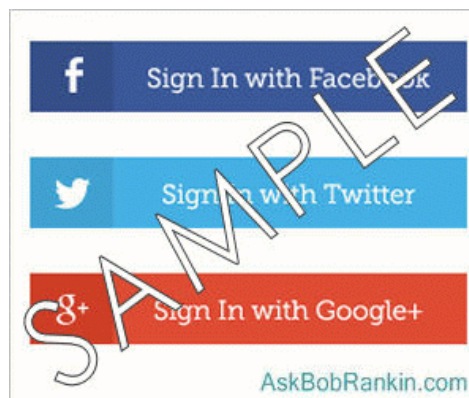
How did Zoosk get the data it needed to create this bogus profile of Mary? The CBC News reporter who chronicled Mary's plight found a “technology expert (who) points to what is known as an ‘open authentication protocol’ – or OAuth – where people often unwittingly share personal information with third-party websites.”

Sign in With Facebook

OAuth (Open Authentication protocol) is what enables you to “sign in with Facebook” or Google or Twitter login credentials on other sites, eliminating the bother of creating and keeping track of new login credentials for multiple sites. Depending on how OAuth is configured, a site may request access to your personal data and the ability to act as if it was you on Facebook, Google, or whatever service you use to save yourself some time and hassle.

A spokesman from Zoosk denies that they automatically create dating profiles based on Facebook data, but their Terms of Service explicitly state that they can. Here's an excerpt from the Terms that spells it out:

“When you have enabled the use of our Services through a Social Networking Site such as Facebook, Google+ or Twitter, you permit Zoosk to access certain information about you ... such as your name, profile picture, network, gender, username, user ID, age range or birthday, language, location, country, interests, contacts list, friends lists or followers and other information. By accessing or using our Services through a Social Networking Site, you are authorizing Zoosk to collect, store, retain and use ... information that Zoosk has obtained from the Social Networking Site, including to create a Zoosk profile page and account for you.”



Plenty of Blame to Go Around

It's not clear to me if OAuth played a role in Mary's victimization. She doesn't mention clicking on anything that explicitly granted permission to access her Facebook profile or data, as the OAuth protocol requires. Yes, it's possible that she clicked something without reading carefully. But there's a Zoosk Victims facebook page where dozens of others have complained about the same thing happening to them.

Mark Zuckerberg started Facebook by doing exactly what Zoosk seems to be doing. Without asking permission, he pilfered names, copyright-protected photos, and other personal information from his classmates' profiles on Harvard's student directory website. So I'm confident that he has no problem with what happened to Mary. If Facebook allows advertisers to hijack its members' browsers and misdirect them to websites when they try to close ads, then Facebook is aiding and abetting phishers and malware distributors. That would not surprise me, either.

Don't get me wrong: OAuth is not without its security and privacy hazards. In fact, a very big one was revealed in May, 2014, that confirms my long-standing policy of never using OAuth as a substitute for site-specific usernames and passwords.

The so-called Covert Redirect vulnerability in OAuth was exposed shortly after the Heartbleed bug; a lot of people missed it in the furor generated by Heartbleed. It allows a phisher to display a bogus log-in popup window on a legitimate site, harvest data that the user thinks is going to the legit site, and then redirect the user's browser to a site of the phisher's choosing.

Standard precautions don't work against "Covert Redirect." In many phishing exploits, the user can tell something is wrong by carefully examining the URL underlying a link or button he's being asked to click; bad guys often used domains that are subtle misspellings of legitimate domains. But the "Covert Redirect" exploit uses the exact spelling of the legitimate domain, so it's undetectable by URL inspection. Facebook, Google, Twitter, LinkedIn, and many other major sites are all aware of "Covert Redirect" and doing nothing about it except "monitoring the situation." The only solution, currently, would be too expensive and labor-intensive to implement.

Avoiding Problems With OAuth

So my advice is to avoid OAuth as much as possible. In practical terms, that means don't log in to a new site using your credentials from another site, such as Facebook, Twitter or Google. Create a new account the old-fashioned way, by choosing a username and password that's specific to that website. Minimize use of apps that employ OAuth. The handy service MyPermissions will identify all apps that you currently have authorized and let you remove those you don't need.

