TOGGLE

THE MICROCOMPUTER TURN (ON)

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR TACOMA-SEATTLE AREA MICROCOMPUTERUSERS

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IN THIS ISSUE

REMEMBER

TOG Membership Renewal Month Will be January From Now On

Most members renew their membership for one year at a time, and can adjust their renewal month to January by paying the $2 a month difference between their previous renewal date and January 2112. There are a few members who have paid several years in advance. Their dues will be adjusted when their renewal date comes up. They need do nothing now. Otherwise, if you have not yet made the $2 a month adjustment, please have your checks ready at the January meeting.

Contact Bob Henkel with questions (253) 537-6732 bobeh@clearwire.com

UPDATE

Communications

In *An App - What it is and What it does* Sandy Berger tells those of us who don't own a ''SmartPhone'' what all those little applications do or are for. Maybe I'm a Smart Phobe, eh?

In *How to Make Your Computer Useless* Vinnie Labash points out that your data are the most important items stored on your computer and discusses ways to protect and save them in a safe place or using a safe method.

In *TrueCrypt* the author tells us all about: ''Free open-source data encryption software for Windows 7/Vista/XP, Mac OS X, and Linux'' The idea is to encrypt your entries in online sites so that only those who you choose to give the encryption code can read them.

In *Skype Reformats Phone Numbers on Websites* the author describes how to modify an undesired automatic option in Skype.

Operating System

In The Tip Corner the author discusses how to discover how some items changes from Vista or XP in Windows 7. How to handle Google Images, reviews some system tools you may have forgotten about. He also suggests that you inform yourself of the plethora of templates avaiable in both Microsoft Office but Open Office as well.

General Interest

In *Freebies* the author gives some tips on how to use things that you already have as well as adding or upgrading some hardware.

In *ABC's of Digital Photography* the author ''...shares his lifelong interest in photography and the tips to help make our photography more useful, and endearing. Photos tell a story.'' Here he helps us tell ours.

Hardware

In *Cleaning Your Screen* the author points out that glass screens are a thing of the past and the new plastic screens offten have a delicate coating that requires some care when applying cleansers.

In *Should you worry about Image Retention on an LCD Monitor?* the author thought it didn't happen with LCD screens but learned otherwise. He gives some good advice that I think most of us already follow. If you're not sure, take a look.

In *External USB Drive Enclosures* the author mentions a potential dearth of available hard drives due to flooding in Thailand where most are manufactured. He describes two relatively inexpensive commercially available hard drives and an enclosure for mounting them externally. If you are in the market take a look.

COMMUNICATIONS NOTES & TIPS

An App - What it is and What it does

by Sandy Berger (Sandy (at) compukiss.com), Compu-KISS

An app can be found on the iPhone and the iPad as well as many other smart phones and tablet PCs. In fact, Apple's introduction of the idea of apps in 2008 is what made smart phones and tablet PCs so popular. Up until that time, we were all used to full-blown programs like those that run on a computer. Most of these programs contain millions of lines of code, have numerous functions, and have menus that open up to reveal a multitude of choices.

In contrast, an app is a little mini program that has one basic function. It is an expression in simplicity. A good app does only one thing and it does it very quickly and easily. There are no nested menus and there are very few choices to make. One similarity between a full-blown program and an app is that both can be started by an icon that you choose by using a mouse or by pressing your finger on the screen. One of the best things about apps are that they are easy to use. The true beauty of the apps, however lies in their variety. There are hundreds of thousands of apps, but you don't have to use them all. You can choose only the ones you want. A computer program may be able to handle 100 different functions. Even if you only want to use one of those functions, you still have to install the entire program. Apps are different. You only install the ones you need.

However, like computer programs, apps are specific to an operating system. For example, a program that is created for the Mac will not run on a PC. An app that was created for the iPhone will not work on an Android phone. Each operating system has their own App Store or Marketplace where you can download apps. Many apps are free. Many are under $2.

Right now there is a large selection of apps for the Apple iPhone and iPad at the iTunes App Store. BlackBerry, Google (Android), Microsoft, Nokia, and Samsung all offer apps through their own app storefronts.

If you have never used a smart phone or a tablet PC that uses apps, you will be amazed by the sheer number and variety of apps. Apple has over 300,000 apps in their App Store. Google has more than 200,000 in their marketplace. Because of the wide variety of apps, it is difficult to talk about them all, but let me give you a quick idea of what an app can do. Using an app, you can you express your artist abilities, play the piano, or visit with your Facebook friends. You can turn your phone into a level to get that picture straight, or turn it into a light saber and become a savior of the universe. There are apps to let you play games, find recipes, read news, get stock quotes, follow sports, shop, and compare prices. There are apps that help you relax, time the seeping of your tea, identify any song, tune your guitar, and even match the color of any object to a paint color.

Yes, there is an app that will help you do almost anything. And people are using these apps in numbers that seem almost unimaginable. The Apple app store opened on July 10, 2008 and they have already had over 10,000,000,000 downloads. The wild popularity of apps will entrench that word in the technical dictionaries for many years to come.

How to Make Your Computer Useless

By Vinny La Bash

Make Your Computer Either Stupid, Useless or a Zombie

There are many ways to make your computer useful and reliable: add memory, buy more storage, and be sure to purchase gear and peripherals from reliable vendors. Some people nevertheless, seem determined to find ways to get into trouble. As a TV ad once proclaimed, ''We all do dumb things from time to time,'' but making your computer useless doesn't have to be one of them.

Inadvertently choosing a wrong key combination, clicking OK in an online dialog box designed to deceive you into unknowingly downloading malware or unthinkingly doing something genuinely dumb are all preventable. They are easily avoided if only a small amount of premeditated thought and common sense are applied.

