

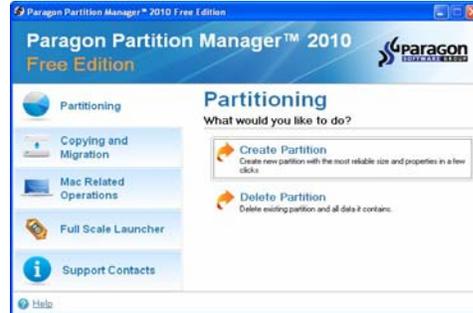
# PACC TALK

Official Newsletter of the Pittsburgh Area Computer Club

December 2009

## MEETING SCHEDULE Sunday, December 20, 2009

- 11:00 -11:25 am Sign In, Pay Dues, Greet visitors, Purchase ROOM # 311 50/50 tickets (Optional), Setup Computers, Connect to Internet , Prep for Meetings
- 11:00 - 11:25 pm PACC BOD Meeting ROOM # 301
- 11:35 - 12:00 pm Windows New Users ROOM # 301 Can we help you? V. Agrawala
- 12:00 - 12:30 pm General Meeting, Raffle. ROOM # 301 Food fest ...
- 12:35 - 2:00 pm EnhanceMySe7en, Windows Acc. Panel for Win ROOM # 301 7 & Vista, The Form Letter Machine (pg. 1)
- 2:05 - 3:30 pm More utilities - Past months reviews. ROOM # 301 (pg. 1)
- 2:05 - 3:30 pm Hardware SIG ROOM # 311 Users Helping Users - guests included
- 1:00 - 3:30 pm Linux SIG, Members Helping Members, ROOM # 311 Computer troubleshooting, Info Exchange
- 3:30 - 4:00 pm Pack Up Equipment, Doors Close



Create and format partitions. Move, resize and delete partitions. It used to cost a lot of money. Now you can download this basic functionality for free from:

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**ATTENTION PACCSTERS**  
**Sunday 20 December 2009 PACC annual POTLUCK meeting. Bring your favorite food, that you are proud of ! Show off! PACC will contribute the cold cuts, soft drinks and of course the ambiance... Read Pres. Desk for more..**

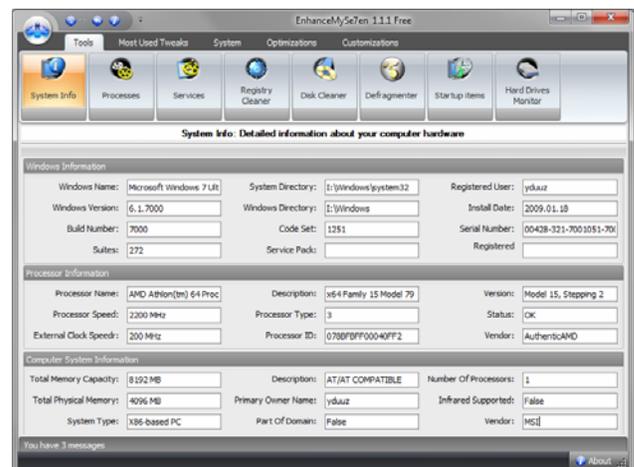
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### Windows SIG

EnhanceMySe7en for Windows 7 is a nice free utility for you, so you can start tinkering and “improving” the new OS as soon as you get it. Whether it is an upgrade or clean installation, if you go to the web site at: [http://www.seriousbit.com/tweak\\_windows\\_7/](http://www.seriousbit.com/tweak_windows_7/) , only 16829 KB a reasonable download really. From the web site:

“ The program offers tools that take care of the registry, disk space and its defragmentation, installed software, HDD temperature and all sorts of things related to system's health.”

There are two more programs of interest and the same purpose at the above web site: EnhanceMyVista at 11.4 MB and EnhanceMyXP at 8.61 MB , if you are not into upgrading to Windows 7.

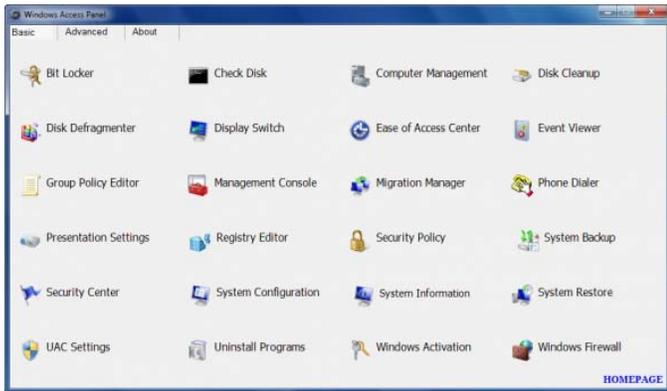


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## Windows Access Panel for Windows 7 & Vista

Another improvement both for Windows 7 and Vista crafted by Anand Khanshe of The Windows Club. ([www.windowsclub.com](http://www.windowsclub.com))



It is a tiny download of only 444 KB and you can get it from here: <http://www.thewindowsclub.com/downloads/WAP.zip>

From the web site: “We are pleased to release Access Panel for Windows 7 & Vista, x86 and x64. While you can use Control Panel to change settings which control nearly everything about how Windows looks and works, in some cases to access these very controls, or the in-built Windows programs, requires you to engage in multiple clicks or know their names.”

Just what you needed and were looking for. It should help you organize your letter or e-mail writing. If you like it make a donation.



