The Cursor

Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group

Meeting Location
Fairfax County
Government Center

apcug
Member of

Next Meeting:
November 17, 2007

Presidential Bits

By Paul Howard

November Meeting

We had a very compact meeting last month - apparently the nice weather tempted many members to bask in the sun rather than adopt an appropriate techie gray pallor <grin>!

Our APCUG regional rep, Gabe Goldberg, gave a great demo and presentation of a huge range of gadgets and things to gladden a techie's heart. Check out the new updated list of items on our Recent Meetings web page - http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html - I'm sure you'll find something fun to give to someone for the holidays - or broadly hint to Santa about something you'd like.

Our next meeting will be on Saturday, November 17th, in the Fairfax County Government Center, conference center room 1. Our featured speaker, visiting us from Utah, will be Dave Whittle, presenting: "**Whittle's Picks for the Digital Home – Exciting Technologies You're Sure to Love.**" Are you enjoying the digital revolution that is transforming your home? The possibilities for managing your own digital content and entertainment are more engaging than ever before. You can now take pictures and videos with digital cameras

and camcorders, add your choice of background music, and moments later share them with family and friends via e-mail or CD or even by DVD, displayed on our television sets in "home theaters."

Would you like a brief look at the latest gadgets, goodies, software, and services available for the digital home? Would you like to have software that takes your digital photos and video footage and almost magically transforms it into a movie on DVD or CD that is a surprising delight to watch? Most importantly, do you ever feel as if there is more to know about Internet security than you're being told? Are you tired of being your own Internet security expert? Would you be interested in a service that brings, for a very reasonable monthly fee, comprehensive Internet security to your PC and identity theft insurance and peace of mind to you? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you won't want to miss Dave Whittle's presentation at our next monthly meeting!

"Whittle's Picks" are hidden gems from companies large and small, old and new, with outstanding, innovative offerings -- including muvee™ Technologies () and the Invisus PC

Continues next page

Lloyd's Web Sites for November, 2007

by Lloyd Johnson, WACUG Member

http://www.wacug.org/ is the URL for the Washington Area Computer User Group. Visit it for past issues of Web Sites with hyperlinks

November 2007 Sites

1. **U.S State Department: Current Travel Warnings** – http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.htm. Travel Warnings are issued when the State Department recommends that Americans avoid a certain country. In addition to this list, the State Department issues Consular Information Sheets (http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html) for every country of the world with information on such matters as the health conditions, crime, unusual currency or entry requirements, any areas of instability, and the location of the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate (http://usembassy.state.gov/)in the subject country.

2. **How Sleep Works** – http://health.howstuffworks.com/sleep.htm. Sleep is one of those funny things about being a human being -- you just have to do it. Have you ever wondered why? And what about the crazy dreams, like the one where a bad person is chasing you and you can't run or yell. Does that make any sense? If you have ever wondered about why people have to sleep or what causes dreams, then read on. In this article, you'll find out all about sleep and what it does for you

3. **Internet Public Library** – www.ipl.org – Provides library services to Internet users. The site includes a reference center, a catalog of books and publications, subject-based collections, and resources for kids and teens.

4. **Home Improvement Tools** – www.popularmechanics.com/home_journal/tools. This Popular Mechanics magazine site presents dozens of articles from the magazine's archives on hand and power tools, including purchase and use of specific tools, product reviews, and tool tests. Tools discussed include: circular saws, table saws, routers, tape measures, clamps, chisels, wire strippers, and screwdrivers. Related sites: DIY Network: Home Improvement Tools / This Old House: Tools & Materials.

5. **Census Bureau Home Page – www.census.gov/**. As the nation's largest statistical agency, our website provides a vital national resource. These pages contain a wealth of statistical information about the nation's people and its economy - information that is used by the general public and researchers, as well as federal, state, and local governments, in making important decisions. Our website also provides information about the surveys we conduct and the information that is available.

Security Solution (myinvisusdirect.com/usergroups). If you'd like to take advantage of these special prices at the meeting and take product home with you, remember to bring cash, check, or a credit card. See you then!

Where has the year gone? I'm up to haunches in leaves, and trying to keep up on some of my technical reading. The bad guys continue to find weaknesses in security to exploit. Microsoft issued a bulletin about an exploit in Internet Explorer 7 that caused both Adobe Acrobat Reader and Mozilla Firefox to issue patches - be sure yours are up to date. At this writing, Microsoft hadn't issued a fix yet.

NCTCUG

Visit our "sister" user group. The National Capital Technology and Computer User's Group meets the first and fourth Wednesday of the month. They meet in Carlin Hall in Arlington at 5711 South 4th Street. Visit their web site for more information, a map and directions:

http://www.nctcug.org/

Meetings start at 7:00 PM

GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum, WAC

Everex $199 PC Available from WalHMart

WalHMart now offers a $199 GNU/Linux based desktop PC built by Everex at selected stores and through their online store (http://www.walmart.com/catalog/product.do?product_id=7754614). The Everex TC2502 Green gPC (http://www.everex.com/) features an energy-efficient VIA C7-D 1.5 GHz processor, 512 MB RAM (expandable to 2 GB), 80 GB hard disc, DVD-ROM/CD-RW drive, 10/100 Mbps ethernet port, six USB 2.0 ports, one serial and one parallel port, keyboard, mouse, and stereo speakers. Video graphics are provided by an onboard VIA Uni-Chrome Pro chipset. A video monitor is not included. The gOS Operating System (http://www.thinkgos.com/) is based upon Ubuntu 7.10 GNU/Linux with the Enlightenment desktop environment (http://www.enlightenment.org/), and includes lifetime updates. The gPC includes the OpenOffice.org 2.2 office applications suite, Mozilla Firefox web browser, Skype internet phone, GIMP image editing, and the Xing movie player. The gPC also links to online Google applications including Gmail, Google Maps, Google Documents and Spreadsheets, Google News, and Google Calendar.

Press Release: Slashdot Turns Ten

Oct 24th, 20:49 UTC

* Home of community-driven content celebrates 10 years of tech news

* More than 80,000 stories posted over the past decade

MOUNTAIN VIEW, Calif., Oct. 24, 2007 -- Slashdot (http://slashdot.org), part of SourceForge, Inc. (Nasdaq:LNUX), the web site that pioneered community-generated content, will celebrate its tenth anniversary on October 25, 2007. To celebrate the anniversary, Slashdot is hosting a free event at Palo Alto's Blue Chalk Bistro, where members of the community can meet the site's founders and editorial team.

The tech community news site, started in 1997 by Rob "CmdrTaco" Malda with Jeff "Hemos" Bates, has grown to an Internet phenomenon in its 10 year run. Slashdot features stories submitted by readers and posted by a dedicated Slashdot editorial board. The site serves as a water cooler for a generation of technophiles and established the model for today's changing media landscape. In August 2007, Slashdot launched a new feature called Firehose that allows subscribers a glimpse into the submission process normally only seen by Slashdot's editors.

"Nobody's more surprised than I am that we've reached the ten year mark," said Rob Malda, Slashdot co-founder. "But we saw what people wanted, and gave it to them before anyone else did."

Stories on the site range from technical to bizarre, falling under the site's trademarked motto News for Nerds. Stuff that Matters. Slashdot's popularity regularly overpowers its featured websites, causing many to experience the "Slashdot effect," where the unexpected and overwhelming traffic slows or temporarily shuts down the linked-to site.

Malda has been posting insights and highlights on Slashdot's origins throughout the month on the site, including:

Links to the navel-gazing brief history of Slashdot:

http://meta.slashdot.org/meta/07/10/02/1553218.shtml

http://meta.slashdot.org/meta/07/10/10/1445216.shtml

http://meta.slashdot.org/meta/07/10/17/1412245.shtml

Most bizarre story broken on Slashdot:

http://slashdot.org/article.pl?sid=02/02/14/143254

Top most visited stories and most active stories on Slashdot:

http://slashdot.org/hof.shtml

Photos of CmdrTaco and Hemos:

http://cmdrtaco.net/rob.shtml

http://web.sourceforge.com/company/mgmt_jeff_bates.php

About SourceForge, Inc.

SourceForge's media and e-commerce web sites connect millions of influential technology professionals and enthusiasts each day. Combining user-developed content, online marketplaces and e-commerce, SourceForge is the global technology community's nexus for information exchange, goods for geeks, and open source software distribution and services. SourceForge's network of web sites serves more than 32 million unique visitors each month* and includes: SourceForge.net, Slashdot, ThinkGeek, Linux.com, freshmeat.net, ITManagers-

Journal and NewsForge. For more information or to view the media kit online, visit www.sourceforge.com. (*Source: Google Analytics and Omniture, July 2007.) SourceForge, SourceForge.net, Slashdot, freshmeat, and ThinkGeek are registered trademarks of SourceForge, Inc. in the United States and other countries. All other trademarks or product names are property of their respective owners.

GNU/Linux Distribution Releases

GNU/Linux distributions are complete GNU/Linux operating system and application software collections. Many are freely downloadable or can be ordered on CDs or DVD at low cost. DistroWatch.com (http://www.distrowatch.com/) features the following distribution release announcements for the period September 28 - October 31, 2007.

Absolute Linux 12.0.7
Arch Linux 2007.08-2
ClarkConnect Server/Gateway 4.2
Damn Small Linux 4.0
Edubuntu 7.10
elpicx 1.1
EnGarde Secure Linux 3.0.17
Finnix 90.0
Foresight Linux 1.4.1

Frugalware Linux 0.7
GoblinX 2.5 "Mini"
Granular Linux 2007 "FunWorks"
Kiwi Linux 7.10
Kubuntu 7.10
Linspire 6.0
Mandriva Linux 2008
MEPIS antiX 7.0
NimbleX sub100_1
openSUSE 10.3
PAIPIX 7.10
Parsix GNU/Linux 0.90r2
Parted Magic 1.9
PUD GNU/Linux 0.4.8
Puppy Linux 3.01
RAYS 2.0
Red Flag Linux 6.0
Resulinux 2.5
rPath Linux 1.0.7
Sabayon Linux 1.1 "Professional"
Scientific Linux 4.5 Live CD/DVD
Slamd64 Linux 12.0
StartCom MultiMedia Edition 5.0.6
SystemRescueCd 0.4.1
Trisguel GNU/Linux 1.5
Ubuntu 7.10
Ubuntu Muslim Edition 7.04
Ubuntu Studio 7.10
Vyatta 3.0
Xubuntu 7.10
Yoper Linux 3.0.1
Zenwalk Linux 4.8

Linux Software of the Month

The software described below is downloadable at the links provided or may be requested on the monthly CD. In addition to the monthly CD described below, WAC can provide CD-R and DVD±R media for any downloadable GNU/Linux operating system distribution (e.g. Fedora, Mandriva, Ubuntu, Debian, Knoppix). Please note that download versions of commercial distributions do not include official technical support or printed documentation.

Discs are available **only by pre-order**. Contact Geof Goodrum by e-mail linux@wacug.org) at least 48 hours before meeting day to order or for more information. Single CD-R discs are available with a $3 donation; GNU/Linux distributions on multiple CD-Rs or single DVD±R are available with a $6 donation.

November 2007

Firefox – v2.0.0.9. http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/all.html. Free Mozilla Public License source code and executable by the Mozilla Foundation. Firefox is a modern, secure graphic web browser with features such as tabbed windows, privacy controls, phishing protection, web feeds, live bookmarks, integrated search engines, and add-on functional extensions and themes for customization.

GIMP – v2.4.1. http://gimp.org/. Free GNU General Public License source code by the GIMP Team and RPM and Debian packages. The GNU Image Manipulation Program (GIMP) is a raster image editor suitable for generating professional graphics or editing digital photographs. Features include:

- Full suite of painting tools including Brush, Pencil, Airbrush, Clone, etc.

- Sub-pixel sampling for all paint tools for high quality anti-aliasing

- Extremely powerful gradient editor and blend tool

- Supports custom brushes and patterns

- Tile based memory management so image size is limited only by available disk space

- Virtually unlimited number of images open at one time

- Full alpha channel support

- Layers and channels

- Multiple Undo/Redo (limited

only by disk space)

- Editable text layers

- Transformation tools including rotate, scale, shear and flip

- Selection tools including rectangle, rounded rectangle, ellipse, free, fuzzy

- Foreground extraction tool

- Advanced path tool doing bezier and polygonal selections.

- Transformable paths, transformable selections.

- Quickmask to paint a selection.

- A Procedural Database for calling internal GIMP functions from external programs as in Script-fu

- Advanced scripting capabilities (Scheme, Python, Perl)

- Plug-ins which allow for the easy addition of new file formats and new effect filters

- Over 100 plug-ins already available

- Load and save animations in a convenient frame-as-layer format

- MNG support

- Frame Navigator (in GAP, the GIMP Animation Package)

- Onion Skin (in GAP, the GIMP Animation Package)

- Bluebox (in GAP, the GIMP Animation Package)

- File formats supported include bmp, gif, jpeg, mng, pcx, pdf, png, ps, psd, svg, tiff, tga, xpm, and many others

- Load, display, convert, save to many file formats

- SVG path import/export

- Much, much more!

Kernel Source – http://www.kernel.org/. 2.6 kernel source code for all platforms (stable 2.6.23.1 and testing 2.6.24-rc1).

gPC

Gimp 2.4

gOS Desktop

Chuck's Clips

by Chuck Roberts, WAC Member

Most WACUG members know that I use Photoshop Elements as my digital image editor. But sometimes the results I need are not easily achieved with Elements or any editor. When that happens, I have to find other tools to assist with a particular task. So I find myself turning to Photoshop Plug-ins or other utilities to simplify my work flow and improve the results. This month I will discuss a common problem in digital photography — noise.

What is noise in digital photography? What does it look like? How do I get rid of it?

These are all good questions and I will attempt to address them. Noise is generally considered to be the result of "static" (if you will) that is generated by the electronics inside your digital camera. It is the digital equivalent of film grain. While it can even look like grain, it looks more like ugly speckles or color artifacts that appear in the middle of other colors – a few rogue color pixels.

Noise usually becomes visible when the ISO setting on your digital camera approaches 400 – 800. Noise in digital cameras is analogous to grain in the old black and white film era. I remember when developing film, we would "push" the film during development to increase ASA setting, or sensitivity, of the film which often resulted in images with grain (scanners are also well known for introducing noise into digitized images in dark areas – especially in blue areas).

Sometimes when shooting, it is not possible or is undesirable to use additional lighting for a proper exposure, so we simply adjust the ISO setting on the camera to increase the sensitivity of the sensor. Most digital cameras include this adjustment, but the less expensive model cameras don't have the higher quality electronics of some of the Digital SLR models so at some point, noise is introduced by the camera's electronics and the sensor (even Digital SLRs will generate noise if the ISO is pushed high enough). As a side note, noise generation can vary by individual camera. Noise is the result of the specific electronic components inside the camera and every component is unique to itself. In addition, the camera is built from a collection of electronic components. This simply means that most utilities to remove noise need to "learn" your camera or scanner's "noise fingerprint" through adaptive profiles.

The real power of noise reduction in digital images (from a camera or a scanner) is to remove or reduce the digital noise from the image and yet keep the details of the image sharp. Simply filtering the image to remove noise would also filter the details thus removing meaningful content from the image.

I have become aware of two utilities that do a good job of reducing noise from digital images that I feel are worth mentioning to our members with photography as a hobby. Both utilities offer a standalone product as well as a bundle which includes a plug-in for your image editing software and both companies offer a free trial, with limitations, so you can try before you buy if you want to test drive either or both applications.

The first product is *Noiseware* from Imagenomic, http://www.image-nomic.com/nwpg.aspx. This product comes in a professional version as well a standard version. Each version is available as a stand-alone utility as well as a plug-in version for use with image editors that support plug-ins.

Noiseware: a $50 professional stand-alone version; $30 standard stand-alone version

Noiseware: a $70 professional plug-in version; $50 standard plug-in version. A 15 Day-trial is available.

The second product is *Noise Ninja* from PictureCode, a Trial with limited functionality and watermarks is available.

See: http://www.picturecode.com/index.htm

Noise Ninja $80 Pro Bundle (stand-alone and plug-in)

Noise Ninja $70 Pro Stand-Alone

Noise Ninja $45 Home Bundle

Noise Ninja $35 Home Stand-Alone

Both web sites contain tutorial information about noise and present both before and after comparisons.

Note To Readers:

The following email was received from the APCUG Newsletter coordinator. It re-enforces just how critical computer backups are to our everyday lives. The recent wild fires in California are not exactly a new phenomenon, and yet no expected to have to immediately evacuate!...Editor

"Hi Editors, I apologize for not getting the October articles to you before the end of the month but I'm still doing clean-up from the fire in Canyon Country CA. I evacuated with 4 out of 5 computers (wonder why I didn't bother to take the Vista computer J), (2 of the computers are my grandson's -- 10 and 7), all the flattop monitors, flash drives, school curriculum notebooks, etc. When I got to my daughter's she asked if I had the pictures in the car – oops, forgot those. Have decided to give each of the three kids their baby books, photo albums and various momentos through their school career – obviously I'm not the one to keep those items. Backing up is so very important and that is really brought out when you have to evacuate. If I hadn't had time to take all of the computers, I would have been OK with just my external HD which backs up everything 24/7."

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Using Imaging Software For Backup

by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D., Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., FL
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There are many hard drive backup programs on the market that tell you that they can make an "image" of your hard drive. This allows you to restore your programs and data in case of a hard drive crash. They also will transfer everything on your hard drive to a new drive. Among these backup programs are well-known names such as Symantec Ghost, Acronis True Image, R-Drive Image, Image for Windows, Paragon Drive Backup and a host of free imaging applications. In terms of making a complete backup of your hard drive (operating system, applications and data), they are very successful. However, what happens when your hard drive crashes or you decide you want a new computer? Will these applications solve the problem of restoring your applications and data quickly and easily? Let's look at the generic methods they use for these situations.

Basically each of these programs makes a "bit-map" copy of your hard drive that is usually compressed and may be encrypted. This, I'm sure, is a statement that needs some explanation. First, the words "bit-map." