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Next Meeting  
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Personal Finance Software  
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## Cybercrime and Phishing

by Kathy Frey

*Computer Club of Green Valley, AZ*

**A**t one time or another we all will be a victim of some form of Cybercrime and Phishing. The use of any preventive product is of little help if you don't practice safe computing. Help protect yourself:

- 1: Watch out for "phishy" emails. The most common form of phishing is emails pretending to be from a legitimate retailer, bank, organization, or government agency. Delete them. Do not open them.
- 2: Don't click on links within emails that ask for your personal information.
- 3: Beware of "pharming." This was also known as redirect. In this version of online ID theft, a virus or malicious program is secretly planted in your computer and hijacks your Web browser. When you type in the address of a legitimate Web site, you're taken to a fake site

without realizing it. Malicious programs can be either spyware, adware or malware. Run your spyware scanning programs. Malwarebytes is a recommended program.

- 4: Never enter your personal information in a pop-up screen.
- 5: Only open email attachments if you're expecting them and know what they contain.
- 6: Phishing also happens by phone. You may get a call from someone pretending to be from a company or government agency, making various kinds of false claims and asking for your personal information. Quite often it is about some problem with your computer. There is no way they can possibly know if you even own a computer. If you have caller ID, screen your calls, and do not answer calls from phone numbers you do not recognize.
- 7: If someone contacts you and says you've been a victim of fraud, verify the person's identity before you provide any personal information. Get a phone number and call them back. Or call who they are supposed to represent and ask if that business is making those kinds of calls.
- 8: Report phishing, whether you're a victim or not. Tell the company or agency that the phisher was impersonating.
- 9: Don't be embarrassed, take action immediately if you've been hooked by a phisher. If you provided account numbers, PINS, or passwords to a phisher, notify the companies with whom you have the accounts right away. For information about how to put a "fraud alert" on your files at the credit reporting bureaus, contact the Federal Trade Commission's ID Theft Clearinghouse, [www.consumer.gov/idtheft](http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft).  
Most Recent Scam Alerts from the Federal Trade Commission:  
Stand up to fake debt collectors - April 10, 2015  
Unlocking the code - April 3, 2015  
The FTC didn't send that sweepstakes letter – April 2, 2015  
Scammers play name game and get caught – March 27, 2015  
An invoice today gets the doctor to pay – March 26, 2015  
Reluctant to be rude? – March 25, 2015  
Don't pay for a vacation to nowhere – March 19, 2015  
It's the IRS calling...or is it? – March 12, 2015  
Cleaning up without getting cleaned out – March 6, 2015
- 10: When shopping online be careful and look for boxes that are pre-checked for you to receive offers from them or their partners. Be sure to uncheck the boxes and opt-out if you don't want to receive any communications. Even legitimate retailers count on you not unchecking the boxes to opt-out.

*From the Summer 2015 edition of Green Bytes, newsletter of Computer Club of Green Valley, AZ. Courtesy of APCUG.*

## Five Things the Tech Industry Won't Tell You

by Greg Skalka

*Under the Computer Hood User Group, CA*

**I**n a nod to the Wall Street Journal Sunday's imaginative, interesting and informative "10 Things . . . (xxx) Won't Tell You" columns, I offer my half-sized version. The tech industry's annual new product celebration, CES (Consumer Electronic Show), occurred in January. I've never attended, but I enjoy reading about the latest tech items presented each year.

Each year brings a new batch of innovative products that get the favorable buzz. Sometimes items at the show succeed in the marketplace, while others never make it to prime time.

## **1. 'The latest is not necessarily the greatest.'**

The main purpose of a lot of new products is often not to help the customer but to make money for the tech companies. Occasionally this results in products that despite a big marketing effort are not well received by consumers. It may be due to a company going in the wrong direction, hastily putting out a shoddy product or attempting to pass off a few changes (some perhaps not really wanted by consumers) as a new product.

Windows 8 is an example of a desire to sell something that the customer really does not want. Microsoft seems to get it right in terms of operating systems only about every other attempt. They were very successful with Windows 98, but then disappointed with the release of Windows Me (Millennium Edition). They captured almost all the market with the popular Windows XP OS, but then followed it up with poorly-received Vista.

After correcting their mistakes in well-received Windows 7, their successor, Windows 8, went in a direction most computer users did not want to go. Since Microsoft has decided that they must skip the number nine, all we can do is hope Windows 10 is an improvement when it is released this year, as our time with Windows 7 is limited (mainstream support ended on Jan. 13; extended support, which includes free security updates, will end in five years).

Unfortunately, Microsoft continues to irritate me with their new versions of Office. It is a very powerful application but most users only scratch the surface of its capabilities. I use it daily for work, but never to its fullest potential. Yet they continue to add additional obscure features and greatly change the familiar user interface to let them somehow justify selling a new version every other year or so. Now they want to sell it by subscription, so users can become just a revenue stream.

And let's not get me started on Microsoft Bob.

## **2. 'Your old stuff probably still works just fine for what you need.'**

Some consumers are enamored with the latest thing and must upgrade whenever possible. It seems to me that these are the customers Apple is often targeting with their new smart phones and tablets. Tech companies would like their customers to think like some car buyers used to (and some maybe still do), and trade up to their latest product every year or two. In most cases, the product the consumer already has meets most if not all of their present real needs. Just as with automobiles, "trading in" for a new smart phone, laptop, camera or office suite too often can cost a lot with little increase in benefits.