A Simple Guide to Keeping Yourself Safe on the Internet

Using the Free Sandboxie Utility

We are all aware of the dangers of malware infection from the Internet these days. The danger has always been there, but this has increased a lot more because people with malicious intents are constantly devising new methods to infect the systems, and the inexperienced, naive, general-users/elderly/teens are the most affected by it. Malware infection from the Internet can occur in many ways, a few of which are:

1. Downloading a malware infected setup/file from a malicious site
2. Venturing to a malicious site
3. Clicking on a bad link in an email, or on a page, or on a bad advertisement
4. Clicking on links that fool you into believing that there is a malware on the system and prompt you to install rogue software etc.

Although there are many ways of getting infected by malware it does not mean that we need to become paranoid, or live in constant fear of the possible consequences. With a little effort, precaution, and by using common sense we can easily avoid getting systems infected with mal-ware. Different safe practices have already been covered in various articles on this site, and can be read to learn how you can stay safe by following a few guidelines. We will all agree that precaution is always the best option.

In this article, we are going to learn how to use an excellent software called Sandboxie, which will keep you safe while surfing on the Internet.

<http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/introduction-and-quick-guide-sandboxie.htm>

Review:

Sandisk Ultra Dual Usb Drive: Android File Transfers Made Easy

by Frank Ramsey

Akron Canton PC Users Group (ACPCUG), OH

Your first question is probably what is a dual USB drive and why might it be useful?

In this context, a dual USB drive is a device that has two USB connectors. In the case of the SanDisk Ultra, as shown in the picture, it has a standard USB type A male and a standard micro USB male connector.



The connections are not to be used at the same time.

There are covers that slide over the connectors, protecting them. Since the covers are attached to the device itself, you cannot lose the cover. Best Buy has them in sizes of 16GB, 32GB and 64GB, priced around \$15, \$25 and \$50 respectively.

Yes, you could use an OTG (on the go) cable and a standard USB device with a USB type A male connector. I personally guarantee that no matter how many OTG cables you have, there will a time when you need it that you cannot find it. Not the case with this device. The two connectors are always attached to the device.

To use, slide the cover back on the connector to use and plug in the device.

Android and PC devices will typically recognize the device as external storage.

When is the device useful? When you want to backup stuff on an Android device, or transferring large amounts to/from the Android device.

Think of the picture library on your Smartphone. Have you protected it? What would happen if you drop the phone into the sink? Are your pictures gone?

Not if you use this device. Plug it into the smart phone. Using your favorite file manager, select the picture library (typically contained in a folder called DCIM). Click copy. From within the file manager, browse to the SanDisk dual USB device, typically called USBDriveA (or B or C). Select the device. Click, paste and wait until the picture library has been copied.

Now, unplug the SanDisk dual USB device from your Smartphone and plug it into your PC, copying the picture library to your PC, the Cloud, or an external USB device attached to your PC. The possibilities are endless.

Great device. Highly recommended.

Courtesy of APCUG.



Merging Photos

by Larry Piper

Midland Computer Club, MI

Ever see a row of photos at the top of a Facebook or website page? I'll bet it crossed your mind that this would be a good idea for one of your own projects.

I'll bet your next thought was that it would take a powerful photo editing tool, most likely Photoshop, to accomplish this horizontal photo montage'. Sure enough, when you did some cursory checking, words like 'layers' and 'flattening' began to appear. Or maybe you found how-to ideas for creating a photo collage', which is NOT what you had in mind.

I too went down this same road. I also discovered that the most recommended solution is to use Paint, a free program that comes with Windows. I found the Paint solution not very intuitive and a little time consuming to use. Then I discovered another solution that had been right in front of me for a number of years. It is also a free program, IrfanView. This little utility has been around since the days of Windows 95. It will open virtually every graphic file type — as well as most sound and video file types. I use it as a fast image resizer. But right there in the opening screen under the Image drop-down menu is the choice Create Panoramic Image. Perfect!

IrfanView gives you the choice of horizontal or vertical merging of photos. You add the photos you want, rearrange their order and then hit the Create key. Save the resulting photo-merge, give it a name and you are good to go. You could even resize the final image if it is too big or too small for your application.