From the web site: “**The Form Letter Machine** is a program that will help you to write letters and emails by mixing and matching from pre-written paragraphs. “...”...It enables you to assemble text from multiple paragraphs, each one customized for a specific type of inquiry or response. You can build your own configurations using checkboxes and radio boxes and nested groups, and then easily write new letters or respond to inquiries by checking off the components you want to include. A real-time preview allows you to view the message as it is composed.” Download is only 2 MB from here:

<http://www.donationcoder.com/Software/Mouser/TheFormLetterMachine/index.html>

To get a free license key go and watch video demo and read info at: <http://www.donationcoder.com/Keys/index.php>

*the end of the story*

## Stealth Spyware: The New Spyware Threat

Written by Kristofer Simon,  
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Fox Tales, Volume 22, Issue 6, June 2009  
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For most of us, the word spyware is not an unfamiliar term anymore. It can mean cookies that track your movements on web pages or other little programs that put garbage applications on your machine. While spyware intentions have not changed much over the past few years, their infection practices appear to be doing so. The newest kind of spyware, which I personally came in contact with a few months ago, should be referred to as “stealth” spyware. What I mean by that is that this spyware installs on your machine without you even knowing about it. You do not become aware of the spyware infection on your machine generally until the next time you reboot and the spyware program activates. In this short article, I will describe my experience with a piece of this spyware and what I had to do to get rid of it so that, hopefully, none of you have the same experience that I did.

The piece of spyware that infected my machine was called “XP Police Antivirus.” I became infected, I believe, after visiting a third party website that provided updated information and screen shots for Nintendo Wii games that were about to hit the market and that were in development. As I said earlier, this program was a piece of “stealth” spyware and installed on my machine without my knowledge. It did not slow down the performance of my machine at all (at least not that I was able to notice), nor did any installation screens pop up during the install. The next time I booted up my machine, an icon appeared on the lower right hand part of my screen that looked like the XP Security Center shield. When I put my cursor over it to see what it was, it said “XP Police Antivirus.” For just a split second, I wondered if maybe Microsoft had tried to install a new version of an antivirus program they created on my machine, but I quickly realized that this was a piece of spyware that had infected my machine without my knowledge.

The program tried to fool me into thinking that anonymous users from the Internet (it would put public IP addresses in the warning dialog boxes) were attempting to access my computer maliciously and it recommended that I install the full program to prevent these attacks. I wasn’t going to do this because I had the full and up-to-date version of McAfee Security Center so I knew this was bogus. When I tried to remove the program through the Add/Remove Programs option in the Control Panel, I was able to wipe out the program temporarily but the next time I rebooted my machine, the application icon was in my system tray again and I was getting the same bogus dialog boxes about people trying to access my computer. This spyware also put another program on my machine called Security Center 2009 that also was made to look as realistic as possible.

Finally, I went on my Motorola Q Smart Phone and searched on the XP Police Antivirus program. Immediately, I got a link to a page that told me that this was a piece of stealth spyware and told me how to get rid of it. I actually had to go into the computer’s registry (kind of like the computer’s brain) and delete the entry that the spyware had made there, as well as delete a number of files the program had put on my machine. Once I did that, the spyware programs (both XP Police Anti-

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virus and Security Center 2009) were finally gone but I still had one more hurdle to overcome from this program.

The spyware also installed a software program known as a “browser hijacker.”

For those of you who don’t know what this is, let me explain. Let’s say you launch a web browser and you want to go to [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com) to see the latest news. You type [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com) into the address bar of your browser and either hit “go” or hit return. The browser initially begins to go to that page, but suddenly the browser gets “redirected” to another page. This happens every time you try to access a web page. These programs are EXTREMELY hard to get rid of but I was able to get rid of the one on my machine using a third party program that found the program and removed it.

While this may sound like a dire situation, the most important thing you can do as an end user in these situations is to remain calm and scrutinize every program that you see on your machine, that you haven’t specifically downloaded (ex. a game, a patch from Microsoft, etc.). If you do get infected by stealth spyware and can’t seem to get rid of it, go to a non-infected PC or web enabled cell phone and do a search on the program’s name. You will almost always get a link telling you how to get rid of the program. Also, never send personal information over the Internet to any site that you cannot confirm is a legitimate site that you use (ex. Amazon.com, Paypal, etc.). Using these steps you can help eliminate most of the problems caused by spyware, but you should always

remain vigilant. You can get infected with a stealth spyware program from just about any website, so be careful out there!

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*the end of the story*

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**The News this Month**  
**By Greg Skalka, President,**  
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It is prime holiday shopping time, and the deals are out there, tempting us to stimulate the economy. Target advertised a \$200 Acer Netbook even before Black Friday. There will probably be lots of good deals all the way through New Year’s Day, as the retailers are hurting and are looking for ways to get customers into their stores. This holiday season will probably see additional increases in online shopping, as shoppers try to save money, gas and time.

One way I’ve used to save money on purchases is to take advantage of manufacturer and store rebates. Over the years I’ve submitted hundreds of rebate forms and received thousands of dollars back. I’m currently waiting on eight rebates, for a savings of \$124. Normally I would expect a check in the mail for each, but six of them are for Visa prepaid cards.

The prepaid plastic card for rebate payment is the latest rebate trend. They force the consumer to purchase something to redeem them, rather than just deposit them into a savings account, so they provide additional economic stimulation. They also reduce costs for the issuing manufacturer or retailer. One article I read listed the manufacturer’s cost for a rebate check as \$1.85, while a prepaid rebate card cost about 6 cents.

Besides having to buy something else, there are a few additional consumer pitfalls with prepaid rebate cards. It is best to make a purchase that is greater than the card’s value, as any amount remaining is not refunded, but stays on the card, and it is often impossible to check a card’s balance. These cards do expire (as do rebate checks), so they should be used promptly. Some rebates provide a store-branded card that can be used only at that retailer.

Many people dislike the hassle of filing for rebates. It is estimated that up to 60% of eligible consumers never bother to file. I figure that I’m getting a savings on my products at the expense of those that are not willing or able to file and track their rebate submissions. The prepaid rebate card adds a little more inconvenience, but if it allows more rebates to be offered, I’ll keep buying and applying.

#### McAfee’s 12 Scams of Christmas

Anti-virus software maker McAfee recently released its list of 12 popular online attacks for this holiday season as a warning to consumers:

1. Charity phishing scams - be careful who you give to
2. Fake invoices from delivery services to steal your money
3. Social networking scams - fake friend requests lead to malware
4. The dangers of holiday e-cards - clicking can lead to malware
5. Discount luxury gift sites that lead to malware
6. Shopping from open Wi-Fi networks can lead to identity theft
7. Risky holiday searches - fraudulent holiday web sites provide malware instead of Christmas carol lyrics
8. Fake job-related sites prey on unemployed
9. Too-good-to-be-true auction-site deals that never arrive
10. Password stealing scams - malware that contains keyloggers
11. E-mail banking scams
12. Your files for ransom - ransomware scams

I’ve heard of many of these scams, but some were new to me, or were things I didn’t really consider. It is good to be charitable, especially during the holiday season, but it is good to be reminded that there are scammers out there ready to take advantage of your generous nature. Just as with banking scams, don’t respond to e-mail donation solicitations directly.

It is unfortunate, but you really need to be suspicious about every e-mail you receive and every web site you go to. I’ve read about holiday e-cards that carry malware, so I typically don’t send or open them. I didn’t really consider before that cybercrooks might set up holiday sites, hoping to entice me to download wallpaper or screensavers laden with malware after finding their site in a search for holiday song lyrics. It also never

occurred to me that crooks might succeed in taking over my PC, encrypt my computer’s files, and then ask for payment of ransom to unencrypt them. I think I take enough precautions to make this unlikely.

I’ve wondered, though, about using public or open Wi-Fi connections for secure activities. All the advice I’ve seen, including McAfee’s recommendations, say that online shopping and banking should not be done at a public Wi-Fi hotspot, but only through a secure Internet connection at your home or work. That makes sense, but where does that leave public Wi-Fi? Is it only useful for benign web surfing? How do you safely access you online bank account when traveling, and don’t have a secure Internet connection?

(Continued on page 8)

## Windows 7 is Here! – Part III

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So far in this series we have covered some general questions about Windows 7 (May) and obtaining and installing Windows 7 (September.) This month I will start to cover some of the new features of Windows 7.

### Caveat for upgrading from Vista

Something I forgot to address in the last issue is for Vista users upgrading to Windows 7. In your upgrade box you will find two DVDs. One is for 32 bit Windows and one is for 64 bit Windows. Choose the 32 bit disc for your upgrade. Don't worry about the difference for basic computing. Now, one of the two choices you have when you start the upgrade disc is the option called Upgrade. This is called an "in place" upgrade where the new operating system replaces the old operating system, but (hopefully) leaves everything else in place – your data files, settings, etc. NEVER, ever, ever start this process without first backing up all your data files to an external medium. Nine hundred ninety eight times out of a thousand everything will go fine, but you don't want to end up among those few where it does not and lose all your data. The Windows 7 DVD contains a Windows Easy Transfer Wizard tool that will backup all your files and settings for you and put them back on the Windows 7 computer. If you are not computer savvy, you may need technical assistance to accomplish all this. Just to reiterate for XP users, Windows 7 ONLY comes on DVD, so if your XP computer only has a CD drive, forget about investing in the upgrade.

### What's New in Windows 7?

There is no way in a few short paragraphs to describe in-depth all the new or improved features in Windows 7. For these articles I will just give you a basic overview of several of the most obvious so you better know what to expect when you see your own desktop and start using your new (or upgraded) computer.

While Windows 7 initially looks and acts a lot like Windows Vista from the user standpoint, there are a number of new and improved features designed to make using the computer easier and to improve productivity. I will cover some in this article and more in the next edition. Some are things you will not use every day, but it is good to know they exist – and understanding them will help you use Windows 7 more effectively.

### Windows Aero

Aero is the "glassy" transparent look of windows that was introduced in Windows Vista. Things look even glassier in Windows 7. The idea is to deemphasize the windows itself and bring the focus onto the contents of the windows. The Aero effect also is seen on the taskbar and in several neat window management features carry the Aero label.

### Windows 7 Taskbar

One of the first things you notice on the Windows 7 desktop is that the taskbar along the bottom of the screen still is there, but looks different. The icons on it are bigger and there are three icons already on it. Normally, the taskbar has only displayed icons for applications, folders, and files you had "opened." Also, just to the right of the Start button (or orb) there was a small area with a few icons on it. This was called

the "Quick Launch Toolbar." Now, those two areas have been more or less combined. You can have both "shortcuts" to frequently used things on the taskbar (which you can "pin" there) as well as having it reflect the things you have opened. How do you tell one from the other? It can be confusing at first until you note that the "open" items each have a "glassy" box around them whereas the shortcuts do not.

You also notice a new button on the far right end of the toolbar. This is the Aero Peek button. Say you have several open windows covering the desktop and want to see your analog clock or weather bug gadget (described below) on the desktop. Just rest your mouse cursor on the Aero Peek button and the open windows become transparent allowing you to see the desktop. Move away and the windows return. Not the greatest advancement since sliced bread, but pretty neat nonetheless.

You also notice that if you open multiple files using the same application – say, Microsoft Word – there is only one Word icon on the taskbar, not one for each document. Hover your mouse over the Word button and you see live thumbnails of each document over the button, similar to what you see in Windows Vista. However, move the cursor up to one of the thumbnails and a full screen live preview appears. Once you find the file you want to work on, click that thumbnail and the document is on the screen.

### Desktop Gadgets

What are gadgets anyway? They are handy little utilities that do something (hopefully) useful for you. There are analog clocks, weather bugs, slide shows, stock monitors, and literally hundreds of others to choose from in all types of categories. Gadgets were introduced in Windows Vista and resided in a reserved area along the right side of the screen called the Sidebar. Users complained that the sidebar ate up too much screen, so in Windows 7 gadgets have been moved to the desktop. You can place them anywhere you want or not have any at all. It's up to you. Since they are on the desktop, they often are hidden behind windows, hence Aero Peek described above.

### Libraries

I am going to end this edition with another significant change in Windows 7. That is the introduction of the library concept for file management. You will see them, but may never fully use them. Still you need to understand what they are. Since the earliest days of Windows, we have had folders to keep our files in – the Documents folder being a prime example. All these folders resided on our computer. Well, the concept of personal computing has drastically changed over the last few years. Many homes have networks of several computers; some homes have home servers – essentially a basic computer with a huge hard drive to store files you want on it. In business, the file a person may need to use daily could be located on a far distant computer. This is where libraries come in. Not to get too technical, but libraries do not exist physically. They are just a way to aggregate the folders and files you use and need to access in one handy place. You still have a Documents link on your Start menu just as you did in Vista. Now when you open it you see "Document Library" and the folders and files you have created. You also still have a default folder on your computer where Windows can store the things you create. This is called "My Documents." (Sound familiar? Déjà vu all over again.) However, you also can "store" – and access in your Documents library – files which exist on another computer on your home network or even in another location over a network or the Web.

Many of you may never find the need to take full advantage of the library concept. However, it is a significant step forward in file access and management that does not tie the user to just one computer any more. Good job Microsoft, for a change.

## Windows 7 is Here! – Part IV

By Robert Nisbet,

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Well, October 22nd has come and gone. Windows 7 now is official! New computer owners and early upgraders now can start enjoying (in my humble opinion) the benefits of one of Microsoft's best efforts. Perfect? No, but it's a real 21st Century operating system, nonetheless.

In the final installment of the series, I cover what's included, what's not, what's improved, and more of what's new. In brief, Windows 7 has been trimmed down and a lot of things previously included are optional now. This helps make the operating system more compact and responsive while giving users more choice of the applications and utilities they want to run on their computers.

### What's Included?

Windows 7 still includes the Internet Explorer 8 web browser, since web access is a key part of any modern operating system. However, if you want to use Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, or Opera instead, feel free. Any browser easily can be set as your default through the Default Programs control on the Start menu. Also included are Windows Media Player 11, a basic picture viewer, and a DVD maker. Again, these easily can be replaced with utilities of your choice. Home users get the Windows Media Center included with their Windows 7 Home Premium, as was the case with the comparable Windows Vista version. That's about it for the standards we might have been used to seeing in previous versions.

### What's not Included?

This is a much longer list for Windows 7. Microsoft has been hit with several anti-monopoly lawsuits over the last few years, so this and keeping the operating system tighter is one reason some things are missing. The most obvious application missing is an email client. Windows XP had Outlook Express and Windows Vista had Windows Mail. Windows 7 users are left to choose their own email solution. More people are using web-based email manager applications, so that remains an option. Microsoft offers a free download of the Windows Live Mail computer-based client. It can gather your mail from a number of different email services other than just Live Mail, which is a positive, but I am not sure those used to Outlook Express or Windows Mail will care for the user interface. If you don't want to use web-based email and want a familiar-looking email client, try Mozilla's free Thunderbird client (go to [www.mozilla.com](http://www.mozilla.com) and look for the Thunderbird link.)

You won't find the Vista Sidebar for Gadgets, either, although the Gadgets still are available for installation on the desktop as indicated in Part III. Also gone from Windows 7 are the multimedia tools Windows Photo Gallery and Windows Movie Maker. (Strangely, the DVD Maker is included, but not a movie maker.) Those of us who did not use Windows Messenger instant messaging utility will welcome its absence in Windows 7. No more unused icon or pop-ups in the Notification Area. All these optional applications are available through the free Windows Live downloadable package, along with something called Live Family Safety to provide parental controls for those requiring them.

### What's Improved?

Some old Windows standbys have been given new faces and new lives in Windows 7. WordPad and Paint have been around since the infancy of Windows. In Windows 7 both have been given more functionality and the Scenic Ribbon interface introduced in Office 2007. In particular, the WordPad basic word processor has been working out at the gym." Now it can read and create the docx format documents of Word 2007 in addition to its default Rich Text Format documents. Even if you don't buy Word, you can read, edit and compose docx files. Another recipient of a major facelift is Calculator. (Did you even know there was one?) Now it has several useful modes and can do unit conversions. (Check the Hel section for an explanation of features.) All these improved utilities are tucked away in the Accessories group on the Start menu. They are worth checking out.

Users of Vista may not have realized their computers could take dictation, but speech recognition was included and seems much improved in Windows 7. All you need is a microphone. The speech tool must be turned on –it's hidden in the Start/Accessories/Ease of Access folder but after that you can launch programs, go to web sites, and dictate letters or email with just your voice. There are some good tutorials and practice sessions included. Unlike commercial products, such as Dragon Naturally Speaking, Windows Speech Recognition does not lock onto one user, so multiple users of the same computer can use it.

An in-your-face curse for Windows Vista users was User Access Control (UAC). Intended to help protect us from bad guys trying to install malware or modify the operating system, instead it became a click every pop-up just to get it out of the way" bother. Often you had to give permission even to delete a desktop icon. The control levels for UAC were all-on or all-off. In Windows 7 UAC has been much tamed and provided with more user control levels. Now it better does the job it was designed for and stays out of the way the rest of the time.

Other improvements are not so obvious until you start using Windows 7. It is noticeably zippier than Windows Vista particularly on somewhat older computers. Windows XP aficionados take heart; you are not giving up performance to take advantage of the new features. Another area much improved is the time it takes to move or copy large files between the hard drive and external media. Vista's performance was take a coffee break time, now you hardly can blink and it is over. There are many more under-the-hood improvements such as file indexing in support of the Search feature, but I need to cover some other things.

### What's New?

This is an operating system that wants to stay out of your way unless you need it for something. Sure, it works differently in many aspects from Windows XP (and to a lesser extent Vista), but its intent is to make things easier for you. Sometimes change really is good. Some of the features tagged with the Aero handle may seem just gee-whiz at first, but after you use them for a while they really can be helpful. I have covered some of these things in Libraries in Part III, so I will cover some of the other new elements here.

While it isn't really new to Windows 7 (it was in Vista, but who knew?) the Windows Snipping Tool is very handy when you need to capture something on the screen or part of a web page. You can send your screen capture to the Clipboard for pasting or save it as an image for use elsewhere or sharing. Again, the Snipping Tool is in the Accessories folder.

One thing Microsoft feels is that everyone needs some basic online security protection in this age of hackers gone wild. Too many inexperienced users just let the trial" security software that comes with

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many new computers expire and still felt they were protected. Not so. A new free download is Microsoft Security Essentials. This is a basic anti-malware (viruses and other bad stuff) tool that is simple to install and set up. Once running it is nearly invisible unless it detects something. It is updated automatically with Microsoft Updates and just does what it does in the background. Power users and tweekers still will want their full featured security suites, but for the majority of basic email and web users Security Essentials will keep them out of most bad situations. Security Essentials has gotten favorable performance reviews early on.

### **Final Thoughts**

This has been by no means a comprehensive review of Windows 7. I have tried to highlight those areas I felt most beneficial to the average user. Windows 7 is an operating system both average users and power users can enjoy. You can just get on with things or you can tweak to your heart's content. The choice is yours.

Windows XP has been around nine years now and still is doing yeoman service for many. Microsoft will continue to support XP until 2014. Many people skipped Vista, and that is fine. With the prices of new PCs these days, however, it really is time to seriously consider moving into the second decade of the 21st Century with a new system, or at least a new operating system for Vista users. If you like Windows XP, you will learn to like Windows 7. Essentially, Windows still is Windows and most basic functions work the same. The new features really do make the computer easier to use once you understand them. As stated in earlier installments, the best route to Windows 7 for XP users is a new computer. Vista users have it somewhat easier when moving to a like version of Windows 7. (Windows Vista Home Basic users are permitted to upgrade to Windows 7 Home Premium.)

I hope this series has been beneficial in explaining some of the major features of Windows 7 in non-technical language and perhaps helping some of you decide to take advantage of the improvements it offers.

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*the end of the story*

## **Using Linux**

**Written by Kerry Miller,**

**Front Range PC Users Group, Colorado**

**k-Byte, August 2009**

**<http://www.frpcug.org> twriterext (at) gmail.com**

As you may know (I have written several articles for this newsletter), I use the Linux operating system. I don't know why more people don't use Linux. Linux is a costless operating system for a Personal Computer.

In one of those earlier articles, I told the story of how back in the 1997 time frame I had a dual boot system: Microsoft Windows NT and Linux. I had copied my user files from the NTFS (file system) to a common Fat 16 (file system) that both Windows NT and Linux could use. I would boot Windows NT only when I wanted to check a setting. After I had most of my user files on the Linux file system (ext2, I think) I went to boot Windows NT. The message on the screen translated to "I am sick fix me". I promptly re-formatted the disk that held Windows NT and haven't looked back.

There are many different distributions (variations) of Linux: Red Hat Fedora, Suse, Ubuntu (to name only a few). Each distribution has its own personality. I use Fedora 10 as it calls itself as it boots. I have used Red Hat for years simply because it is compatible with the way I want to use a computer.

As far as using Linux is concerned, all you need to do is to place the media (e.g., CD) in a media reader attached to your computer and install the Linux operating system. You may also download an ISO\* file for a CD or DVD and burn (write) the ISO file onto the media. In some cases you are allowed to download the operating directly onto your hard disk. There are even versions of Linux to load onto a flash drive.

When you are loading an operating system, there are usually a few questions to answer, such as the language you want to use, what keyboard you are using and what mouse you are using. Most distributions check the computer for the amount of memory (RAM) and peripherals that are installed. If there is enough memory they will use a graphical installation. As far as I know, this is similar to Microsoft.

If your computer has enough horse power and memory to run what is called Xwindows (a computer software system and network protocol that provides a graphical user interface (GUI) for networked computers--see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xwindows>), there is a choice of desktop applications: GNOME or KDE. You will find a group of people that prefer the KDE desktop and a different group of people that like the GNOME desktop. I use the GNOME desktop which uses three menus: Applications, Places and System instead of a start menu. The KDE desktop uses a single menu more like Microsoft's start menu.

There is also the ability to place icons of the desk top so that a mouse can be used to open an application or even a data file.

The usual applications included (all free) are: Firefox (web browser), OpenOffice.org (compatible with Microsoft Office, including reading and writing Microsoft Office files). There is a choice of text editors, some of which are dependent on the desktop of choice. There are even games and graphic applications. Not to mention photo editing programs (e.g., GIMP). And there is a host of other applications that may be downloaded.

The web site <http://www.gnu.org/> is a good place to learn more about Linux. The Ubuntu distribution, as I said, fits me. Use a google search to find the many (if not all) Linux possibilities. It can be said that using Linux is similar to using Microsoft Windows in many ways.

An additional note: There are some shops that custom build computers without an operating system at a reduced the price, and others that will install an operating system of choice (such as one of the Linux distributions).

The simple truth is that, especially when used with Xwindows and either the GNOME or KDE desktop, the operation of a computer with a Linux operating system is so similar to Microsoft Windows there is hardly any learning curve to it. Linux uses (in my opinion) a more understandable file arrangement (called the ext3 file system).

There are some computer hardware issues that need attention. Connect to <http://www.linuxdevices.com/> for a good place to verify the hardware possibilities.

There is a Linux users group in Fort Collins called the North Colorado Linux Users Group. Connect to <http://www.nclug.org/> for more information. These folks can and will answer any questions you have.

\*ISO is an acronym for International Standards Organization. An ISO file is an archive file in a format defined by the ISO. For more information on this topic, connect to [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iso\\_file](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iso_file).

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*the end of the story*



**From The DealsGuy**  
 by Bob (The Cheap skate) Click  
 Greater Orlando Computer Users Group  
 January 2010

**Problems Never Cease**

A while back, I mentioned my lightning strike and replacing my damaged router with a new one by D-Link. I'm told that D-Link has many glowing reviews, but my experience has been just the opposite. It stops working whenever it feels like it and if I switch the Ethernet cable from the router directly into the modem without rebooting either the modem or the computer, the computer accesses the Internet OK, and faster than it did before. When I get the router running again, my network connected printer no longer prints and I have to get Ricoh's help to reconfigure the IP addresses so my printer works. The Ricoh techs have been great. I've tried reconfiguring the printer using the printer's manual, but have not mastered working with IP addresses so far. The D-Link router tech support also leaves a lot to be desired; in fact, they sometimes brush you off whether they get the router working or not, and they're sometimes hard to understand. Once they advised me to upgrade the firmware and quickly got rid of me. Updating the firmware didn't help.

Last week that router quit working twice and I decided I'd had enough of that piece of junk, so I bought another router on sale, but this one is a Netgear, as was my last one, which worked great for a couple of years, until the lightning strike. The Netgear has a disk to help set it up (so did the D-Link) and this Netgear is working fine, but my printer again had to be reconfigured. I'll see if D-Link will let me return the router for them to check, but at this point, it doesn't matter to me. I've had enough of D-Link.

**Gotta Keep Those Costs Down**

How many people do you know who have been let go by their employer lately, even though they might have been with them for years and have an excellent attendance and work record? Lately, I know quite a few of those people. They go to work one day only to be told that a cut is being made, and it is them. Usually the employee has likely been with the company the longest. I believe that's the corporate way of keeping the bonus up by getting rid of employees who are paid the most. Disregard the knowledge, dependability, and experience they have for taking good care of customers. All those years of being a responsible and prudent employee meant nothing. Most of the ones I know had to immediately collect their personal items and were escorted off the property like some kind of criminal, which doesn't make them feel very good. An older person has a difficult task finding a job, unless you get lucky, and older can mean over 35 these days.

**Time To Help Pay Back The Stimulus Loans**

I'm sure there will be several articles soon about doing your income tax return free, but I'll add my two cents worth on that topic now. There are several ways to do your income tax at no cost, but my favorite is "Tax Act," <<http://www.taxact.com>> which has a free version and a pay version. The free version does your tax return just fine, except that it pesters you frequently about the advantages of their pay version. I used the free version the first year I tried it and it did what I needed just fine. I had already taken my data to a free preparation service and just wanted to compare the results. Tax Act actually found a mistake in the one I just had done for free.

The following year I decided to use the deluxe version (right now they are offering it to me for \$12.95) because that one brings forward all of

the information from your previous year's return, saving a lot of typing and possible errors. I also called their tech support a couple years ago for help with my "green" credits and had good response with it.

Also, don't forget AARP's free tax help for seniors. We really need to pay our taxes so we can repay the Chinese and keep them from repossessing the USA for nonpayment of our loan. I doubt I could learn to speak Chinese.

**This One Can Improve Your Photos**

AMS Software announced the release of Home Photo Studio, a new program for photo editing, creating original greeting cards, and decorating ordinary pictures. It offers plenty of frames, tools, masks, filters, and effects (such as 3D and plastic effects). The number of effects may be confusing at first, but it offers opportunities for making every photo special. Greeting card templates can be colorful, darkish, funny, or romantic, and will help the user create a proper greeting card for any occasion. Home Photo Studio offers all necessary functions for uncomplicated photo editing.

The most popular feature, besides greeting card templates, is probably Effects&Filters that allows adding natural phenomena (such as stars, clouds, rain, snow and lightning). You can also add noise and blur, stylize a picture (ancient photo effect, pencil drawing, lithograph, etc.), adjust brightness and saturation; and make complex combinations. The user can adjust the transparency of the effects and set the area to be processed (the top, bottom, center, borders, etc.). There are a variety of picture frames.

Home Photo Studio Deluxe edition costs a bit more than Standard Edition, but is rich with extra features. It is the right variant for those who want to create 3D compositions, get automatically created collages, use plastic effects, and import PNG/Photoshop™ templates. Deluxe edition is also remarkable for it's over 100 professionally designed frames and greeting card templates.

Working with Home Photo Studio is usually trouble-free thanks to the intuitive interface. But if the user still faces a problem while mastering the program, the detailed Help system is ready to explain how to deal with it.

Features: (Some features are only in the Deluxe Edition)

- Support of more than 20 graphics formats;
- Convenient image explorer;
- Hundreds of filters, effects and masks;
- Fast photo enhancement and retouch;
- Creation of slideshows with smooth transition effects;
- Greeting card templates and picture frames;
- Automatic creation of collages and 3D compositions;
- Auto enhancement and red eye removal.

Home Photo Studio runs under Windows 2000/XP/Vista and 7. The Standard edition costs \$39.00 USD and the Deluxe edition costs \$59.00 USD. Here's a special offer for user group members. Order the Standard Edition, and then write to <[support@ams-soft.com](mailto:support@ams-soft.com)>.

The message must include the order ID and the text "DealsGuy Special Offer." AMS Software will then ship the "Deluxe" Edition with 100 extra templates and extended functions. Further product information, as well as its free trial version, is available at <<http://home-photo-studio.com/>>.

Download link: <<http://home-photo-studio.com/PhotoStudio.zip>>  
 Company website: <<http://ams-soft.com/>>

*(Continued on page 8)*

(Continued from page 7)

### Some Popular Sites With Low Prices

Some of you probably know about these, but some may not. Here are some URLs for great deals that are popular with the local user group members, and something I check frequently. One is <<http://www.1saleaday.com/>> where the sale is good for 24 hours only. The price might even be FREE with the only cost being the shipping. I've bought a few items there and some were fantastic deals while others were good, but the item wasn't quite as I expected.

Another very popular one is <<http://www.giveawayoftheday.com/>> where the item is absolutely free by download for just 24 hours. Some of these free items are reputable ones that normally have a retail price and are rated good software. When it's free, I sometimes download it even though I have no use for it at the time, but I take the attitude that "you never know." I think that men can change their minds too.

<[http://www.software-dod.com](http://www.software-dod.com/)> is another interesting site where you might find a bargain, but I've only found one I wanted so far, and I'm not sure I really needed it.

If you find something that interests you, I suggest you read it thoroughly because I had something I thought I wanted on 1saleaday, but ended up not getting what I thought I was ordering. Read the description over thoroughly to avoid that.

That's it for this month. I'll soon have some more new product announcements on my Web site that didn't offer discounts. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound.

Bob (The Cheap skate) Click  
<[bobclick at bellsouth dot net](mailto:bobclick@bellsouth.net)>.  
Visit my Web site at  
<<http://www.dealsguy.com/>>



the end of the story

(Continued from page 3)

I read one intriguing posting on CNET that accessing an online banking site from a public Wi-Fi connection is safe, as the bank employs SSL (secure socket layer) encryption of the data between your PC and their site. This also seems to make some sense. I know that VPN (virtual private network) software like StrongVPN ([www.strongvpn.com](http://www.strongvpn.com)) and others claim to secure Wi-Fi links. Services like GoToMyPC ([www.gotomypc.com](http://www.gotomypc.com)) also claim to allow remote connection to your home computer in a secure way. I'd like to find out more about SSL and VPN connections, so that it may be possible to use free Wi-Fi to bank and shop.

### New Communications

I installed Skype ([www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)) on my laptop a few months ago so that I could use it to allow Gene Barlow to give our group the webinar presentation on Acronis True Image. I think Skype is great for audio and video communication over the Internet, though I've only found a few occasions to use it. I've done some test videoconferences with our editor, Art, and my wife has used it with our notebook computer to call me when she was away on business. The main downside to Skype is that it must be run on both ends for a free call.



## From the Editor's desk



Hi PACCsters!

Read the great articles.

I will see you this Sunday, December 20, 2009.

A friendly, end of the year and PACC meeting with the customary annual benefits.

Bring what you like to eat to share! PACC will supply the drinks and coffee. Yes we will have cold cuts, and the condiments.

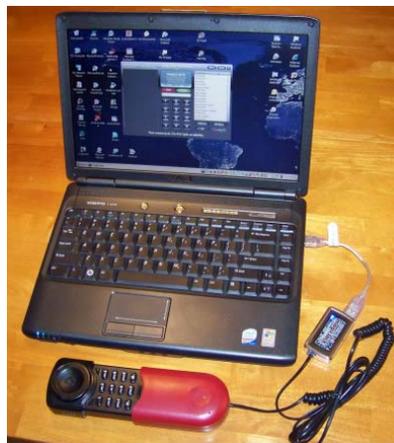
Ergo! POTLUCK! Come to see your friends and socialize.

PJK

Please change your address of PACC Web site to the following URL:  
<http://pacc.apcug.org>

You can use it to make a call to any phone from your PC, but that incurs a charge. Unless the person on the other end of the connection is willing and able to use Skype, it does not help you much.

I've been making all of my recent long distance calls over MagicJack, and have had no problems with it. I look forward to taking it on a trip and being able to make calls for free over free Internet service in a hotel or hotspot. I even bought a compact corded phone on eBay to use with MagicJack. Its limitation is the U.S. call restriction; it may be able to call International, but I'm sure there would be additional fees involved. The company does advertise it as the perfect communication



tool to take on a foreign trip to call back to the U.S. for free. I'm hoping for a chance to try that out one day.

Another great communication tool that I've started using is drop.io ([www.drop.io](http://www.drop.io)), which I learned about from our editor, Art. It provides a free "drop box" for transferring up to 100 MB of photos or any other files to anyone. You create a drop, upload the files and provide the drop name and password to the recipient, who then downloads the files from the drop.io site. I recently had to provide 300 MB of photos to someone, so rather than mail them a CD, I set up three drop.io drops and sent the access info through e-mail.

I've read about a new online service called Snailmailr ([www.snailmailr.com](http://www.snailmailr.com)) that may be of use to me one day. For \$0.99, it will print and mail up to two pages to anywhere in the world. That is not bad, considering the cost of postage and the hassle of getting it into the postal system. Since the letters are mailed from the U.S., it would be a great way to inexpensively and quickly send letters here from abroad.

the end of the story

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OCCUPATION.....

INTERESTS.....

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**Dues: \$25 per year.**

**Make your check out to: PACC and send it with your application to:**

**Treasurer, PACC, P.O. Box 6435, Pittsburgh, PA 15212-6435**

*cut here.....cut here*

***PACC HELP LINE***

Help is available to PACC members on various computer topics by contacting one of those listed below. It is recommended that the initial contact with any of these experts should be made via the PACC WEB SITE. In this way others can benefit from the questions and responses. Be courteous and call only during the listed times.

<b>NAME</b>	<b>COMPUTER AREA</b>	<b>PHONE</b>	<b>TIME</b>
Agrawala, Vishnu	Hardware	724-553-8051	3 - 6:00 pm
Cutrara, Phil	Geoworks	766-0274	
Fisher, Bill	Cobol, Word Perfect	367-8996	7 - 9:00 pm
Konecny, P.	Windows, DOS 6.2x, MS IE., Hardware	795-6075	8 - 9:00 pm

If you would like to become PACC HELP LINE volunteer inform the editor by sending e-mail to: [pacccomm@aol.com](mailto:pacccomm@aol.com)

**FOR SALE**

**Your ads PACCsters?**

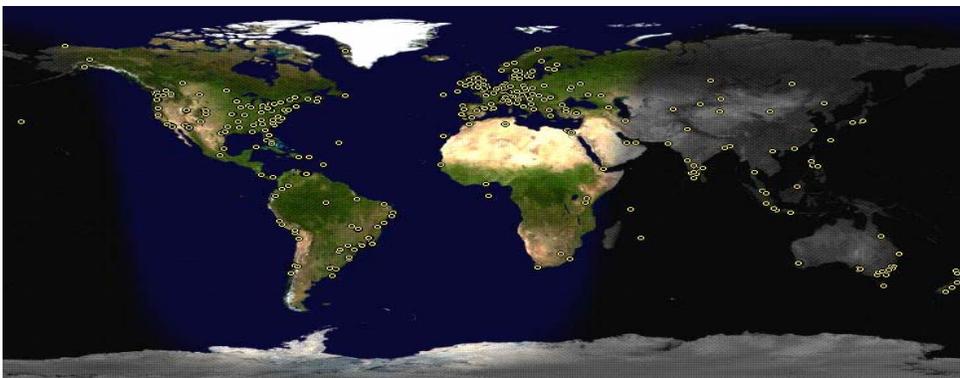


Classified ads. Buy, Sell, Trade. Members may place free ads (up to 5 lines). For commercial ads send an inquiry to: [PACCCOMM@Aol.com](mailto:PACCCOMM@Aol.com)

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**NEXT PACC MEETING  
 IS ON DECEMBER 20, 2009**

**PACC 1975 - 2009  
 IN ITS THIRTY-FOURTH YEAR**



**PACC TALK**

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***NEXT MEETING: December 20, 2009***

The Pittsburgh Area Computer Club (PACC) holds its meetings the **THIRD** Sunday of each month. The next meeting will be in room 311 at **Point Park University**, Wood St. and Blvd. of the Allies. The doors open at 11:00 am and close at 4:30 pm. Bring your PC!  
**NOTICE THE EXPIRATION DATE ON THE MAILING LABEL OF YOUR NEWSLETTER.**  
 You won't get your newsletter if you let your membership expire. Renew your Memberships !!! Send a check or money order for \$25 made out to 'PACC' and addressed to Treasurer, PACC, P.O. Box 6435, Pittsburgh, PA 15212-6435.  
**Classified ads.** Buy, Sell, Trade. Members may place free ads (up to 5 lines). Articles should be prepared in plain ASCII text. **WITHOUT** formatting. Deadline for articles is the 25th of the month. Send them to P.J. Konecny, P.O. Box 557, Monroeville, PA 15146.  
**PACC homepage can be found at: <http://pacc.apcug.org>**

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