A number of PC users hung on to Windows XP a lot longer than Microsoft would have liked. Though the poor reputations of Vista and Windows 8 contributed, a lot of XP users resisted switching because XP met their needs. Businesses were particularly reluctant to switch. I am presently using three XP computers at my work, a small telecom equipment design firm. I also still have a couple of XP computers at home (I wrote this column on one), though I'm definitely phasing them out because of security concerns.

A lot of technology costs a lot when initially introduced, but drops in price once it is more widely adopted and production volumes increase. Staying off the cutting edge can save money but still provide a good user experience.

## **3. 'This new stuff may seem great, but it is still a long way from reality.'**

Highly innovative new products can capture the imagination, but most successful new products are the result of iterative development. These iterations can require years to finally come up with an implementation that is cost-effective for consumers.

I was excited about Google Glass when I first heard about it a few years ago. I'd hoped by now it would have had greater availability and a lower price, but instead Google has just announced that it is halting production of this model. I am encouraged that Microsoft is

working on the HoloLens device, but I expect I'll be waiting a while longer to personally experience this type of device. With luck Google will continue development of Glass as well; I'd hate to see it become the Segway of computing device

It also seems to be taking a long time to get autonomous cars into the hands of consumers. The Google Self-Driving Car project has been in existence for a number of years, having logged nearly 700,000 autonomous miles. A new prototype without human controls will begin testing this year. A number of major auto manufacturers are also at work on autonomous cars. Google believes that it will be able to offer a self-driving car to the public between 2017 and 2019. The legal issues may take as long to work out as the technical ones, however. Meanwhile, we may get there piecemeal as car-makers offer features like self-parking (for parallel parking) and auto braking now

#### **4. 'New technology may provide benefits, but there are usually unintended consequences.'**

Almost every new technology introduced has resulted in job losses somewhere in the economy. The automobile put a huge dent in buggy sales. Streaming video wiped out most of the jobs involved in video disc rental. Computers and robotics greatly reduced factory employment. Digital cameras decimated the photographic film industry and computers and tablets have reduced the need for photo prints.

These technologies have of course created new jobs of different types, but this forces great change on the industries and employees. Email and social media have greatly reduced the number of letters delivered by the Postal Service, so it has had to recast itself as a deliverer of Amazon packages. Unskilled labor is being pushed out as almost all workers, from the burger flipper to the airline pilot, must deal with video displays and electronic controls on the job.

The Internet has revolutionized communications, education, shopping, entertainment and our relationships. Smart phones and social media have greatly changed our culture and our society. We get our news, find our jobs and pick our mates using the Internet. Crime has followed the technology path to our money; it is not in the banks, but in our personal information. Identity theft, phishing, cyber terrorism, sexting and laws against texting while driving are all unintended consequences of our new technology.

Our technology may have had a hand in changing our planet's climate and it may ultimately provide us with a remedy, but some initial tech solutions have provided mixed results. Nuclear power has the promise of carbon-free energy, but radioactive leaks have resulted in disasters. Wind power seems to be a clean renewable source of energy but the large rotating blades may also cause excessive bird kills. The new Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System in the Mohave Desert may be scorching thousands of birds each year with its concentrated reflected light.

How will new tech advances change our economy and our society in the future? We can guess that widespread use of autonomous cars might make our highways safer, increase productivity by reclaiming lost commute time and wipe out the taxi industry. What other unanticipated effects will it have on us? Police body cameras and other public video surveillance may reduce misconduct, but how will they affect privacy? Will virtual reality technology wipe out the travel industry? Will increased use of online communications and telepresence devices leave us virtually connected but physically isolated in our homes? Will biotech advances turn us into a long-lived, genetically engineered species? Will our computers and autonomous vehicles achieve artificial intelligence? We can never fully predict the future.

## 5. 'Playing the Luddite is pointless, as technology is transforming our society as we speak.'

The Luddites were 19th century English workers who rebelled against technology by smashing the new machines that were taking their jobs. They were not successful in stopping progress and it is likely modern opposition to technology would be ineffective on the whole. Cell phone networks are being spread through almost every developing country and satellite-based Internet and Wi-Fi installations are increasing, so soon no one will be able to escape technology's reach. Our culture and our relationships are being changed by our technology. We may not be able to put the genie back in the bottle, even if we wanted to.

*From the February 2015 issue of Drive Light, newsletter of the Under the Computer Hood User Group, CA. Courtesy of APCUG.*



### Create Foreign Language Characters

Q. My keyboard has several diacritic marks, including the tilde and circumflex accent. How does one place such a mark over a letter?

A. Diacritic marks? Circumflex accents? Pulleezee! Around here we refer to those as doohickies and squiggly things, so kindly refrain from using such high-falootin' technical jargon in the future. I do have a reputation to protect, you know.

Turning to the squiggly thing that is also known as a tilde, on the keyboard it's a single character. But since you cannot press two keys at the same time – and Lord knows I've tried – you cannot force the keyboard tilde to appear above another letter by brute strength.