Are you a ''Nervous Newbie?'' People new to computers are often fearful of damaging their equipment. Don't worry! No matter what crazy combination of keystrokes you activate, the computer will not explode. Short of throwing the thing off a rooftop or beating it with a blunt instrument, it's highly unlikely you could do anything to seriously affect your hardware.

Instead, ask yourself, ''What would happen if I lost all my data?'' The answer will determine what kind of backup plan you should implement. If all you do is surf the Internet, fool around playing games, and spend time on a social network site, you don't need much of a backup plan. If you run a business that depends on data that must be constantly updated, losing it all may mean you will retire much earlier than you anticipated at a reduced standard of living. Your personal situation is probably somewhere between these two examples.

Most people are at least vaguely aware that they should back up their system, but never get around to it because it's too much trouble. System crashes and data loss occur for many reasons. Power surges, lightning strikes, hardware failures, software glitches, and user error are among the common causes of losing information.

Your data is the most important part of your system. You can always reinstall a program, but there is nowhere you can go to buy a copy of your precious data. You must make a copy of your information, and have a recovery plan in place before disaster strikes. You don't have to buy a backup program. Windows 7 has a perfectly good one built-in. You can quickly find it in Control Panel. Use it. You won't be sorry.

Store your backups on a removable disk or flash drive. An increasingly popular alternative is to store data online. Whatever you do, it's important to keep your backups at a location away from your computer to protect against theft of your system or natural disasters. To find the best method for your personal needs there is no better place than your local computer user group. You will find centuries of experience at your disposal.

Losing your data is no fun, but losing your entire system can be much worse. No computer should operate unprotected from electrical surges. The best form of protection is with an Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS). It is internally powered by a battery that ensures a smooth flow of power even if an outage occurs. This gives you sufficient time for an orderly shutdown to avoid not only loss of information, but physical damage to the computer. Most surge suppressors are worse than useless because they give you a false sense of security.

A surge suppressor can protect a system from a voltage spike usually at a cost of severe internal damage to the surge suppressor. There is seldom any visible sign of harm so it's easy to assume you are still protected when you are not. A high quality UPS provides far more safety.

Most of us like a genuine bargain, and a great temptation is to believe free is always better than merely inexpensive. There are many high quality freeware programs, and many of dubious value. Some freeware programs are so sloppily written they can cause your computer to behave erratically or come to a screeching halt. Even if you take care to research and install only the best of the best, too many installs and uninstalls create useless entries in the registry. If not properly removed, these registry orphans can create their own problems such as system slowdowns and strange behavior. For good system performance, install only the programs you really need, and keep your installs and uninstalls to a minimum.

Terabyte-sized hard drives have made fragmentation less of an issue than with smaller capacity disks, but it can still be a problem if you neglect it too long. Fragmentation will become a non-issue when solid state drives eventually replace standard hard disks. Until that happy day arrives it makes sense to keep your files neatly arranged so the mechanical parts of your drive can take less time accessing programs and information. Files become fragmented through editing documents and other normal usage of computers including surfing the web. Excessive fragmentation forces your hard drive to perform extra work that eventually noticeably slows down your computer.

Windows 7 has an excellent built in defrag tool that you can access through the Systems Tools folder. The tool runs on a schedule, but you can run it manually anytime. The tool will defrag your system drive, removable storage devices such as USB flash drives, and almost any external storage device where you can store and delete files. Disk Defragmenter runs on an automated schedule, but you can also analyze and defrag your disks and drives manually.

Even if you own a solid state drive that never needs to be defragged, you can still run into trouble by letting it get too full. If you find yourself with a drive that's using more than 90% of its capacity, applications can suddenly exhibit very abnormal behavior. The system has no place to put temporary files, and if a drive runs out of room, it can simply stop leaving you wondering what happened. An easy preventive is to use the Disk Cleanup Tool once or twice a month.

Are you guilty of indiscriminate link clicking? We all know about the danger of downloading attachments that could cause havoc with our systems, but do you click on hyperlinks embedded in e-mails? This could take you to web sites having implanted ActiveX controls designed to either damage your equipment, spy on you to collect passwords or track your activities to target you for personalized advertising among other nefarious reasons.

Some hackers are eager to install back-door or Trojan horses designed to allow them to control your computer without you being aware of it. Your computer could end up being a remotely controlled Zombie soldier in an army of similar machines to launch Distributed Denial of Service attacks.

Carelessly clicking on links could get you to very inappropriate sites that feature pornography, pirated videos, music or other kinds of software which could cause you personal embarrassment and even your job. People have been known to get in trouble with the law when a simple mouse click brought them to a child pornography site.

Think before you click. Bring your mouse pointer over the link. Often this simple act will reveal the real URL the link may be trying to disguise. If you aren't sure the link isn't going to take you to www.yourpcistoast.com don't do it.

We've covered a fair amount of territory here, but there is more danger lurking on the web than is dreamed of in your philosophy, Horatio. Choosing weak passwords, surfing the web without a firewall, failing to update anti-virus programs, and creating shared folders that the wrong people can access are among many additional dangers there simply isn't room for in this article.

Don't conclude that the web is too dangerous a place for you. The cautions mentioned here is the web equivalent of telling people to stay away from crime-ridden neighborhoods, and don't step off the curb into oncoming traffic without looking to see if it's safe first. As always, common sense is your first and best defense.

Vinny LaBash is a regular columnist with the Sarasota PCUG, Florida. Article is from the September 2011 issue of the Sarasota Monitor. Web: <www.spcug.org>. E-mail him at: <labash (at) spcug.org.>.

TrueCrypt

by John Langell, Southern Tier Personal Computing Club, NY August 2011

Free open-source data encryption software for Windows 7/ Vista/XP, Mac OS X, and Linux

The May 2011 issue of Rare Bits contained an article by Dick Maybach titled ''Cloud Computing'' in which he pointed out the necessity of securing your data via encryption when it ''...is stored on the same disks, uses the same memory, and passes through the same processors as everybody else's.'' And I recall Dave Bilcik voicing a similar warning at the May meeting and also mentioning the program TrueCrypt. It just so happens that I am currently using TrueCrypt and I believe it to be very satisfactory solution whether you need relatively modest security or very tight and sophisticated protection.

