

PACC TALK

Official Newsletter of the Pittsburgh Area Computer Club

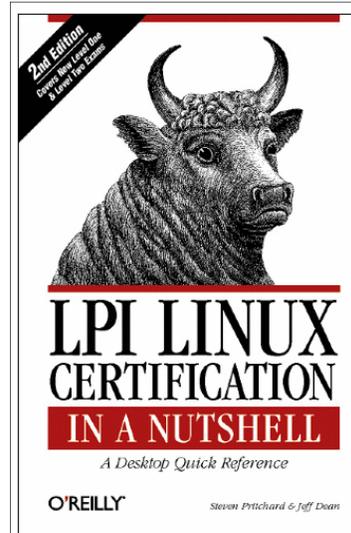
December 2010

MEETING SCHEDULE

Sunday, December 19, 2010

- 11:00 -11:25 am Sign In, Pay Dues, Greet visitors, Purchase 50/50
ROOM # 311 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, POTLUCK etc.
ROOM # 301 Raffle. (pg. 1)
- 12:35 - 2:00 pm Process Tamer, Cryptainer LE,
ROOM # 301 FilerFrog (pg. 1)
- 2:05 - 3:30 pm More programs and utilities
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

*** RAFFLE ***



“LPI Linux Certification in a Nutshell prepares system administrators for the basic LPI General Linux 101 exam and the more advanced 102 exam. The book is divided into two parts, one for each of the LPI exams. Each part features a summary of the exam, a Highlighter's Index, labs, suggested exercises, and practice exams to help you pass the LPI exams with flying colors.”

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What is inside....

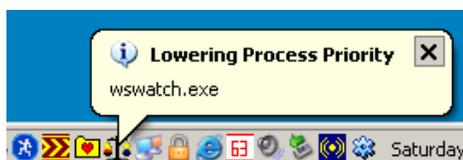
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ATTENTION PACCSTERS
The PACC will have its POTLUCK meeting this
Sunday, 19 December, 2010
As usual , please bring your favorite food. The
PACC will provide cold cuts fare in variable format.

Windows SIG

I like this Process Tamer utility because it is very user friendly, and easy to configure. Here is some info from their website:

“Process Tamer is a tiny (140k) and super efficient utility for Microsoft Windows XP/2K/NT/Vista/Win7 that runs in your system



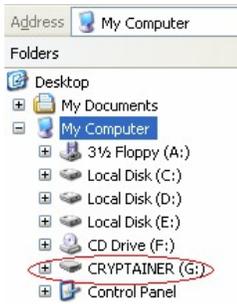
tray and constantly monitors the cpu usage of other processes. When it sees a process that is overloading your cpu, it reduces the priority of that process temporarily, until its cpu usage returns to a reasonable level. ... Process Tamer solves this problem by identifying such these degenerate conditions and temporarily reducing the priority of the offending processes in order to allow your system to respond to other requests. Stop being a victim to an overloaded cpu - let Process Tamer keep your system responsive no matter what you're doing.”

Get it here:

<http://www.donationcoder.com/Software/Mouser/proctamer/>

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Another very neat program comes from **Cypherix™**. There is all this talk about encryption of your important information and other data which you do not want anyone to access. This freebie is easy to use and it is portable. Read the excerpt from the website:

“Cryptainer LE is a freeware utility from Cypherix. It is a 128 bit disk encryption software that is a "miniature" version of Cryptainer PE and Cryptainer. It creates encrypted containers (vaults) of upto

100 MB each to store any type of data. You can encrypt files and folders by simply dragging and dropping them into this vault. Additionally, it lets you create secure e-mail files that you can send to anyone. Cryptainer LE includes a 'Mobile' feature, which allows it to encrypt all media (including, USB, CD ROM etc). It works on all 32 bit as well as 64 bit versions of Windows. The Best Part - this award winning encryption package is totally free and never expires.”

There is much more on the web site, I highly recommend you go there for more detailed information. Only a 6.6 MB file size. Get it from here:

<http://www.cypherix.co.uk/downloads.htm>

Or here:

<http://cypherix.com/download/cryle90.exe>

What is it about FilerFrog? There are some good utilities to improve Windows file handling in Windows Explorer. It may get some getting used to but it offers too much, to not try it out!

From the web site:

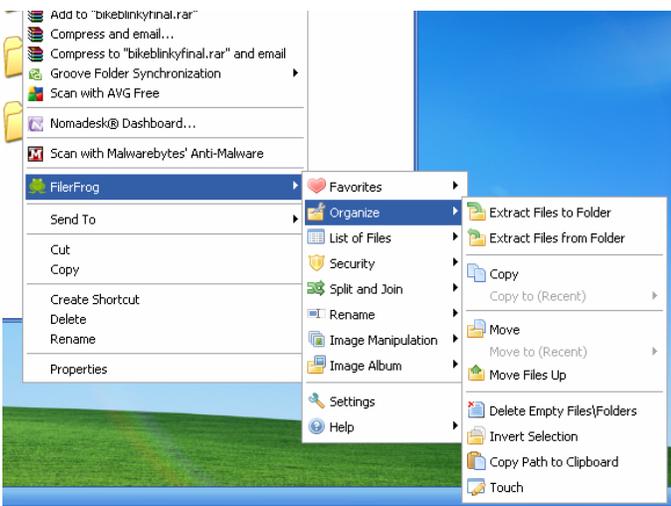
“ * FilerFrog is a new and innovative way of manipulating files in windows explorer.

* FilerFrog integrates with windows explorer as a shell extension so it can provide you with tools to perform your every day file manipulation actions easily and efficiently.

* FilerFrog helps both advanced and novice users to perform file manipulation functions easier and more efficiently.

* FilerFrog provides you with the ability to perform your actions quicker by giving you the appropriate tool in the appropriate places.” Small download, only 1.4 MB file size, get it here:

<http://www.filerfrog.com/>



Dick's Clicks

By Dick Ramette, President,
Computer Club of Green Valley, AZ
November 2010 issue, Green Bytes
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Resigned to the premise that I've irreversibly "welcomed the frenziedness of technology into my soul" (see my piece in October *Green Bytes*), I clicked on ORDER NOW at the Apple Store to get a new iPod Touch 4G. It finally arrived after going through Honshu, Shanghai, Anchorage, Memphis, and Tucson. "Touch" means the smooth and intuitive user interface where fingertips rule. It's a lot like the much larger iPad.

My chief motivation was to make my entire music collection available during neighborhood walks. The new Touch also has two(!) cameras, one for taking snapshots of what I'm looking at, the other pointing at my face for an application called Facetime, rather like Skype. The cameras have both still and video modes. Also, my photo collections are easily copied onto the Touch for viewing away from home, and I can watch videos.

Then, there's the vast (200,000?) world of applications (apps), many of which are free downloads, in case I need more ways to veg out in the digital lifestyle. I can access my Netflix account and watch, for free, movies on my tiny screen. But I won't. My Google Gmail account lets me send and receive messages. But I won't. A TV Guide lets me scroll through today's program schedule. I will. Another app peruses the International Movies Database to check up on movies, old and current. The NASA app provides all kinds of info on space technology. With Safari I can surf the web, read the NYTimes, etc., etc. Huffington Post's app makes it much easier to navigate than the regular web site.

A cool app called Dragon Dictation lets me "talk" to my iPod, and transcribes my words into printed text, virtually error-free. This text can, for example, be pasted into an email message. Maybe I will. Google Earth is there (small world). I'm no big gamer, but I really like Zynga's Scramble, an interactive word game. I can display maps, a calendar, a clock, stock reports, weather, YouTube and use a simple calculator. The Epicurious app is the ultimate cookbook - in the category of Decadent Desserts alone there are 6,023 mouth-watering recipes, none of which I'll use.

That so much technology has been crammed into such a tiny case is stunning. Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock would have lusted after such a versatile device. It's very relaxing to enjoy my new toy while laid back in my recliner. Perhaps, in time, my infatuation will narrow to my original goals of music listening and picture taking while out walking, and Scramble. But, for now, I think I'm in love.

Thoughts of the Month:

It would appear that we have reached the limits of what it is possible to achieve with computer technology, although one should be careful with such statements, as they tend to sound pretty silly in 5 years.

John von Neumann, circa 1960

"Technology makes it possible for people to gain control over everything, except over technology."

John Tudor

Solid State Devices

By Vinny La Bash, Regular Columnist,
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October 2010 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor
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Measuring the effect of SSD technology is more than the numbers game we play with conventional Winchester disk drives. What you experience with SSD drives centers on how certain tasks feel. Loading applications, boot up, shut down, and changing levels in your first person 3D shooter game are prime examples. Everything happens incredibly fast.

Examine the current state of SSD technology and you see a rapidly evolving technological landscape. Concerns about performance, longevity, and outright failure that plagued early solid state drives are fading. These issues are being replaced by how well manufacturers are optimizing the components of SSD technology. NAND chips, controllers, and cache memory are made by multiple suppliers. SSD vendors must take these separate components and merge them into a reliable storage device with good performance at a price that potential customers are willing to pay.

SSD manufacturers select a controller based on the controller's cost and capability, match it with one of several different kinds of cache memory, and marry the combination to either MLC or SLC NAND flash memory chips. Single Level Cell (SLC) holds one data bit per cell. Multi Level Cell (MLC) has greater capacity. Currently MLC data chips hold two data bits per cell.

Experience reveals that the future belongs to MLC based devices. Up until now SLC based technology offered faster writes, lower power consumption, and greater longevity. Still, Intel and other chip makers appear confident that MLC technology will become dominant in the marketplace. That confidence is backed up by the design of current MLC devices where performance measured against SLC based devices is becoming nearly indistinguishable. An examination of technology publications shows that reviewers of SSD drives overwhelmingly prefer MLC gear.

Intel has been and continues to be a leader in this area. In the early days of SSD development, controller problems were so prevalent that Intel assigned a team of development engineers to redesign the controllers. A new generation of controllers came about which rehabilitated the technology. That too is about to change. Earlier this year Intel and Micron announced 25nm NAND flash memory production which means yet another generation of controller technology is imminent.

Why Performance Declines Without TRIM

It is important to understand how SSD devices handle a delete operation. (Otherwise you may have difficulty comprehending TRIM, which will be described later). No storage device, whether it is an SSD or traditional drive, has access to the operating system's file structure. Therefore, it does not know what data the OS has marked for deletion and is available for overwriting. Later on, when the OS wants to perform a write operation, this becomes an overwrite operation from the viewpoint of the storage device.

For conventional disks, this is the same as writing to an empty sector, but because of how an SSD must operate at the hardware level, an overwrite operation involves considerable additional overhead which can effectively cripple write performance.

An SSD stores its data in flash memory cells. These cells are organized and grouped into pages. Typical page capacity is 4 KB. These pages are further consolidated into blocks consisting of (typically) 128 pages or 512 KB of data. Early SSD performance slowed down over time because data can be erased only at the block level. An erase operation is theoretically possible at the page level, but because of the physical construction of an SSD device, erase commands won't work except at the block level. This is inherent in the design, and cannot be changed.

Note: By design, it is impossible to write to a NAND memory cell unless it is empty.

Any data in the block must be transferred into cache memory where it is then erased and rewritten to flash memory as empty pages. The actual operation is more complex, but a data overwrite is essentially a read, modify, erase, and write cycle. The memory and processor embedded in the controller handles the entire procedure and does not go outside the SSD. The process is commonly referred to as write amplification.

Example: You have 8KB of data. In a previous session the OS marked some of the data for deletion, and the OS now wants to overwrite the "deleted" data.

1. The OS sends instructions to the SSD controller to begin the data overwrite.
2. The contents of the entire block are read into cache memory.
3. The memory cache is now updated. Unneeded data is deleted, and the rest undisturbed.
4. The entire block is erased on the SSD.
The updated data in the cache memory is now written back to the block.

The longer the SSD has been in use, the greater the performance degradation because of the way data must be stored and modified.

TRIM

Without TRIM, performance declines because the operating system doesn't bother to inform the SSD when data is available for re-write, and the operating system doesn't actually delete the data. The TRIM command addresses the situation by working with the operating system to notify the SSD that data marked for deletion should be immediately erased. In other words, the TRIM command tells the SSD to delete data at the same time the user initiates the delete function instead of waiting for the OS to decide when to overwrite the "deleted" data.

When the operating system "deletes" a file, if TRIM is enabled, the operating system updates the file system and notifies the SSD via the TRIM command which pages need to be deleted. Then the SSD reads the block into cache memory, updates the cache, erases the block on the SSD, and then writes back only pages containing data which was not marked for deletion by the OS. The delete is slow, but there is no performance hit for write operations because the affected pages are now empty, and write performance is what's important. TRIM improves performance only when you delete files.

The TRIM command acts as an interface between the OS and the SSD that tells the SSD when data should be erased. The SSD then performs the delete operation immediately after the OS marks the data for deletion. Since TRIM ensures that data is actually deleted immediately after the user deletes a file, traditional file recovery programs will not work on solid state devices with TRIM enabled.

Note: Windows 7, Windows Server 2008 R2, and some versions of
(Continued on page 4)

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Linux support TRIM. Windows XP and VISTA do not, repeat, do not support TRIM. However, a few vendors have included utilities that will enable the command with XP or Vista if the SSD supports the command. However, most early SSD devices do not support TRIM. Check with the manufacturer.

Partitioning and Formatting

While the physical structure of solid state devices is considerably different from traditional disk drives, partitioning and formatting operations appear virtually identical from a PC user point of view. What goes on under the covers should be of no concern to most users.

Defrag

In a standard disk drive, information is accessed by a combination of platter rotation and movement of read/write heads. Defragmentation takes all the sections or fragments of a file and positions them in one contiguous location. This minimizes seek time and speeds up disk operations.

Solid state devices have no moving parts. Performance is the same no matter where data is located. Therefore, nothing can be gained by defragging a solid state device. The additional, unnecessary read/write cycles may actually reduce the SSD's life expectancy. Therefore, defragging SSDs is not only useless, but may be harmful. Don't defrag an SSD.

Wear Leveling

Flash memory chips have a finite life cycle. This cycle is defined by approximately 10,000 write operations before the cell is subject to breakdown and no longer reliably records data. Wear Leveling is the process by which no flash memory cell is required to undergo significantly more write operations than any other memory cell on the drive. The process evenly distributes write operations among the available flash memory cells.

Wear Leveling affects the data capacity of solid state drives because some of the disk space must be reserved to carry out the leveling operation. The amount of reserved space varies by manufacturer and is known as over-provisioning. The longevity of an SSD appears to be directly proportional to the efficiency of Wear Leveling. Most manufacturers reserve around 7% of the SSD. Conservative vendors such as Mushkin reserve up to 13%. This can account for much of the discrepancy between stated total capacity and formatted capacity. The trade off could become an issue to SSD customers who may be unwilling to sacrifice storage space even for potential increased longevity.

Summary and Conclusions

There is no doubt that solid state devices will eventually replace conventional disk drives, but prices of solid state drives will have to decline significantly first. Until that day, expect to see hybrid systems consisting of an SSD boot drive, and traditional drives for bulk storage. Solid state drives have no moving parts. Therefore, they have considerable advantages over traditional drives:

1. They are very fast because seek time is greatly reduced.
2. Less likely to malfunction.
3. Smaller and lighter.
4. Generates very little heat.
5. Completely silent.
6. Consume far less energy. :

Twitter

By Constance Brown, President,
Canton Alliance Massillon User Group, Ohio
October 2010 Issue, The Memory Map

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When I speak about Twitter to people who are in their forties and older, the usual responses are as follows. "It's silly to tell people what you are doing every minute. Who cares anyway?" "I don't see the point." "It's a waste of time." "I don't have time for it." "I have no interest in it."

Perhaps all of us have been irritated by stories of two people sitting on the porch twittering each other instead of talking together. Sometimes we fear that conversation is becoming a lost art. Maybe it is. Nevertheless, Twitter and other social networking sites are becoming crucial communications tools in a day when people are so busy they don't often have time for conversation but want to stay in touch.

Perhaps Twitter is one of the more difficult to appreciate. Each message has to be 140 characters or less. Yes, it takes time to communicate on Twitter.

So why is it so popular? How is it used? Does it have a place in business?

You will find 17 Reasons to Twitter at <http://www.doshdosh.com/ways-you-can-use-twitter/> < <http://bit.ly/UsY5>>. The writer encourages readers to Twitter the information to others. Here are the 17 reasons. A few have been slightly abbreviated. My comments are in italics.

1. Personal Branding. Twitter establishes you as a social personality that is connected and approachable. As Twitter adoption increases, new users will be drawn towards well established Twitter personas. *This can also create problems. Beware of anyone on Twitter who is following scores or hundreds of people but has almost no one following him. He might be phishing for information that he can use to steal identities.*

2. Get Feedback. Need an alternative perspective on how a website looks or the right course of action to take? Blast out a message asking for advice and you'll receive replies from other users. This collective intelligence can be used as fodder for articles or projects. *Hmm. Great way to spark the writer's genius!*

3. Hire People. Need a good logo designer, marketer or programmer? Send out a message asking for recommendations. This is a very quick and easy way to hire freelancers or even companies based on familiar recommendations. *It is important for freelancers to keep their quality top-notch. All it takes is a dissatisfied client twittering a bad experience to make others wary of your services.*

4. Direct traffic. Twitter can be used to get traffic to your websites or the sites of friends. If you ask your friends to tweet about it, the message will spread faster and further as other active users pick it up. *Traffic is essential to the success of any site selling products or services. Twittering is free and an important way to reach clients, especially the group ages 30 and under.*

5. Read News. Twitter users often link to useful sites or articles and can be a source of scoops and alternative news. You can also subscribe to Twitter feeds for specific websites/conferences. *It is also the*

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quickest way to find out the scores in a game or the votes on election night. Find out who is winning before the news sites post the information.

6. Make New Friends. Like any other social network, Twitter has a built-in function for you to befriend and track the messages of other users. This is an easy way for you connect with people outside of your usual circle can be developed into a long lasting friendship.

7. Network for benefits. Twitter can be used as a socializing platform for you to interact with other like-minded people, especially those in the same industry. It can be used to establish consistent and deeper relationships for future benefits such as testimonials or peer recommendations. *Get peer reviews and testimonials from a large audience. New writers take note.*

8. Use it as a ToDo list. Use Twitter to record down what you need to do while you are away from the computer. Mark the tweet as a favorite to file it for referencing. Another alternative is to use an Online task management service that is synced with Twitter. One example is Remember The Milk. *Won't do me any good when I shop because I do not have Internet service on my phone. But that type of service is popular with the group under age 30.*

9. Business Management. Twitter can be used as a company intranet that connects employees to one another. Workers can liaise with each other when working on group projects. Particularly useful when certain workers go out often in the field. Updates could be set to private for security reasons. *Useful indeed . . . But will upper management recognize that or try to ban twittering on the job for any reason just as they did Internet use because they believed workers wasted company time.*

10. Notify Your Customers. Set up a Twitter feed for the specific purpose of notifying customers when new products come in. Customers can subscribe via mobile or RSS for instant notification. Twitter can also be used to provide mini-updates for one-on-one clients. *Free Advertising! Entice your customers by sending limited time specials to Twitter clients only.*

11. Take Notes. Twitter provides you with an easy way to record important ideas or concepts you want to explore further. Include links relevant to ideas you want to explore. Note taking can also be done offline via mobile applications. *Do I want everyone to gain from my brainstorm? I can't complain of idea theft if I publicize them!*

12. Event Updates. Businesses can use Twitter as a means to inform event participants and latest event happenings/changes. *Wonder whether the schools are using this method to announce closings because of weather? I'm afraid none of the CAMUG members would get the message!*

13. Find Prospects. Twitter can be used as a means to find potential customers or clients online. Do a search for keywords related to your product on Twitter Search and then follow users. Tweet about topics parallel to your product and close prospects away from public channels by using direct messages or offline communications. Discretion and skill is needed in this area. *The last sentence is important. You do not want to turn Tweeters against you!*

14. Provide Live coverage. Twitter's message size limit prevents detailed coverage of events but it can allow you to provide real-time commentary which may help to spark further discussion or interest on the event as other Twitter users spread the message. Very useful for citizen journalism. *Online blog and tweets along with text messaging*

can be powerful political tools as we observed in the last election.

15. Time Management and Analysis. Twitter can simply be used to keep a detailed record of what you are doing every day. This might be boring for others but this type of usage is useful when you want to analyze how you spend and manage your time. *But why make it public?*

16. Set Up Meetings. Twitter can help you organize impromptu meet-ups. For example, you can twitter a message while at a cafe, event or art gallery and arrange to meet fellow users at a specific spot. It's an informal and casual way of arranging a meeting. *If there is a really good daily special or if the food is exceptionally bad or good or the server is having a bad day, all your friends on Twitter will know!*

17. Acquire Votes. Send a link to your stories you've submitted in other social news sites like Digg. Sometimes your followers will vote up the stories because they agree with it. This allows you to acquire more support for your efforts on other social media websites. *Very important way to acquire support and a name people can recognize.*

Now that we have looked at the ways in which Twitter can be used, some of you may decide to venture cautiously into the world of tweeting. Businesses have recognized its value and are utilizing not only Twitter but other social networking sites to reach younger audiences. When you got the newspaper this morning, the information was old news to the tweeting audience. Yet the printed page still has its appeal though it is struggling in this world of instant communication. Whatever method you select, I wish you happy communicating!

the end of the story

It's Crystal Ball Time Again

**By Elizabeth B. Wright, Member,
Computer Club of Oklahoma City
October 2010 issue, CCOKC eMonitor
www.ccok.org [wright599new\(at\)sbcglobal.net](mailto:wright599new(at)sbcglobal.net)**

Is it any wonder no real work gets done any more? Since the advent of the personal computer, the workforce in the world has been in a constant learning mode. Early in the game there were many competing programs to buy. Some had a steep learning curve, others were fairly easy to conquer. In business, you either got the concept of a spreadsheet or you didn't. One way or the other the number crunching software became a dominant player in the office environment. The same held true for word processing. Apple had the inside track on graphics, but folks that is also based on numbers whether you can see it or not. Don't be fooled. Computers only do one thing, they turn on and off little switches which make up what you see on your screen. And they do it with two numbers, 0 and 1. Off is 0, On is 1. Admittedly it is a bit more complicated than that, number combinations which tell the computer what those two switches will turn on or off, but the basis of all computing is number handling.

Since the time of the first personal computers, there has hardly been a gap between the last software update and the newest release. Those developers who had a good product that was supposed to last forever found themselves quickly out of business, buried in the onslaught of Microsoft and IBM sales techniques. Just as Mt. St. Helens buried a good chunk of real estate, so has Microsoft buried the competition in personal computer software. Funny, both Microsoft and Mt. St. Helens are located in Washington state. Anyway, there seems to be no

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end to the product finagling designed to make users think they are getting something new.

But here is the problem. With each new version of both software and operating systems, endless retraining is needed to get the individual or workforce up to speed and to actually be productive. This provides work for the trainers, but of course the trainees never arrive at the productive stage because there is always a newer incarnation of the same old tired software, requiring the cycle to begin all over again. For government entities this is no problem since very little beneficial work gets done there anyway. But for other businesses, a thinking person might find it confusing that any corporation, large or small, could be profitable in the above scenario. I don't know to what extent the business world is resisting the pressure to upgrade and update, but obviously if one large company chooses to do so, many others must follow suit. Monkey see, monkey do.

The day has long passed since the novelty of owning a desktop computer, either in an office or at home, was exciting. Few people have opted to do much more than use email on their home machines. Small offices either had to make do with older software and machines or face non-profitability in the upgrade race. A few have been able to continue business as usual without changing with each new version, but the lack of support for older systems must be placing a heavy burden on such establishments.

Go to any bookstore or restaurant with wi-fi and you will see many people with their laptops doing what appears to be research, homework or business transactions. Are they upgrading their machines and software at every turn? These people often take up prime seating (case in point: a booth for four people which becomes a virtual private office) and conduct their affairs via the free internet access. Some even go so far as to talk to what I assume are customers/clients, either by cell phone or phone access via the computer. Can the restaurants and bookstores make enough money from these customers to continue providing free offices for them?? For the people taking advantage of the free spaces and services, perhaps it's the only way they can make any kind of living. After all, if they had to pay the internet bill themselves or rent office space they almost surely could not be competitive. While these customers may buy a drink, or possibly even some food, the time they spend taking up space seems unreasonably long to me. But I suppose the business owners know what they are doing. Or do they? On a very recent internet news blurb there was reference to this very problem. As some of the coffeehouse/ bookstores/ deli cafes face lower profits, will they begin to see this phenomenon as a good thing gone sour?

Back to the subject of endless upgrades, I can understand hardware upgrades. But how can any of this superfluous software revision possibly be good for consumers? Since the really big companies utilize very specialized software and mainframe hardware which requires a far different kind of tech support, when does the upgrade cycle for the rest of us come to an end?

Are we in the fourth quarter in a tied game, users 0, developers 0? Laptop computers use the same software as our nearly obsolete desktop systems, so what is the picture? There is no overtime or sudden death playoff in this game. No winners, only losers. Some are saying we are at the end of the road for personal computers. Young people seem to want nothing bigger than something they can hold in their hands.

Or could I be totally wrong? Is there a whole new world of technology about to be opened up to us. Who will lead the way?

eBAY- The Pluses and the Problems

**By Ian Gemmell, Webmaster,
Computer Pals for Seniors - Epping Inc., Australia
September 2010 Newsletter
www.cpepping.net.au Open Windows (at) Epping**

BEGINNERS BEWARE

We have Club members who are very active users of eBay, and who do so with very few problems. Some even say they are addicted. We need to understand that people in this category succeed because they understand both the techniques necessary for buying and selling and also the pitfalls which have to be avoided.

eBay has grown rapidly and now has 181 million customers, and at any one time has more than 3 million items for sale. Because of this there are 174 thousand professional users of eBay who make their living on eBay. It is important to realize that you are competing with these.

Search techniques and trading tricks

The first thing you need to understand is you have to know how to "snipe". This is a technique whereby you only bid in the last few seconds. You can either do this manually or by using a professional sniper. It is also important to understand that all the intermediate bidding is a waste of time. Leave it to the inexperienced operators as you only increase the competition. You only bid once at the end and set your sniping price according to your keenness to win in the bidding.

Fraud – Prevalence and Prevention

eBay go to great lengths to convince us that fraud is not very significant. The fact is that fraud has become the domain of professionals, who become increasingly expert as time goes by. For this reason if you venture into trading on eBay you will have to be aware of the precautions you must take. The most common cause of fraud is non-delivery by the seller, usually because the item does not exist. Precautions which you should take include the following:

Check the trading history of the seller and only deal with those with a good record.

Use eBay's Paypal facility to ensure that you receive the goods as described. You can also for a small fee when dealing with expensive items use an escrow service. This ensures that the goods are verified before you pay for them.

Ask the seller any questions needed to further describe the item.

Be on guard against a scam where sellers provide a fraudulent "proof of dispatch" document to obtain payment claiming that the shippers will only dispatch when goods are paid for.

Use the proven guidelines that if something sounds too good to be true then it probably is.

Use a universal email provider like Gmail in communicating by email. Use of your regular email address is inviting problems.

Be aware that eBay has been the subject of fraudulent "phishing" emails which are trying to get your user name and password. Never respond!

All you have to do now is to learn all the ways that you can use eBay. Use the eBay Sitemap to find all the links, and use all the information on eBay Help. Best of luck.

Tips and Tricks (Slip an Ace up your Sleeve)

By Bob Goodman, Newsletter Team,
Cajun Clickers Computer Club, LA
December 2010 issue, Cajun Clickers Computer News
www.clickers.org bob (at) houseplanz.com

Map Envelope

The Unofficial Google Maps Envelope Service It's easy to attach a Google Maps image to any email, but I doubt that would elicit as much of a smile from whoever gets it. Map Envelope is a free service, so go ahead and give it a try.

No, this isn't another Google Maps music video, but a new web service that allows users to print mailing envelopes with their Google Maps location. Best of all, it's free and no registration is required. Try it here:



<http://mapenvelope.com/>

Cleaning your Screen by Cal Esneault - CCCC Member

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 later. 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.

Troubleshooting PC System Slowdowns

By Vinny La Bash,
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December 2010 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor
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Your PC used to be a rocket ship with turbo boost. Today, a glacier could whiz right by it. What happened? Listing all the possible causes could generate a useless lengthy list, so let's focus on some likely culprits and look at what can be done to either eliminate or tone down their effects on performance.

Windows 7 has been out for over a year now, and one of its virtues is that it requires far less system resources to operate than either XP or Vista. Nevertheless, initial lightning like response tends to fade over time, and system hang-ups become all too common. Before reformatting your hard drive let's examine some less drastic methods of getting your PC back to its initial unspoiled state.

The odds are good that you have enough physical RAM to run your most common applications without your machine having to swap data in and out of memory often enough to be a problem, but are your memory chips performing the way they should? Computers have become very powerful compared to machines in the past. Your digital watch probably has more computational power than some main frames built in the 70s.

Buying memory used to be a simple affair. You needed to know the maximum speed your motherboard would support and how much memory would fit into a slot, and that was it. Motherboards today will allow a mix of speeds without apparent trouble, but the system will default to the slowest memory speed to avoid conflicts.

Most memory chips are fine, but if you try to save money by buying cheap RAM you could be purchasing chips with minor flaws that don't show up until you stress your system with video editing, high end games or some other application with far-reaching RAM demands. A high quality motherboard will have built-in mechanisms to let your system keep working, but you may pay a steep performance price.

To check out your memory (and other system components) download the free Belarc Advisor program to see what you have. It is an amazingly extensive analysis of your system. You can download the program at http://www.belarc.com/free_download.html.



Until recently, heat generated by memory chips was not an issue. That's changed with the newer type RAM chips and the only way you can know if your memory is overheating is to power down, open the case, and touch the chip. If you have to pull your hand back, your memory is probably running too hot. If you think your memory chips are overheating, check your motherboard manual to see if you can install a RAM fan. Another alternative is to install a fan card in a PCI slot.

(Continued from page 7)

Multitasking and resource hungry applications need RAM and lots of it. If you are running on a manufacturer's minimum specifications you probably don't have enough physical memory to accommodate the more demanding tasks. Memory is cheap, and there is no good reason not to have the maximum amount of memory that your system can handle. The amount of RAM you can install is determined by the chip set on your motherboard. Consult your user manual. Windows 7 can handle up to 192 gigabytes. That's overkill, but there is no good reason to work with less than 4 gigabytes.

Background applications are like invisible gremlins throttling performance. Take a look in the notification area located at the bottom right section of your display. Every icon there represents a program. All of them are running. Most of them are performing their function in the background, but they all consume system resources.

Left click on the **Start** orb and type **System Configuration** in the search box. After launching the tool, click on the **Startup** tab and uncheck the boxes of any unneeded startup programs.

Manufacturers assemble their systems to work, not necessarily to work at optimum performance. Don't overlook the BIOS settings as a cause of system slowdown. Most people accept the default BIOS settings and never check them. It's always a good idea to get your motherboard's user manual and examine the BIOS settings that optimize performance. Sadly, there is no centralized database you can reference, but you can use Google or Bing search engines to find out. The odds are good that your default settings need to be changed.

Intel and AMD have gone to great lengths to design processor chips that are efficient and generate less heat. That hasn't eliminated the need for some kind of cooling mechanism which is most commonly a fan. Accumulation of dust can overwork a fan, and cause it to fail. Clean the dust out with a can of compressed air, and monitor the fan afterwards for signs of failure. Bearings can get loose and cause vibration. When you hear noise develop because a fan is failing, don't hesitate; replace the fan. Clean out the interior of your machine with compressed air while you're at it.

If quality control wasn't the best when your machine was built, the heat sink used to cool the processor may not be placed properly above the CPU; the thermal paste may be of inferior quality or have been improperly applied. This condition appears mostly with home built systems, and sometimes even in commercially assembled units.

A poorly designed case can contribute to excess heat due to internal airflow restrictions. It's best to check this out before you buy, but if you didn't, installing extra fans is usually possible unless you have a laptop.

Overclocking can generate enough excess heat from the CPU to cause failure. If you are experienced enough to handle overclocking, consider a water cooled system. It can be expensive and it's certainly more complex, but that's the price you pay for extra performance.

Keep the ambient temperature comfortable. If you feel too warm it's probably too high for your system. You needn't keep your computer in a refrigerator, but adequate ventilation and room temperatures below 80° are simply common sense procedures.

Whenever you notice degrading system performance, always look for potential hardware problems first. Software can be at fault, but it's far less likely to be the root of your problems.

the end of the story



From the Editor's desk



Hi PACCsters!

Must Read List!

- Dick's Clicks by Dick Ramette
- Solid State Devices by Vinny La Bash
- Twitter by Constance Brown
- It's Crystal Ball Time by Elizabeth B. Wright
- eBAY-The Pluses and the Problems by I. Gemmill
- Tips and Tricks (Slip an Ace up your Sleeve) ... by Bob Goodman
- Troubleshooting PC System Slowdowns by Vinny La Bash

Do not miss the POTLUCK !!!

I'll see all you at the December 19 , 2010 meeting. PJK

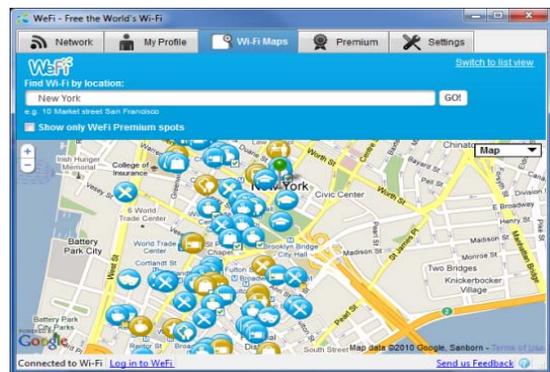
IMPORTANT NOTICE

There may be some changes soon to the APCUG web hosting and with it the URL. The switch is to take place by December 19, 2010. As of now, that is all I know about it. I will let you know as soon as it happen, by e-mail of course!

Please have patience waiting for a new address of PACC Web. As soon as the migration is resolved I will send out the information.

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NAME	COMPUTER AREA	PHONE	TIME
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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

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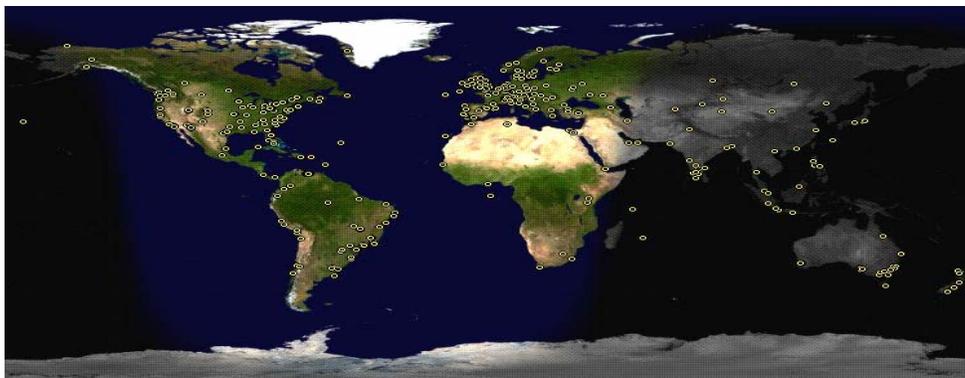


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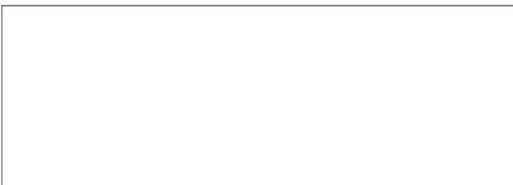


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NEXT PACC MEETING IS ON DECEMBER 19, 2010

PACC 1975 - 2010
IN ITS THIRTY-SIXED YEAR



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NEXT MEETING: December 19, 2010

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.
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