So what about merging photos of different pixel size or resolution. No problem. I ran a few tests where the height dimensions were five times different. IrfanView makes the horizontal photo montage' a constant height. The same thing occurred when merging photos of very different resolution. Again, the merged photos were a nearly constant total pixel size. The overall picture quality has been reduced substantially, but who cares when it is being viewed over the Internet.

IrfanView is the product of Irfan Skiljan, who lists himself as graduate of Vienna University. Be sure to get the latest version which is 4.37 as of this writing.

From the April 2014 issue, Bits and Bytes, newsletter of the Midland Computer Club, MI. Courtesy of APCUG.

Windows 8 Tablet - A tablet for all reasons

by Phil Sorrentino

The Computer Club, Inc., Sun City Center, FL

Well, maybe not "all" reasons, but it certainly has some very good points in its favor. I have used an iPad, an Android tablet, and now finally a Windows 8 tablet. And let me tell you they are all great tablets and any one would be a good addition to ones computing inventory. But, as similar as they are, they are all very different in the details, and, in my opinion, that is where the ownership decision lies. I must admit that most of my experience has been with Android tablets and smartphones, so my tendency has been towards the Android "ecosystem." Yes, the literature considers these different varieties, "ecosystems," and right now there are three major ecosystems out there, Apple's iOS, Google's Android, and Microsoft's Windows 8. (Blackberry would have also been considered a few years ago, but they seem to have been eclipsed by the other three, but that might change in the future.)

Tablets, of all types, are great devices for "consuming data." They are not the best choice for creating data, though they can be used to create short documents and review most any document. Can you imagine writing your memoirs on a tablet? (I wouldn't even want to write this article on a tablet.) Tablets are very good at checking your email, checking on your stocks,

sharing pictures and videos, listening to music, social interactions, finding a nearby restaurant, getting driving directions, keeping a calendar, accessing your cloud storage, and many more very specific activities. But they are not so good for writing lengthy documents, writing and sending lengthy emails with attachments, managing your stock portfolio, managing a large picture or document database, ripping your CD music, editing pictures, creating elaborate spreadsheets, and many more generally complex computing activities.

The latest addition to my tablet collection is an 8" Dell, Windows 8 tablet. Those of us who are familiar with Windows 8 will feel right at home in front of this tablet. Yes, there are differences in the User Interface between Windows 8 on a non-touchscreen computer and on a tablet because you don't use a mouse, you use only your fingers. But all the Windows 8 functionality is right there in front of you. (Although on an 8" screen, some of the buttons are very small and may be difficult to actuate with a large finger.) Windows 8, as any user will tell you, has two distinct modes of operation, Desktop (like Windows 7) and Tiles (on the Start Screen). Those who are only familiar with Windows 7, may look at the Tile mode as unnecessary and maybe even unusual, but it is my feeling that the Tile mode really shines on a tablet. So, why didn't Microsoft develop two different Operating Systems, each optimized for the specific target hardware, computer or tablet? The answer to that is way above my pay grade, but, maybe having to maintain multiple OSes in synchronism is more difficult than combining the functionality into one OS. Only the gurus at Microsoft know the reasons and only time will tell if it was a good decision, but I'm betting that it will be a winner. The reason being; simply, Microsoft enjoys a strong corporate presence.

The Tile mode seems to be a good default for a tablet, even if it is not a good starting point for a Laptop. (For a laptop it would probably make more sense for it to start in the Desktop mode.) The tiles in Windows 8 are like the icons on an Android or Apple tablet. The Tiles are rectangular and re-sizeable. The sizes for many Tiles are Small, Medium, Wide, and Large. Because many of the Tiles are "live," meaning that changing data is being displayed on the tile, the Wide and Large sizes are useful. Tiles that don't reveal any data can be relegated to Small or Medium size, leaving more screen room for information. Tiles can be grouped and the groups can be named. With a group of only a few tiles, you can get a really good idea of what is happening in the world, at a glance. Live Tiles for Email, News, Finance, Weather, and a Calendar, will give you a pretty good summary. When you want more detailed information, just touch the appropriate tile.