TrueCrypt is a software system for establishing and maintaining an on-the-fly-encrypted volume (data storage device). ''On-the-fly'' encryption means that data is automatically encrypted or decrypted right before it is loaded or saved, without any user intervention. The entire file system is encrypted; e.g., filenames, folder-names, contents of every file, free space, meta-data, etc. No data stored on an encrypted volume can be read (decrypted) without using the correct password and/or key file(s), or correct encryption keys.

I'm not sure how unique TrueCrypt's approach is but I was nevertheless intrigued by it. The first step is to create a ''container;'' otherwise known as a TrueCrypt ''encrypted volume.'' To my mind, this is somewhat like obtaining a safety-deposit box at a bank.

TrueCrypt provides a ''wizard'' to assist with the task. As at a bank where safety-deposit boxes of various sizes can be rented, the encrypted volume can be created to have as much capacity as you need. For example, it can be a specific portion of a hard-disk, or an entire flash drive or other storage device. Unlike a safety-deposit box, however, you hold the only key... so you need to remember and protect it. And, into the container (the volume) you can store any number of files. If the capacity of the volume is exceeded, you simply create a bigger container.

One of the interesting facets of a TrueCrypt volume is that it has most of the characteristics of an ordinary file. That is, the volume can be moved or copied within the storage areas of a given PC, or to a different PC. The name of the volume can be changed; and the volume can be included in routine backups. It can be transmitted across the Internet; and even into the wild-blue yonder, if you're so inclined. And, even if you have no intention of salting ''the cloud'' with your personal data, what about that minuscule 8- or 32GB flash-drive you carry around in your pocket. The smaller they get, the easier they are to lose. Wouldn't it be reassuring to have made it an encrypted volume so that whoever finds it won't have an easy time of it when they try to discover the contents of your personal data?

The downside of the file-like characteristics is that, like any file, an encrypted volume can also be deleted and all its content lost (...thank goodness for the Recycle Bin). That would be very bad if done unwittingly. But that's why we do back-ups! Yes? Once a TrueCrypt volume is mounted, the data files it contains can be copied to and from the volume just like they are copied to or from any normal disk; for example, by simple drag-and-drop operations.

Files are automatically decrypted on-the-fly in RAM (Random Access Memory) while they are being read or copied from an encrypted TrueCrypt volume. Similarly, files that are being written or copied to a TrueCrypt volume are automatically encrypted on-the-fly in RAM right before they are written to the volume. Note, however, this does not mean the whole file that is to be encrypted/decrypted must reside in RAM before it can be encrypted/decrypted. That is, there are no extra RAM requirements for TrueCrypt. The following paragraph explains how this is accomplished.

Let's suppose that there is an .avi video file stored on a TrueCrypt volume; that is, the entire video file is encrypted. The user provides the correct password and/or key file and mounts (opens) the TrueCrypt volume. When the user double-clicks the icon of the video file, the operating system launches the application associated with the file type typically a media player. The media player then begins loading a small initial portion of the video file from the TrueCrypt-encrypted volume to RAM in order to play it. While the portion is being loaded, TrueCrypt is automatically decrypting it in RAM. The decrypted portion of the video in RAM is then played by the media player. While this portion is being played, the media player begins loading next small portion of the video file from the TrueCrypt-encrypted volume to RAM and the process repeats. This process is called ''on-the-fly'' encryption/ decryption and it works for all file types, not just for video files. The process also ensures minimal impact on processing performance.

Note that TrueCrypt never saves any decrypted data to a disk - it only stores it temporarily in RAM. Even when the volume is mounted, data stored in the volume remains encrypted. When you restart Windows or turn off your computer, the volume will be automatically dismounted and files stored in it will be inaccessible and encrypted. Even when power is suddenly interrupted (i.e., without a proper system shut-down), files stored in the volume are inaccessible and encrypted. To make them accessible again, you have to mount the volume by providing the correct password and/or key file.

Of course, as with any unintended power interruption or shut-down, unsaved changes to files are lost because re-

encryption of changes occurs only when files are saved to the volume in a normal fashion.

I've only touched on a few of the main facets of TrueCrypt. In addition, TrueCrypt offers a choice of encryption algorithms from which you can select one that will give the degree of security you feel you need. This and other aspects of TrueCrypt are fully documented in an excellent User Guide. The latest version of the free software, Release 7.0a, can be downloaded from the product's home Website at ***http://www.truecrypt.org***, as well as from CNET's ***http://www.download.com***, and other sites on the Web. The User Guide PDF and a more detailed description of TrueCrypt can be found at the product's home web-site.

TrueCrypt is one free program that is, in my opinion, an exception to my general perception of the breed. Of course, the developers gratefully accept donations. In this case, I think they are well deserved.

Skype Reformats Phone Numbers on Websites

by Ron Ogg, Diablo Valley PC User Group

DVPCI developed and maintain a website for a Contra Costa HICAP, a County department. This website includes pages that have telephone numbers for locations where HICAP counseling and Medicare classes are offered. One day these numbers were displayed as an icon that had a colored background, a U.S. flag, and a green telephone symbol.

It turned out this was the Click to Call feature added when I installed Skype on my PC. Click to Call lets visitors to a website call a phone number using Skype (if they have it installed) by clicking on any Skype telephone number icon. Unfortunately, when one of these pages was saved as a PDF file the code behind the Skype icon was displayed instead of the icon.

While Skype Click to Call might be useful on some websites, I didn't want it on the phone numbers on the HICAP site. Nor did I want it displayed on phone numbers on other websites I visited using Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, and Firefox. So what to do?

When you install Skype there's an add-on installed in your browser that displays the phone number in the Skype Click to Call format. To uninstall this add-on for all browsers, go to Control Panel and select Programs and Features or Add/Remove Programs depending on your version of Windows. Double-click Click to Call with Skype then click Yes to uninstall the add-on. That's it.

OPERATING SYSTEM NOTES & TIPS

The Tip Corner

By Bill Sheff

Windows 7

Just got Windows 7? Notice something missing? Well if you want to see a list of what happened to those programs you liked in XP or Vista here is a simple way to find out. Open Help and Support then type ''What happened'' in the search box. Windows will give you lots of results for the query, such as: What happened to the NetBEUIprotocol?, What happened to ActiveSync?, What happened to Sticky Notes?, What happened to Windows Calendar?, What happened to the Run as command?, What happened to the Quick Launch toolbar?'' and many more.

Say you picked the ''What happened to the Run command?'' This is what you get: ''The Run command no longer appears on the Start menu in this version of Windows. The search box that appears on the Start menu provides much of the same functionality as the Run command. However, the Run command is still available if you prefer to use it. You can even add it to the Start menu for easier access.

To add the Run command to the Start menu Click to open Taskbar and Start Menu Properties. Click the Start Menu tab, and then click Customize. In the list of Start menu options, select the Run command check box, and then click OK. The Run command will be displayed on the right side of the Start menu.

Tip: You can also access the Run command by pressing the Windows logo key +R. Check it out.''

Google Images

A while ago Google switched over to a different display method for their images. If you want to turn it off and go back to the original, heres what you do: Scroll to the very bottom of your Google image search and click on Switch to basic version. If you want to go back to the regular way, simply scroll back to the bottom and click Switch to standard version.

System Tools

Just for a little review, there are a bunch of very useful programs in the System Tools folder. To get to them you access the System Tools by going to All Programs | Tools. When you open the folder in XP you can find the following programs:

♦ CHARACTER MAP, which allows you to copy and paste letters and symbols from other fonts into your document without switching fonts.

♦ DISK CLEANUP, which frees up space on your hard drive by eliminating unused and temporary files.

♦ DISK DEFRAGMENTER (Defrag), which speeds up your computer by reassigning or eliminating stray bits of data.

♦ FILES AND SETTINGS TRANSFER WIZARD, for transferring files and data from one drive to another.

♦ INTERNET EXPLORER (NO ADD-ONS), which allows you to access the Internet without any Explorer addons interfering with it.

♦ SCHEDULED TASKS, which allows you to schedule a specific time to run updater, defrag, and other system programs.

♦ SYSTEM INFORMATION, which tells you the basic ram, processor, etc., of your system.

♦ SYSTEM RESTORE, which will restore your Windows system to an earlier time.

In Vista and Win 7 you can find all of the above and more. Check it out.

Templates

A template is a prepared form or pattern within various programs such as document and spreadsheet programs. They allow a user to develop a form that allows for easy entry and automatically formats and calculates data.

If you are a user of the Microsoft Office suite you are probably aware of them as Microsoft makes mention of templates and even has a folder of them within their suite.

But are you aware that there are literally hundreds located on the Internet? But that is not all. There are even templates designed for the free suite put out by Open Office. Just Google open office templates and find body mass calculators, ovulation schedules time cards, shift scheduling and so much more.

You do not have to reinvent the wheel every time you sit at your computer. One little caveat though, these are usually presented by users and sometimes do not cover all you would like to find in a template. But do not lose heart, once downloaded you can continue to tweak the form until it does what you want the way you want it.

Bill Sheff is Novice SIG Coordinator, Lehigh Valley Computer Group, PA. Article appeared in the August 2011 issue, The LVCG Journal. Web: <http://www.lvcg.org>. E-mail: <nsheff (at) aol.com

GENERAL INTEREST

Freebies!

by Dave Bilcik, Southern Tier Personal Computing Club, NY August 2011

Summer is still here and still hot. Thunderstorms and chances of heat waves are all a part of August's end-game. It gets people to accept autumn more easily.

In last month's Freebie article I told you of DVD Flick and DVD Styler. Two free pieces of software that will allow you to take your finished movie clips and embed them into a DVD that is playable for everyone. What if your clips aren't finished? We have some help for you here as well... think free video editors. This software will allow you to tweak, edit and clip your digital movies so that even Spielberg might get a twinge of jealousy. If not high art, at least edit out the part where you caught Uncle Bob scratching his behind at the family reunion (no one needs to see that). A good Samaritan (Yogesh Mankani) posted, as part of his blog (at ***http://bit.ly/cjHfMR***), a list of 18 different free software packages that you can experiment with. I will only deal with #1 on the list, Windows Movie Maker.

If you have XP as your operating system, you received Windows Movie Maker with your Service Pack 2 (SP2) updates. If you are using Vista (may the Lord have mercy on your soul), download it from ***http://bit.ly/kXpG92*** Or go to ***http://bit.ly/gT4F8Z*** if you're running Windows 7. The location gives you a download link and tells you how to find out if Windows Movie Maker is already installed on your system. Mr. Mankani has also kindly included a list of the top 10 free online editing software at ***http://bit.ly/bICenR***, if you don't want to install any software on your PC. All you need is a browser and a broadband connection to the net and you are ready to go.

Speaking of YouTube (subtle transition here), by starting your account today you might avoid the DVD building entirely. Last month I suggested YouTube as a possible source of stock movie clips. If you post your immaculately edited movie to You Tube, just send your friends the web address of your video and let them watch it in their browser. Go to ***http://www.youtube.com/*** to get things started. Even radio shows are posting to You Tube. Check out ***http://www.youtube.com/user/JRense?blend=6&ob=5*** to hear (see?) some alternative radio. You may not agree with it but what a range of topics. YouTube content goes from stupid to sublime so be aware of your filtering options. YouTube is Google owned and operated.