ALT Codes are required to create special characters such as , 1 ½ ñ, which may not display on all systems. ALT Codes are deployed by using the ALT key in concert with the numeric keypad located on the right side of most keyboards – not the numbers at the top of your keyboard. Make sure the NUM LOCK is toggled on in order to use ALT Codes. To view a list of most ALT Codes and the special characters they create, take a look at Washington State University's list of Doohickies and Squiggly Things at <http://tinyurl.com/9ylga>.

Q. How can I convert a bookmark into a Desktop icon for faster access? Thanks, Mr. M.

A. The easiest thing to do is go to the Web site that you want to create a shortcut to, then drag it to the Windows Desktop. To do that, place your cursor on the little icon to the left of its address as it appears in your browser and drag that to the Desktop. It will instantly create a shortcut to the site. Press F2 to rename the shortcut, if you wish. Depending on the browser you're using, you might be able to drag it from the list of bookmarks itself. Then again, you might not.

As an alternative, if you don't mind a little hard work, you can roll up your sleeves and create it manually: First, note the address of the Web page so you have that at hand or in mind, whichever is the most reliable. Let's use Google as an example. Its address is <http://www.google.com>.

Right-click anywhere on the Desktop and select New > Shortcut. In the Location field type Google's address, then click Next and give the shortcut a name – something clever like ôGoogleö will work – then click Finish. That's all there is to it.

Q. The sound system in my new car will allow me to plug in a USB drive and play songs. I have quite a few, so how large of a drive should I buy to copy my songs to?

A. Assuming your songs are in MP3 format and each song is approximately three minutes in length, every 2GB can accommodate approximately 500 songs. So a 4GB drive can hold 1000 songs, a 32GB drive 8000 songs and a 64GB drive a whopping 16,000 songs.

Converting all those tunes into listening time breaks down as follows: 500 songs, without allowing for time between songs, will play for 25 hours; 1000 songs will play for 50 hours (more than two days of 24/7 tunes); 8000 songs. 5.5 days; 16,000 songs, more than 11 24-hours days. Yikes!

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

### Episode Guides

Here you will find lists and links containing episode titles and air dates for more than 6,900 TV shows. Type in the name of a show, old or new, use the ôCurrent Showsö link or the alphabetical listing. Also included are links to TV-related retailers, schedules and UK-based radio shows.

[www.epguides.com](http://www.epguides.com)

### The Body Explained

Hosted by Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, this portion of the “Bio Ed” site uses original video clips to answer common questions about the functioning of the human body. Browse the site's list of delightfully light-hearted yet informative video explanations. Make your selections, then sit back, watch and discover the answers to such life-altering questions as, “What causes an ice cream headache?” and “Why do our ears pop?”

<http://tinyurl.com/o57gltg>

### Where's George?

This entertaining and quasi-informative site tracks where your U.S. dollars go – not in a budgeting sense, but geographically. Enter the serial number(s) of your bills and leave a comment explaining where you obtained them, what condition each bill is in, or if you made any special markings on any bills (which you're not supposed to do). As other individuals check their serial numbers, if someone receives one of your bills, they will presumably note the same information so you can track the meanderings of your dollars. Registration (first name and email address) is required to check the whereabouts of any bills you enter. The same service, called Where's Willy ([whereswilly.com](http://whereswilly.com)) is available for tracking Canadian currency.

[www.wheresgeorge.com](http://www.wheresgeorge.com)

*To subscribe to Mr. Modem's award-winning weekly computer-help newsletter and receive personal responses to your questions, visit [www.MrModem.com](http://www.MrModem.com). Courtesy of Mr. Modem.*

## How to Stream TV

by Sandy Berger

*CompuKiss.com*

**T**here is no doubt that the world of television content and the way we get that content is changing. Many people are “cutting the cord” by turning their backs on cable and satellite TV. These folks are turning to streaming TV shows and movies. For those of you who are not yet familiar with “streaming,” here's a quick tutorial on how to stream and what you need.

Streaming is named for a technique for transmitting data over the Internet so that it can be processed as a steady and continuous stream. This differs from downloading content in which the entire chunk of data must be downloaded before it can be processed. Most users do not have enough bandwidth to download an entire movie or TV show, so streaming is a great technique. During streaming the content is constantly being processed so you can watch the show while it is being processed with no interruption.

Streaming allows you to watch television shows and movies without having a cable or satellite subscription. You can use streaming to augment a basic cable or satellite TV subscription or to eliminate cable or satellite subscriptions completely making it a valuable tool for TV watching.

Also, Netflix and Amazon are now producing their own programming, much of which, like House of Cards, has become very popular. With streaming you can also watch a wide variety of movies and the past episodes of many different TV shows.

Even if you are not technically inclined, you will find that streaming is quite simple to setup. Here's what you need.

First – a HDTV with a HDMI port. While older analog TVs can also be set up to stream, having an HDMI port make it much easier. All HDTVs, which include most newer TVs have these ports. To find them look at the back of the TV, they are usually labeled HDMI.

Second – You need a good broadband Internet connection. This is how the data (movies) will get to your television. The faster the better and you might want to upgrade your Internet, but you may not have to. Try it with the connection you have right now. You might be pleasantly surprised.

Third – you need a streaming media device. Some newer TVs and most Blu-ray players can access the Internet. If you have one of these you can use it as your media streaming device.

If you don't have one of these, you will need to purchase a new device. The good news is that these devices are small and inexpensive. These devices include Chromecast, Roku, and Amazon Fire TV and Fire Stick. They range in price from \$30 to \$100. I have tried them all and they all work quite well. If you already belong to Amazon Prime, an Amazon Fire might be the best choice. To get the best selection of content, Roku is the best. In any case, the main difference in price is often whether the device comes with a remote control or not. If it doesn't come with a remote, like the Chromecast, you will have to use a tablet or mobile phone to control it. If that doesn't appeal to you, opt for one with a remote.

Fourth – you will need a wireless router. Although some devices can hook up directly to your wired Internet router, in most cases your television is not in the same room as the Internet connection making it necessary to have a wireless router to transmit the data wirelessly to your television. If you already have wireless in your home for a tablet or phone, you are all set.

When you get your streaming media device home, you simply plug it into the TV. Set the TV to the proper input like HDMI 1 or HDMI 2, then follow the set up instructions that will appear on the screen. All are easy to follow. The only thing you will need is to know the password for your wireless network if it is password protected.

After the setup you will see your choices of things to watch. Some of these will be free, some will have extra costs. For instance Netflix and Hulu both have a ton of content, but each charges about \$10 a month. Fortunately both have free trials which you can use.

Watching streaming media on your TV is not as simple as watching cable TV. There are little inconveniences. Every time you want to switch to your streaming device, you have to change the input on your television. Also there is no simple guide as the one you get with cable or satellite TV. You often have to search for what you want to watch. The Amazon Fire TV (not the Fire Stick) makes this easier because its remote has a voice search which works quite well.

Just speak the name of a movie, actor, or director and it will find the movie you want. This, however, only works for Amazon Prime movies and shows. Also, if you have more than one subscription, you have to remember which movies are on which service ...now was *Orange is the New Black* on Netflix, Hulu, or Amazon?

Yet, the inconveniences are minor and there are advantages. For instance, after I started streaming I was able to watch the entire series of *Downton Abbey* on Amazon and *House of Cards* on Netflix at my convenience. How wonderful to watch a few episodes a week until I got caught up!

If you haven't yet tried streaming, be sure to check it out. You may find a new way of watching television that can save you money and give you new options.

*Courtesy of APCUG.*

## Neverputt

by Cal Esneault

*Cajun Clickers Computer Club, Baton Rouge, LA*

Neverputt is a multi-player miniature golf computer game available as a free download for Linux, Windows, and MAC OS. The underlying physics simulator and OpenGL renderer were originally developed for Neverball, a classic motion-sensing game where a ball is manipulated to strike targets and increase your score. Both of these games support mouse, keyboard, game pad, and joystick input (they were originally created about a decade ago). Neverputt allows selection of 7 different courses of varying difficulty. It is a challenging game combining both skill and strategy and is suitable for all ages.

I installed Version 1.5.4 from the Ubuntu repository for my Linux Mint system. Screenshots below show the layout for one of the "easy" holes. A triangular guide behind the ball allows you to aim the direction and determine stroke intensity based on the length of the guide. The three-dimensional view changes as you aim to give you proper perspective. Swing too easy and the ball will not reach the target. Swing too hard and the ball will hit the flag and bounce to the side or it will bounce over the side rail and result in a one-stroke penalty. Based on layout configuration, "par" values range from 2 to 5 strokes. An updated scorecard is provided after

each hole. For multi-players, participant shots rotate in turn.

As you progress through a course, different challenges appear. For example, below (left) forces you up an incline and then down a ramp. A "hole" is in the middle of the turn (fall into it and you get a penalty stroke. Other obstacles include moving walls, "dips" and "hills" in your path, ramps with no borders that let the ball fall off the course, etc. You can be aggressive and try to conquer the problem quickly to reduce stokes or



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slowly “nudge” into a better position with more, but controlled, intermediate shots. Some of the courses include strange ramps and multi-levels as shown below (right). A few holes are frustratingly difficult, but after numerous shots the game will mercifully let you pass onto the next hole.

The game engine follows realistic physics. For example, a ball will roll up and down a depression until it comes to rest after a realistic time, energy will dissipate when you hit a border wall, and the ball will curve if rolled at an angle on a hill.

Neverputt is distributed as part of the Neverball network (go to [neverball.org](http://neverball.org)). Also, Neverputt has been released to the open-source community at large. The web site lists the names of the many contributors, and it also lists the specific areas in which these developers and artists have helped.

*From the January 2015 issue of the CCCC Computer News. Courtesy of APCUG.*

## AntiVirus Protection No Longer Needed?

by Bob Rankin  
*askbobrankin.com*

**A** startup firm says that security software on your computer is unnecessary. Their solution to protect users against viruses and other malware is simple: keep malware out by not letting the Internet in. Here is how Menlo Security plans to do it....

### What is Menlo Security?

A new approach to protecting end users against malware was revealed the first week of June, when Menlo Security emerged from its “stealth” period with \$25 million in venture capital and an outline of its plan to put anti-malware software developers out of business.

One of the big problems with conventional anti-malware solutions is keeping up with the bad guys. As I reported in May, an average of 255,000 new malware threats are detected each day. Anti-malware software will always be behind in detecting new threats; some will slip through, inevitably. Another problem is getting users to install anti-malware software on their devices and keep it up to date.