One nice thing about a Windows 8 tablet is that it is a full network participant, showing up in the Network folder in Windows Explorer, with ease. Yes, you have to set it up just like any other computer you want on your network, but once that is done, it can share files, folders, and printers just like any other network participant. You can easily watch movies that reside on one of your other networked computers, on the tablet. You can play music that resides on another networked computer, on the tablet. You can access any information that has been shared on your network, easily and efficiently. Everything you know about networking applies to the tablet. Anything you do, on the network, can be done on your tablet. Most of these things can also be done with Android tablets, but in my experience, it was much more difficult with the Android Apps that I used. And, when things did work, you had an entirely different User Interface with which to become familiar. Most of the App provided User Interfaces were very different from the well known Windows (File) Explorer.

Apps really make the tablet useful. And in this area, the lack of Windows 8 Apps is probably the biggest detractor. Currently, in the battle for the largest number of Apps, both Apple and Google boast over 1 Million. Microsoft on the other hand can list only about 100,000, so they are really way behind in this area. (However, some tasks, like moving your camera pictures to your home computer, that require an Apple or Android App to accomplish can be

accomplished with Windows Explorer, which is an integral part of Windows 8.) Many, of what I'll call "basic Apps," are available. There are multiple Apps for email, news, finance, weather, cloud storage, maps, calendars, search, picture, and video viewing, music playing, social interaction, reading, and internet browsing. But, when I looked for my favorite picture viewer, it wasn't available; however the Photo Viewer that comes with the tablet works quite well. Although many of the basic Apps are available, there is certainly nowhere near the selection that is available with Apple and Android. So, if a large number of Apps is important to your decision, then the Windows 8 tablets are probably not ready for prime time. But, if taking advantage of the storehouse of knowledge that you have acquired, using Windows 8 and previous Windows Operating systems, is important to you then a Windows 8 tablet might be the right choice.

Windows 8 tablets are certainly late to the party, but once they are available at reasonable prices, and the Apps store gets a good bit larger, they just might be a really good tablet choice.

Courtesy of APCUG.

Windows Lab - Adware

by Phil Chenevert

Cajun Clickers Computer Club, LA

DEFINITION - 1) Generically, adware (spelled all lower case) is any software application in which advertising banners are displayed while the program is running. The authors of these applications include additional code that delivers the ads, which can be viewed through pop-up windows or through a bar that appears on a computer screen. The justification for adware is that it helps recover programming development cost and helps to hold down the cost for the user.

Adware has been criticized because it usually includes code that tracks a user's personal information and passes it on to third parties, without the user's authorization or knowledge. This practice has been dubbed spyware and has prompted an outcry from computer security and privacy advocates, including the Electronic Privacy Information Center.

Noted privacy software expert Steve Gibson of Gibson Research explains: "Spyware is any software (that) employs a user's Internet connection in the background (the so-called "backchannel") without their knowledge or explicit permission. Silent background use of an Internet "backchannel" connection must be preceded by a complete and truthful disclosure of proposed backchannel usage, followed by the receipt of explicit, informed consent for such use. Any software communicating across the Internet absent of these elements is guilty of information theft and is properly and rightfully termed: Spyware.

A number of software applications, including Ad Aware and OptOut (by Gibson's company), are available as freeware to help computer users search for and remove suspected spyware programs.

The Chrome browser has a neat plug in called ABP that blocks almost all ads.

From the March 2014 issue of the Cajun Clickers Computer News. Courtesy of APCUG.



Gizmo's Freeware:

**Get a New Look on the Windows Desktop with More
Interesting and Colorful Cursors**

The plain old standard mouse pointers may serve you well most of the time but now and then there comes a point when you want something different. Maybe you are like me and your eyes are not what they used to be. So you'd like cursors that are easier to find on the screen. Maybe you give presentations and your audience needs more striking cursors in order to follow what you

are doing. Or maybe you just want something jazzier for a change. One way to make changing and managing cursors easier is to use a free program called Cursor Commander.

<http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/get-new-look-windows-desktop-more-interesting-and-colorful-cursors.htm>

Two Amazing, Yet Different, Examples of Computer Graphics

Occasionally I use this column to bring you news of items which may be of interest to the computer-minded but which aren't freeware. Or indeed software of any kind. And because I haven't done such a posting for a while, here's a double bonus with links to 2 amazing things that are both graphics-oriented.

<http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/two-amazing-yet-different-examples-computer-graphics.htm>.

This Antivirus is the Number-One New Contender on the Block

Senior Editor is George.J says: "There are plenty of antivirus products on the web and you might have your own favorites. Earlier this year, 360 Security came from nowhere to beat most of the top rated antivirus products that's been there for a long time now. The product has been getting rave reviews from all quarters by independent labs and users alike.

It has achieved Advanced+ awards for Real-time protection, Performance and File detection tests at AV-Comparatives. At AV-Test it has secured the perfect 6/6 for Usability and Performance and 5.5/6 for Protection in the Total Scores.

For Windows PC users, Qihoo has provided 360 Internet Security and 360 Total Security, and is also available for Mac's and Android. We will look into the Total Security version in this review."

Does 360 Security now deserve our Top Pick award in the free anti-virus category? Well it is certainly impressive but we'll need a bit more time to examine it closely before we give it the top gong.

<http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/antivirus-number-one-contender-block.htm>

Train Your Brain While Playing Games (Android, iPhone, iPad)

Lumosity has built some scientifically designed games for five Brain Areas namely speed, memory, attention, flexibility and problem solving. Each game is to challenge your cognitive abilities in each of the Brain Areas.

When you play the games, your scores are tracked with an index called Lumosity Performance Index (LPI), which helps you compare your strengths and weaknesses in the Brain Areas, plus an overall LPI which is an average index.

Lumosity is free to play across select games for all Brain Areas but it's limited to three games per day.

<http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/train-your-brain-while-playing-games.htm>

Society News Help's Half Hour Notes-November by Jan Rothfuss

Q: One member asked whether anyone knew about Apple Pages.

A: This is a program that is similar to Microsoft Office. It was suggested that she try Libre Office (Open Office's replacement).

Q: What can you buy to protect yourself from scammers?

A: First, keep up with what is involved and what is 'safe' to do while online. Check out these websites: Web of Trust. Avast does some work to tell you that a certain web page may not

be safe. Also, if doing a search when using DuckDuckGo or IxQuick, there will be symbol indicating that it is their official site. That one is usually safe to go to.

Q: When a member tries to bring up Google, he gets an error message. Why?

A: There could be a Google server issue. Or, if you are using a wifi, you may be a bit too far away from the router/connection.

Q: One member is having trouble getting things he used to be able to see like *The New York Times*. He has a new Apple password from them last week.

A: The password may have been temporary, lasting only 24 hours. You may want to initiate a password change again and be sure to log in right away to get a permanent change in place. It was also suggested that he use KeyChain, a program that will save your passwords for you as you successfully log in.

Q: When will Windows 10 be ready?

A: Rumor is early 2015. It may also be a free upgrade but that is not sure.

The website to find last month's speaker's slide deck is: Sideshare .net/msz

Help's Half Hour-December

by Jan Rothfuss

Q: Both of a member's machines are XP and he is considering the purchase of a new machine. Any recommendations?

A: It was suggested that he move to at least Windows 7. If he considers a Windows 8 machine, a touch screen was recommended.

Q: A member is getting a message that a printer cannot be found. But it sometimes still prints. He can select the printer from the dropdown list.

A: It was suggested that he check to make sure that his printer has been selected as the default printer by going into the "Devices and Printers" and verifying that the green checkmark is on his printer.

Q: A member is trying to send emails to yahoo users but, no matter who he tries, it bounces back.

A: He may be able to review the message and get a clue. Is there a Yahoo Blacklist?

Info from Tony: XP is no longer supported by Microsoft. There is a monthly malicious software removal tool and, perhaps, a Microsoft update. Autopatcher can be used and it will contain XP updates, along with other OS. For access open a browser window and go to Autopatcher.net. The first download will take a while but, after that, you are able to visit periodically and get the latest download quickly. You will see XP along with other OSes.

The Lighter Side