Non-free warning! Do you want your YouTube posted podcast/rants sounding crisp and clear? Invest in a good microphone for your system. Don't depend on small built-in mics in your laptop or cheap gaming headphones. Blue Microphones has some highly rated USB microphones that you can check out at ***http://www.bluemic.com/desktop/***. They may look a little funky but it is said their sound starts to get close (for the money) to the studio. I might suggest the Blue Yeti. Google ''Blue Yeti'' as key words, hit the Shopping button at the top of the screen and go from there.

Almost last words... the Barnes & Noble NOOKcolor at $249 is the lowest price tablet disguised as an E-Book reader. You can read and browse as is. When the warranty runs out, root your NOOK and have a full Android tablet plus a well-regarded E-book reader. More details next month if I feel like it.

My personal email address is dlbilcik@yahoo.com if you want to send me comments, questions or cash. Please put Freebies somewhere on the subject line so I will have some idea about its contents. Tell me about your best free software experience or your our best bargain (...ever!) and I will pass it on.

ABC's of Digital Photography

by Gary Stanley
Presentation at the Quad Cities Computer Society, Iowa
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Gary Stanley returned to the QCS to share his lifelong interest in photography and the tips to help make our photography more useful, and endearing. Photos tell a story. He was here to help us tell ours. His first digital camera was a 1/3 megapixel one that used a 3.5" disk for storage. Today, he uses a wide range of digital cameras on his travels around the world.

Megapixels is all most people need!

He has wonderfully condensed some photographic principles that we all can use. First off he related that salesmen will emphasize megapixels. Some of today's point and shoot cameras have 14 megapixels. A 5 megapixel camera is all you need. The large capacity megapixel cameras are needed only for large size blowups of your photos. Most of us will never need this resolution. We usually will print 8" x 10" prints at the most and 5 megapixels will sustain that quality. In fact, the Flixr photo web storage site emphasizes that the most used camera for its site is the iPhone4 which has a 5 megapixel lens.

Experiment with program mode.

Point and shoot digital cameras have automatic settings by default. Gary explained that these settings will give you OK pictures. But for a better outcome, it is preferable to select the program mode so that you can fine-tune the camera to meet your photographic perspective.

The importance of white balance

One of the essential features of creating a good photo is to understand and manage the white balance in it. Note the lighting conditions before you take your shot. Is it outdoors in the sun or indoors under incandescent or fluorescent light? Select the appropriate setting. If you take an outdoor shot with an incandescent setting the picture will turn out blue. If you pick the fluorescent setting in an outdoor shot the picture will have a purple cast. Make sure that your camera is set properly.

Shooting at an angle

He suggested that you take your photos at a 90 degree angle to the sun; this will add depth to your subject. Also view your subject through the lens. Will it look better in a vertical or horizontal mode? Conform to your subject and it will improve the quality of your shot. For example: get down on the same level of kids and animals. Enter their world and your pictures will come to life.

The timer

One of the more interesting settings is the camera timer which is usually prefigured at 2 seconds and 10 seconds. The 2 second mode allows for a perfect shot with a tripod. Press the shutter button down half way to allow the camera to calculate all of the configurations. Now you can lift your finger from the trigger and walk away from the camera as the still camera takes the shot a second later. The 10 second mode allows one to take the picture and also be a part of it.

The importance of taking many pictures

On the photo walk in LeClaire, he reminded the participants to always check their settings before they began their work. Also take many pictures. Unlike the old days, when negatives had to be developed, they are free. Professional photographers usually get a good photo with a 200 to 1 ratio. Let creativity be your guide.

Transferring photographs to your computer

When we are finished with our photo set we need to transfer them, edit them and store them. Gary recommended that you transfer photos by removing the memory card from the camera and placing it in a card reader or your computer. This saves the battery life of your digital camera. Using a USB inadvertently with a low battery can risk losing your photos entirely.

When you transfer them it is important to select them all on the memory card with a Control-A, then right click on a photo, and select Copy from the menu. Next, on your computer create a folder for your images, right click in that folder and select Paste from the drop down menu. This method places your photos in three places until the process is finished: on the memory card, the computer memory clipboard and the hard drive - always a good fail safe method.

Free photo editing software

There are many free photo editing software packages on the Internet, however Gary recommended Windows Live Photo Gallery from Microsoft. Paid image editing software offers

more advanced options. Good choices in this category are : Photoshop Elements, and Paint Shop Pro Photo X3.

Gary emphasized that we need to back up our precious photographic moments to an external hard drive. He mentioned they are very reasonably priced, as low as $49. There are several brands: Seagate, Western Digital, and Maxtor. He has a Western Digital My-Book external drive that has a feature that he likes. It backs up your data as soon as it is created on your computer. For him photographic backups are essential as he has over 70,000 photos that he has taken over the years and doesn't want to lose them. Likewise, we wouldn't want to lose those memories either.

Gary offered a delightful presentation filled with humor, insight and detail. An enjoyable evening and learning experience all in one. Be sure to visit his Blog:gary-stanley.blogspot.com as it will have many of the presentation details on the internet from this meeting.

Gary concluded with:
''Birth Certificates show you were born.''
''Death Certificates show you died.''
''Photos show that you lived.''

HARDWARE NOTES & TIPS

Cleaning Your Screen

Cal Esneault, Cajun Clickers Computer Club

Originally, computer monitors were CRT tubes with a glass viewing area. To clean these screens, methods typical for window glass could be used. Today however, flat-panel LCD displays are made of plastic, are flexible, and usually have a surface coating. They are easily scratched or damaged. The use of harsh window cleaners can permanently damage them. Although not everyone agrees on the same techniques, following are a few guidelines to consider.

First, remove any dirt or dust with a soft brush to prevent them from becoming abrasive grit during subsequent steps. Second, use a treated microfiber cloth sold at computer or camera store (or the Internet) to gently wipe out any smudges. Be sure to routinely clean your cloth with soap and water, and then let it dry to refresh its oil absorbing ability. Optionally, you can use a soft cloth pre-wetted with mild soap and water, but this has more risk. Special lens-cleaning pens are available from camera accessory suppliers which have special oil-absorbing carbon granules embedded in a micro-fiber tip.

For extreme cases, such as long-term build-up of a film from smoke or other air-borne contamination, you can get a special cleaning solution or make one yourself by diluting isopropyl alcohol (70% solution of rubbing alcohol found at a drugstore) 50/50 with water. Be sure to turn the power off to the monitor when using any liquids, and put the liquid onto the cleaning cloth first.

The above also applies to smart phones which are even more of a problem due to the multi-touch control method which requires touching the screen with our fingers. You should review as much information as possible before cleaning any visual display surfaces.

There is always a risk of damage and there are no guarantees since results depend upon the device and the exact technique used.

Should you worry about image retention on an LCD monitor?

Linda Gonse, Editor/Webmaster, ORCOPUG (Orange County PCUG), California July 2011 issue, Nibbles n Bits
www.orcopug.org editor (at) orcopug.org

I just bought a brand new HP ZR22w LCD flat screen monitor. My understanding always has been that burn-in (also called image retention or image persistence) does not occur on LCD screens. But, an HP help file that came with my monitor dispelled that notion.

''Image retention occurs when the monitor is left ON while displaying the same image for an extended period of time, leaving a ''shadow'' of this image on the screen.''

I researched the burn-in problem further and About.com, ***http://bit.ly/k05clD***, said ''Image retention can be corrected in most cases and is easily prevented.'' That statement was a relief!

The article went on to list methods that could be used to prevent image retention/persistence.

1. ''Set the screen to turn off after a few minutes of screen idle time under the Power functions in Windows. Turning the monitor display off will prevent an image from being displayed on the screen for extended periods of time. Of course, this could be annoying to some people as the screen may go off more than they wish.''

2. ''Use a screen saver that either rotates, has moving graphic images or is blank. This also prevents an image for being displayed in screen for too long.''

3. ''Rotate any background images on the desktop. Background images are one of the most common causes for image persistence. By switching backgrounds every day or few days, it should reduce the change of persistence.''

4. ''Turn off the monitor when the system is not in use. This will prevent any problems where the screen saver or power function fails to turn off the screen and result in an image sitting on the screen for long times.''

The bottom line is not to be too worried about image burn-in, but keep it in mind when using your LCD monitor and you can easily prevent it from happening.

If somehow it does happen, see ***http://bit.ly/k05clD*** for instructions on how to correct existing image retention on LCD monitors.

Finally, the HP text helpfully revealed another problem not known to all LCD monitor users, ''the fluorescent lights inside

the display have a limited lifetime and will gradually degrade.'' This is reason enough not to leave a monitor on 24/7, even with a screensaver enabled. Use the timed Energy/Power setting to automatically turn the monitor off when your system is idle for a while.

External USB Drive Enclosures

by Bruce Preston, Danbury Area Computer Society, (DACS), December 2011

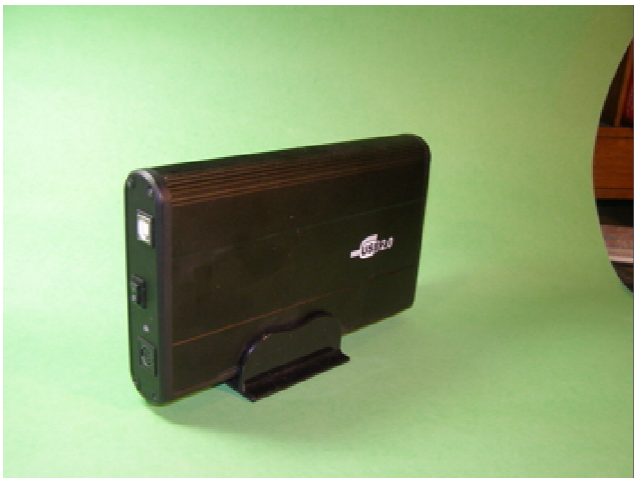
On the news this morning (Nov. 24 2011) it was mentioned that the availability of hard disks for computers will become scarce for the next six to nine months because of the flooded factories in Thailand, where roughly 40% of consumer-grade hard disks are manufactured. So it was recommended that if you are about to purchase a PC, or increase your capacity by purchasing a new hard disk, that you do it now while there is still inventory.

I have had many people ask how to retire an old desktop or notebook computer, with emphasis on maintaining the privacy of data stored on the computer. For many years DACS refurbished donated computers, wiping the hard drive and installing fresh copies of the Windows operating system. However the price of new computers has come down so much that it just is not cost effective to do so, and there is essentially no market for used computers, and in many cases you have to pay environmental disposal fees.

I was thinking about this when I also remembered that at the Ask DACS sessions for recent General Meetings, the topic of external USB drive enclosures came up and there appeared that for many where is a lack of awareness of these devices.

Thus the inspiration for this article - I'd like to describe USB external drive enclosures using two relatively inexpensive models as examples.

Inland 3.5'' IDE to USB Hard Drive Enclosure.
SKU: 763276 $17.99 + S/H from www.MicroCenter.com



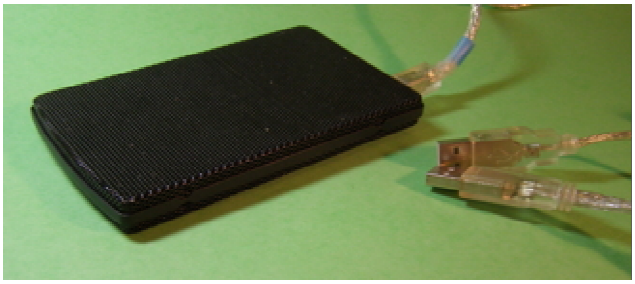
3.5'' IDE (Integrated Drive Electronics) hard drives were the standard desktop IDE drive technology from about 1990 to the present, although SATA drives are now becoming more prevalent. The 3.5'' refers to the diameter of the disks within the drive; the drive itself is designed to fit in the 5'' drive bay. If you are retiring a desktop it probably has a 3.5'' hard drive (or two!) They are usually attached to the chassis of the computer in either of two ways:

1.''Rails'' - the drive slides out the front of the chassis. To remove it, open the case, then pull the ribbon cable out of the rear of the drive, and then the 4-conductor power connector. This connector is usually very tight, but rocking it side to side will eventually loosen it. Pop the face plate out of the case, pinch the (usually green) tabs and slide the drive out. Remove the rails from the drive body.

2.Fixed mounting brackets. Open the case, and disconnect the ribbon cable and the power connector as above. Then remove the 4 screws (two on each side) that hold the drive in the cage and slide the drive out either to the inside of the chassis, or pop the face plate and slide it out the front. Remove any mounting brackets from the drive.

Installing the drive in the enclosure: Remove the end cap that has the On/Off switch, the power connector, and the USB data socket. Connect the power plug that is on the inside of the end cap to the drive, and the ribbon cable to the drive. It is not necessary to change any jumpers on the drive. Slide the drive into the enclosure and fasten it to the enclosure using the four screws provided. There is a pair of trim strips that cover the drive mounting screws. Fasten the end cap to the enclosure using the four screws provided. Plug in the external A/C power adapter (the usual ''wall wart'' transformer) and connect the USB cable to your computer. The computer should immediately recognize the drive and assign it a drive letter such as E:. You may now use the drive as you would any other hard disk. For best throughput you want to connect it to a USB 2.0 port, although it will work at reduced speed with USB 1.1. You do not need to repartition the drive or format it, your data will be there. However if you don't need the data, you might consider deleting the partition(s), create new partition(s) and format it with NTFS format.

Inland u-Jam 2.5 Hard Drive Enclosure USB/IDE
SKU 392670 $5.99 + S/H from MicroCenter.com

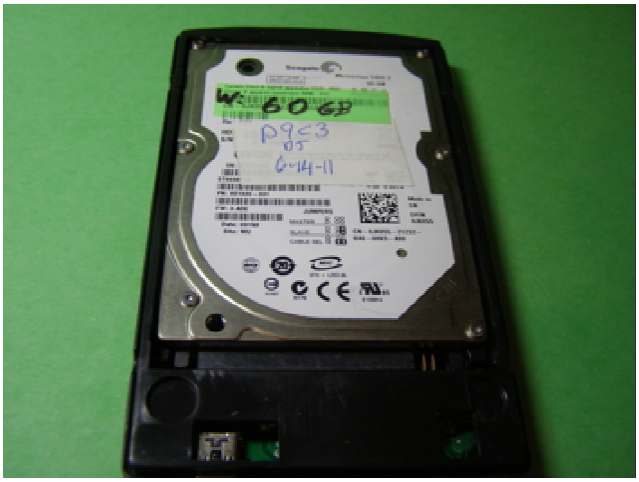


The most common hard disk in notebooks older than about 2 years is the 2.5'' IDE drive. More often than not it is accessible via a hatch on the bottom of the machine. Remove the hatch

cover and you will usually find the drive in a metal ‘‘caddy’’ that can be flipped out. Remove the drive from the caddy, and remove any right-angle adapter at the connector edge of the drive. There is no separate power connector.

The external drive enclosure is about the size of a deck of cards, although a bit thinner. Remove the 4 small screws that hold the cover plate to the frame, plug the single ribbon connector into the drive, and seal it up. This enclosure makes use of a three-ended USB cable. The end of the cable that attaches to the computer has two plugs so that the drive may draw power from two USB sockets. While the drive’s power consumption is low enough that it doesn’t require an A/C power adapter, it needs just a bit more power than is available from a standard USB port. By using two ports there is enough power for the drive.

Connect the drive to your computer and the operating system should identify it and assign it a drive letter. As described above, you may immediately make use of the drive as is, or repartition it and format it if you like.



I make use of my external drive enclosures several ways:

1.They can handle transferring files or collections of files that won’t fit on my largest flash drive.

2.They lend themselves to making backup copies of files, and you may ‘walk the drive’ from one machine to another to perform multiple backups.

3.When I am presented with a machine that has malware or virus infections such that it won’t even boot, it helps to be able to access the drive from a known-to-be-clean computer. Since the infected drive is not used to boot the system it can’t load the malware or virus (such as a root kit) into the machine that is performing the scan, thus giving me a better chance of cleaning the drive.

4.My router (LinkSys/Cisco WRT610N has firmware within it that supports the user of an external USB drive as an NAS (Network Attached Storage) device. This makes the drive available to any device attached to my network, either wired or WiFi.

What you don’t get by using a ready-made external hard drive is the software that is often bundled with such a package. Such software offers ‘‘One Touch Backup’’ can be convenient, but I don’t find it to be a compelling reason to go out and purchase a new drive when you may reuse a drive that otherwise might end up in a land fill.

The Case For A Single Use Computer

by Carl Tenning,
Tacoma Open Group For Microcomputers

If you have room for an additional desktop computer, or perhaps you have an old computer sitting unused somewhere, one use for it might be solely for processing and archiving photos from your digital camera. The example I’m using is for a relative who just purchased their first digital camera, but has never owned a computer and, of course, has no internet connection. But by not having an internet connection you can dispense with installing a firewall or an anti-virus. I have put together a spare desktop for just this purpose.

It’s an old ASUSTeK P5A motherboard with an AMD K6 500 MHz processor with 256MB RAM that’s been sitting in the basement unused. It consists of a 3.15GB hard drive, a 3.5" floppy drive, a 5.25" floppy drive and a R/W CD ROM drive.

All of the software that I installed was previously purchased, but not in use:
Windows 98SE
Roxio CD Creator 5 Platinum
CompuPic (for image viewing and editing).

With this simple setup, the new digital camera owner can transfer the photos from the camera to the computer via the USB ports, edit images and make archive photo CD’s.

I found this setup very stable and quick to use. Windows 98SE boots 55 seconds and shuts down in only 5 seconds. Compare that with your later Windows XP and Windows 7 systems.

Help Lines

HARDWAREHELP	Advisor No.
Reformat Hard Disk, FDISK	2,4,5
Install Hard Drive, CD-ROM/RW	2,4,5
Install Video Card	7
Partitioning Hard Drives	2
Internet/Intranet	6,7
Audio Cards	4
MPs Files, WMA Files, WAV Files	3,4
Burning CD's	3,5
Homesite	7
Net Objects	7

SOFTWAREHELP	Advisor No.
Win 95/98/ME/2K/NT/XP	2,3,4,7
Win 7	4,7
Microsoft Word	2,7
Microsoft Excel	4
Microsoft PowerPoint	4
WordPerfect	1,7
Norton/Symantec AntiVirus	2,3,6,7
Norton System Works	2,7
CompuPic / CompuPic Pro	3,7
Winzip, WinRAR	6
Ccleaner	3,4
Outlook, Outlook Express	2
Internet Explorer	2,7
RegSeeker	3,5
Instant Messaging	2
Installing Software after Reformatting	5
Deleting Files; Wiping	6

ADVISORS

Name	Phone	Hours
[1] Fred Shelton	(253)752-0120	Variable
[2] Bob Henkel	(253)537-6732	8A-8P any day
[3] Tom Stepanek	(253)922-7939	7-9P Mon-Fri
[4] Carl Tenning	(206)824-3843	6-9P Mon-Fri
[5] Oclad Wesley	(253)212-0352	6-9P
[6] Bob Thomson	(253)752-5582	Variable
[7] Ray Mills	(360)692-7568	6-9P Mon-Sat

News From the January Meeting
TOGGLE Web Site Hacked!

At the TOG meeting [second Monday of each month], the Program Chairman uses a DLP projector for members to view whatever is being presented. As the webmaster was presenting how he edited the TOGGLE web site, it was discovered that the site had been hacked. Suddenly, there on the large screeen for the webmaster and everyone else to see was the hacked code! Someone had added links on the front page, to sites that advertized replica watches. Here is an example of the added code:

M

In HTML, the "<a" is the beginning of a tag to link to another location or another web site. The "style=" attribute inside the link tag apparently configures how the link is displayed.

In this case the hackers code displays "Ferrari replica" when the cursor is held over the first letter of the word "Monday"where we display the date of the next meeting on the web page. A similar link tag was also added to the remainder of the letters and into the first three letters of the word "January".

It would appear that someone has obtained the password to the site server, either through FTP access or through the host site file manager. Each of these access routes have separate passwords. Needless to say, we have changed the passwords. So be vigilant. If you see any unexpected links on the TOGGLE web page, please alert the webmaster by e-mail to: "webmaster@toggle.org".

We will be researching how our password(s) might have been compromised.

Tacoma Open Group for Microcomputers (TOG)
New Member Application/Existing Member Change of Address Form

For **Tacoma Open Group** annual membership, send form (if needed) & **$25** to Bob Henkel., 10613 25th Avenue E., Tacoma, WA 98445.
Make checks payable to TOG

Please print or type. Date:_____ Sponsored by:_____

Member's Name:_____

Address: _____

City:_____ State:_____ Zipcode:_____Plus Four _____ Country: _____

Home Phone: (____) _____ Work phone: (____) _____ E-Mail Address _____

TACOMA MEETING

When: **Mon 9 Jan 2012 -7:00 PM**
Where: SE Tacoma Community Centre
1614 99th Street E.
Tacoma, Washington

From I-5 take Exit 127 (Hwy 512) to Portland Ave., north on Portland to 99th, left over tracks. Building is on south side.

Future Dates: 2nd Monday of Month

TOG BOARD MEMBERS

TOG Web Site: http://www.toggle.org

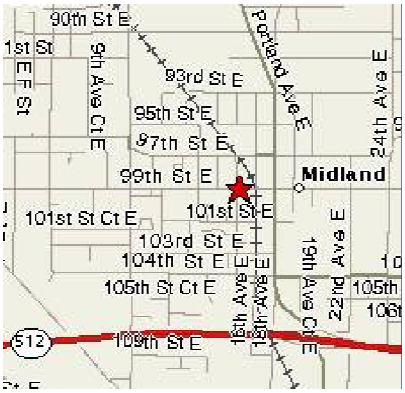
Deadline: 15th of this month to appear in next months' issue, if room

Corporate Sponsors:

Raymond Mills & Associates
www.rm-a.com

How To get To The Meeting

For those readers still unfamiliar with how to find our meeting place we have reproduced the map showing its relationship in Tacoma to Portland Ave S. and the 512 Freeway. The 512 Freeway can be entered from I-5 in Tacoma on the west or from Hwy 167 in Puyallup on the east. Proceed to Portland off-ramp and turn north to 99th Street. Some folks in the middle of Tacoma may prefer to take Portland southbound to 99th. At 99th turn west over the tracks and there you are!



TOGGLE

Tacoma OPEN Group for Micros
1808 Lenore Drive
Tacoma, WA 98406-1920

Change Service Requested

PROGRAMS

This Month's Meeting

This will be a regular monthly meeting. Meeting discussions are always interesting and the ever-popular Q&A (Question & Answer) period is sure to pique your interest, come up to your expectations and tickle your fancy. Come and share your own experiences, problems and discoveries.

No Program Presentation has been announced at Press Time. However, lively discussions of current problems and discoveries always seem to arise. Bring yopur problems and discoveries for discussion. They will be welcome.