Menlo Security aims to solve both of those problems by acting as an intermediary (proxy) that filters out all the bad stuff, before it has a chance to reach your computer.

When a browser fetches a web page, normally the request goes directly to that website. In Menlo’s approach, HTTP requests for content go to a Menlo Security Isolation Platform (MSIP) instead. The MSIP fetches the requested content and executes everything in it — Java applets, Flash animations, PDF files, and other things in which bad guys like to hide malicious code. Everything, good and bad, executes in a virtual machine created just for that user session on an MSIP server.

The MSIP transmits to the user only “rendering information,” the essential code that makes a website appear and behave as it should in your browser. Animations still roll, but without Flash. Shopping carts, cookies, browser plugins, and other widgets work just as they should. There is no noticeable delay while MSIP does its magic, according to Menlo.

### Hit Me With Your Best Shot

Meanwhile, any malware in the Web content is vainly struggling to do its dirty work in the virtual machine. When the user ends a Web session, the virtual machine and everything in it just vanishes.

Bromium vSentry takes a similar approach of isolating Web content in a virtual machine. But it requires installation of software on the end user’s machine. The virtual machine actually runs on the end user’s device.

Menlo plans to deploy its MSIP platform as a cloud service (public or private), and as a turnkey solution sold to enterprises who want to run their own MSIP servers. Right now, at launch, there's nothing consumers can run out and buy. So don't uninstall your security software just yet.

Menlo has two other "products" that seem to be just special use cases of the MSIP. The "Email Isolation Service" does not prevent malware-infected email attachments from doing their damage. It simply filters Web content requests when users click on links in email. The "Doc Isolation Service" renders dangerous documents such as PDFs, Word docs, and Excel spreadsheets in an MSIP virtual machine, and makes "sanitized" versions available for downloading or viewing in a browser.

Menlo Security has a potentially game-changing concept. Enterprises may well jump on MSIP to solve security problems for their many employees. But Menlo will have a bigger challenge getting end users to let Menlo filter all of the Web content they see.

Effectively, Menlo acts as a gatekeeper, allowing only what it deems "fit" to get to end users. There's no evidence that they would do any sort of censoring. But since everything you retrieve from the Web will pass through Menlo servers before reaching you, there will of course be privacy concerns. Tin-foil hats will be twitching.

### **Downloads: An Achilles Heel?**

One question that remains after reading Menlo's documentation is how they will handle downloads, and in general, the introduction of new software. Long-time readers here will know that I've written about the problem of foistware often. Will they simply block users from downloading new software? Will the downloads be "sanitized" to remove unwanted or malicious components?

### **What about software that's installed from a CD or flash drive?**

Traditional anti-virus programs scan executable files (software) and analyze both their content and behavior while running. Menlo's solution (which is confined to your Web browser) doesn't seem to address this at all.

I see much promise in Menlo's approach to preventing Web-based malware threats. But does it really eliminate the need for anti-virus software? I'm not sure it does. Once I've had an opportunity to try the MSIP service, I'll report back.

Additionally, why won't Fido or Fifi answer the phone when you call? What's different about Russian Internet trolls? And how many angels can dance on a 128-GB flash drive? 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!

In a four-story government building in St. Petersburg, hundreds of Kremlin trolls work 12-hour days flooding the Internet with Vladimir Putin's view of the world. If only we knew where the "Washington trolls" work.

Only in Japan (or first, anyway) will you find the "Internet of Animals," better known as AniCall. A digital collar on a pet communicates via Bluetooth with a smartphone app, enabling behavior and health monitoring, and lost-pet alerts to neighboring Anicall users. Remember when a cat could just be a cat?

CIRFU.NET is the domain where the FBI parks hundreds of domain names of websites it has shut down, including file-sharing service MegaUpload.com. But oopsie ... the FBI allowed CIRFU.NET to expire, and a porn peddler snapped it up.

Woolworths supermarkets in Australia leaked the gift card data of nearly 8,000 customers, enabling thieves to steal \$1.3 million worth of value stored on the cards.

Why doesn't your dog or cat recognize your face on a smartphone screen? Scientists say dogs see differently, while cats just don't give a darn about you.

Here's a new way to wake up disappointed every morning. SensorWake is a new alarm clock that wakes you gently with the mouth-watering aromas of coffee, hot pastries, fresh cut grass, and even the sweet, sweet smell of cash.

A woman donated several boxes of her late husband's gadgets to an electronics recycling firm. Among the discards was an Apple One computer with a wooden case hand-built by Steve Wozniak, which sold for \$200,000. The shop is seeking the woman, who did not leave her name, to give her half of the proceeds.

Google Maps has partnered with real-time public transit data providers in 25 locations to tell commuters exactly where that bus or train that was supposed to be here 15 minutes ago is right now.

SanDisk has released a 128 GB USB flash drive (\$120) that is the size of a dime and is sure to get lost in seat cushions.

George "I guarantee it" Zimmer, ousted head of Mens Warehouse, has launched zTailor, an "Uber for tailors" app that will bring a tailor to you for custom alterations of the suit you bought 20 pounds ago.

The ultimate stay-cation ... Choice Hotels Intl. is seeking \$145,500 in damages from a Florida man who discovered that the lodging chain's rewards system did not delete gift card credits he was given after he canceled the reservations that earned the credits. "Frequent-stay programs are common throughout the industry and neither Choice nor its competitors offer rewards for frequent reservations," the lawsuit said.

*Courtesy of Mr. Rankin.*

## Learning to Program

by Dick Maybach

*Brookdale Computer Users' Group, NJ*

If you are interested in learning about programming, or you'd like to introduce a young person to it, how do you begin? Clearly, the approach would differ for an eight-year-old who wants to design a game, for an adult who is curious about how software works, or for a student considering a computer science major in college. You can't learn programming by approaching it as an abstract concept. Instead you have to come down to earth and wrestle with real code, and this means you first have to pick a programming language. With hundreds to choose from, this can be difficult. However, if you have a particular application in mind, the choice is easier. For example, if you want to code extensions to Excel, you will probably choose Visual Basic. Suppose though this isn't the case, what characteristics should you look for in your first language?

- It should be simple enough that you can begin writing programs without wading through hundreds of pages of text.
- It should run on a wide variety of computer hardware and operating systems.
- There should be good tutorials for it.
- It should have a useful development environment that is a set of software to assist you in coding, debugging, and running your programs.
- There should be a forum (probably on a Website) where you can ask questions and find example programs.
- It should encourage writing clean, well-structured code. (The most notorious violators of this were early implementations of BASIC and FORTRAN, which were infested with the infamous "goto" statement to move to different points in their programs.)

I propose that you consider three languages, *Scratch*, *Python*, and modern variants of *BASIC*—Scratch for young people, the typing-challenged, and those with only a casual interest in programming, Python for almost everyone else, and a BASIC variant if you have a specific

application that uses it or if you're interested in reliving your early PC experiences. I have no experience with it, but you might also consider *Java*, which is used for both PC applications and on Websites.

*Scratch*, <http://scratch.mit.edu/>, is unusual in that, unlike any other language, it doesn't require typing skill. Instead, creating a program in Scratch involves moving shapes (representing commands) together to form a program. The physical act is much like assembling a jigsaw puzzle. As a result, someone can concentrate on the logic of a program rather than on the mechanics of assembling a command sequence. The downside is that except for the concepts of composing a set of instructions into a logical structure, there is little that you will learn that can be applied to other languages. Scratch was developed by the MIT Media Lab to introduce students, teachers, and parents to programming and to provide a stepping stone to more advanced languages. It can be run on-line using a browser or as a local application on your PC.

In the screen-shot of the Scratch development environment, the program is assembled in the center column by dragging command icons from the left column. (The contents of the left panel change depending on what class of commands is selected at the top of the column.) The top panel in the right column (called the stage) is where the program runs. In the simple case shown, the program starts when you click on the green flag at the upper right and loops continuously. The cat icon (which Scratch calls a sprite) moves 20 steps ahead; a drum beats twice, the cat moves 20 steps back; a different drum beats twice; and this repeats. A second routine below the main program results in the sprite changing color each time you press the space bar. The bottom panel in the right column is where you change the sprite, its costume, and the stage background.

While Scratch is clearly not suited to data crunching, it can be used for surprisingly complex games and animations. That it doesn't require typing means that even young children can learn logic and the basis of programming. Its downside is that it's a dead end, since except for encouraging logical thinking it doesn't provide a path to other programming environments. However, the skills it does help develop are invaluable and shouldn't be overlooked. For more information, see *Scratch 2.0 Programming for Teens*, by Jerry Lee Ford, Jr., or make a Web search for "scratch language."

*Python* is a modern programming language, suitable both for learning the craft and working at a professional level. As a result it's a good choice for a range of users, from the casual hobbyist through someone who is considering a career in programming. When you begin learning Python, you will probably use it within the Idle Development Environment, which facilitates editing, debugging, and running programs. Idle has two windows – one for editing the program and one for running it. In the screen-shot, the program runs in the left window, called the shell, and you edit code in the one on the right.

The simple program shown calculates the area of a circle with a given radius. As you can see from the shell window and perhaps from the code, it asks you to enter the radius, prints the area, and repeats until you enter a negative number. If you are familiar with the *c* language or its variants, you have probably noted that Python is significantly simpler. In particular, it doesn't require you to declare variables; in the example it understands that *pi* and *r* are floating point quantities and that *reply* is a string.

It is probably not evident, but being able simultaneously to see both the code and its result is a very useful while learning. For example, to understand a new command, you can enter an example of its use in the shell and see immediately what it does.

Python is widely used to code application programs and on Websites. It can be approached casually, at a level not much advanced over Scratch, or with as much rigor as you can tolerate.

It supports complex data and object-oriented code structures, and as a result is often used in college programming courses. Because it originated relative recently, it takes advantage of the experiences of older languages and eliminates many of their short-comings. Good books on Python are *Python for Kids*, by Jason R. Briggs (where the examples are graphics and games, much like those for Scratch), *Learn Python the Hard Way*, by Zed A. Shaw (which is a fairly easy read with many examples and exercises), and *Learning Python*, by Mark Lutz (which, at 1500 pages is not for the faint of heart, but is well written and essential if you are serious about doing some real work with the language).

When personal computers first appeared, almost every one of them had a BASIC interpreter. Unfortunately, the early versions of the language had significant shortcomings that encouraged bad programming habits. Since then, there have been many efforts to improve and extend the language, but most of these are niche products. A possible exception is Visual BASIC, which is used to add features to Microsoft Office. As a result, unless you know that a particular variant is important to you, you probably should avoid BASIC as a vehicle to learn programming. However, if you have worked with BASIC in the dim past and would like to renew the acquaintance rather than taking on something completely new, there are some modern, no-cost variants. All of them let you write programs with good structure and provide for graphical output (neither of which was true of the early BASICs). However, their modern features result in languages that have little resemblance to traditional BASIC. Two examples are *FreeBASIC*, <http://www.freebasic.net/>, for Windows and Linux, which has a mode that is compatible with QBASIC (if you're old enough to have used that) and *Microsoft Small Basic*, <http://www.smallbasic.com/>, for Windows.

Unlike when they first appeared, PCs no longer require programming expertise to be useful. However, it is a useful skill that many find enjoyable, and if you pick an appropriate language and a good book, not difficult to acquire.

*From the February 2015 issue of BUG Bytes, newsletter of the Brookdale Computer Users' Group, NJ. Courtesy of APCUG.*

## Freeware

by Steve Costello  
*Boca Raton Computer Society, FL*

### Freeware/Crapware

Old freeware download site favorites, such as download.com, CNET downloads, Tucows, etc., are now bundling crapware, including Superfish style malware. Even others like Source Forge and File Hippo are not as safe as they once were; they don't wrap their downloads, but they do make it hard to find the right download link.

If what you want is on ninite.com, that is the safest way of getting it. If you must get it from somewhere else, make sure you don't install using the defaults, check and only install what you need, not the crapware. Further, make sure you research it to make sure it is really what you want, and check for/remove malware immediately after the install to make sure.

### Sources

<http://www.howtogeek.com/210265/download.com-and-others-bundle-superfish-style-https-breaking-adware/>

<https://discuss.howtogeek.com/t/download-sites-distributing-spyware-crapware/12449>

<http://www.ghacks.net/2015/03/13/report-all-major-download-sites-serve-potentially-unwanted-programs/>

### Google Search

Google Search now blocks crapware in the search results for downloads.

<http://www.howtogeek.com/210568/google-is-now-blocking-crapware-in-search-results-ads-and-chrome/>

## f.lux

f.lux is an application to change your display to match the lighting by time of day.

<https://justgetflux.com/>

## Web of Trust

<https://www.mywot.com/en/aboutus> says:

“Web of Trust (WOT) is a website reputation and review service that helps people make informed decisions about whether to trust a website or not. WOT is based on a unique crowdsourcing approach that collects ratings and reviews from a global community of millions of users who rate and comment on websites based on their personal experiences.”

Web of Trust is an add-on for Firefox, Google Chrome, Opera, Internet Explorer, and Safari browsers.

From the FAQ: <https://www.mywot.com/en/faq/add-on>

“WOT shows you which websites you can trust based on millions of users’ experiences around the world to help you stay safe when you search, surf, and shop online.”

<https://www.mywot.com/>

## Wi-Fi Slow Down

According to the HowToGeek blog, using slower Wi-Fi devices can slow your entire Wi-Fi network. The post explains why, and what you can do about it.

<http://www.howtogeek.com/210062/how-802.11b-devices-slow-down-your-wi-fi-network-and-what-you-can-do-about-it/>

## Other Items Discussed

VPN - <https://www.witopia.net/>

Firefox Add-ons – <https://www.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/hello/> and <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/ghostery/>

On-line Spell Checker – [www.afterthedeadline.com/](http://www.afterthedeadline.com/)

*Courtesy of APCUG.*

## The Tip Corner - February 2015

by Bill Sheff

*Lehigh Valley Computer Group, PA*

### Windows Sidebar Gadgets

Once we graduated up to Win8 the old sidebar gadgets introduced by Windows Vista can be considered a thing of the past. These Gadgets allowed you to do a lot of things such as see the weather, check the stock market and see how much strain you’re putting your computer under. And there are a lot more out there. So for those of you who still have them on your computer here is way to uninstall them if they get to crowded.

Click Start and in the Search Box, type Gadgets. The gadget window should open up: Now, right click on the gadget you want to eliminate and select Uninstall. A confirmation window opens up, so just click Uninstall again.

### Balloons, Pop-ups, and Tooltips

What’s the difference?

Well, regardless of the size, shape or color they are all known as screen tips.

So when you see a little text box that pops up over an icon, or a yellow balloon like you see in the comics, or read about a ‘description’ don’t worry about what they are called. If they

provide information when you hover over an icon or right click on something, you are looking at a screen tip.

## Windows 8 Terminology

When is an icon not an icon? When it is a Charm a Tile or an App.

OK, we know that any small picture is an icon (or GUI) which represents a program or a file. In Windows 8 there are three types of icons that are used, and each has a specific name. First we have the charms. This is a group of five icons called Search, Share, Start, Devices and Settings. When you look at a windows 8 start screen they are not visible. To open the Charms Bar you can either press the Windows key (Windows 8 keyboard key)+ C key, swipe from the right side of the screen (touchscreen) or with a mouse, point to the upper-right corner of the screen. The charms menu opens on the right edge of the screen.

The charms provide access to the following:

**Search** charm – Search for apps, settings, or files.

**Share** charm – share photos, music, movies, or links with other apps or people. For example, when viewing a web page, use the share charm to send it. You do not have to open email, and copy and paste the link. Send a favorite recipe directly from the Recipe app, or photos from the Photo app.

**Start** charm – The Start charm returns you to the Start screen. If you are already on the Start screen, the Start charm returns to the previous page. You can also shut down Windows using the Windows 8 keyboard key.

**Devices** charm – use the Devices charm to print, play media on TVs and audio systems, use more than one monitor, and send content to nearby computers and other devices such as phones.

**Settings** charm – This charm helps to personalize your computer. For example, change the volume or brightness, choose your keyboard type, access the PC settings, and turn off the computer are just a few of the selections.

Tiles are icons of apps that appear on the Start page. Many of them show active screens within the tile. They can be moved and re-sized.

Apps are shown on a secondary screen that contains all the tiles and other apps that were either included with your computer, or downloaded from an app store or some other location. They can be grouped, or dragged onto the Start screen to become a Tile.

## Organize Windows 8 Start Screen

We showed you how to remove Gadgets in older systems. And we let you know what the icons in Windows 8 are called. Now, let's look at Windows 8 and see what we can do with the apps that start accumulating.

Of course we can revert back to a Windows 7 screen, and sometimes that is handy, but lets jump into the latest windows format and see how to organize it to our liking.

Windows 8 allows us to move and adjust the size of the tiles on the desktop. So let's start by organizing by category. With a touch screen device, select the app you want to move by pressing down and holding on the tile and pulling down slightly. If you're using a mouse, just click and drag. When you drag the tile, it will appear translucent. You can group tiles such as Kindle, Nook, Overdrive, 3M, Adobe Reader and any other app that allows downloading and/or reading books into one group.

To relocate the group with a touch screen device, you can simply pinch the screen. If you have a keyboard and mouse set up, just hold down the Ctrl key and zoom out with your mouse wheel.

Then select your newly created group of tiles by pressing and pulling down slightly on them or by clicking with your mouse. Drag your group to the desired position. Once in location you click on the group or pull down slightly and you will get the option to name the group.

You can do this with the rest of your tiles until they are all organized the way you want them.

There are other things you can do with Tiles or Apps, which are a snap with a mouse. Right clicking on a tile or app opens up a pane with the following commands: Pin (or unpin) from Start; Pin (or unpin) to taskbar; Uninstall; Open New Window; Run As Administrator; Open file Location, and for the tiles Re size.

With a touch screen you can do the same thing by just holding down the tile for a second (some require that you slide it a little) and the same options appear on the bottom of the screen.

If you have a Windows 8 tablet, you probably use it a great deal for browsing the Internet. It's handy to have tiles for your favorite sites displayed front and center, so you don't have to always open your browser and pull up favorites. This also works for a Windows 8 computer with a mouse or track pad.

Just remember that you can customize the Start Screen of Windows 8, so you can pretty much get it to look just like you want it to.

## PDF Security

PDF files are usually document files that cannot be changed from the format that you receive them in. This is a good thing if you want someone to read something that cannot be altered, like a book or an important document. These files are read in what is called a PDF reader. The most common one is Adobe, but there are others that are available. So do you get annoyed when a box pops up telling you that there is an update for Adobe reader? We all do. Get them and get annoyed at them. I do not recommend you downloading these updates that come unannounced on your computer. I do recommend that you periodically go to the Adobe site and click on and download any update. Why? Let's start with the PDF file itself. PDF is one of the most widely used file formats. But unfortunately, hackers have found ways to embed malware in PDF files. New threats are discovered on almost a daily basis. So patches and updates are continuing to be generated. But if it is not from the Adobe site, the notice that you received might even be sent by somebody who does not have our best interest at heart. So rule one is to check the Adobe site periodically and download any updates. Rule two is not to download the notices that pop up on your computer without being asked.

## Application Security

With the tip above in mind you should also try and keep all your software up to date with the latest patches and upgrades. However, our computer holds dozens of application programs, so how do we keep up with it all?

First, concentrate on the programs that are most often targeted. The ones that are most commonly used. Your browsers, Office suites, etc. The more popular the program the more users that can be reached.

Second, activate any automatic update features that are available. Then your software will check its home site for patches and upgrades on a routine basis.

Third, you can use a program like Secunia Personal Software Inspector (PSI). This free program comes from a trusted security site, and scans your software for known vulnerabilities. It will tell you which programs need updating and provide links to sites where you can download patches.

Finally, let me add one more tip. When installing a new application, or a new program DO NOT, I repeat DO NOT run the normal installation. Always use the Custom button, and read



carefully each screen that comes up. Many applications now carry all sorts of additional programs. Not that they are bad in themselves, but do you need another search engine? Another toolbar? This is becoming very prevalent with downloads from even trusted sites. We don't have to clutter up our computers with stuff we do not want.

*From the February 2015 issue of the, The LVCG Journal, newsletter of the Lehigh Valley Computer Group, PA. Courtesy of APCUG.*

## Society News

Mark Zinzow's presentation on shortcuts and tips for getting the most out of your browsers was fun and educational. I don't think anyone left without at least a couple of things they couldn't wait to get home to try out. His slides can be found at [www.slideshare.net/msz](http://www.slideshare.net/msz)

## The Lighter Side



I think it's a mousetrap. What do you think? –ed.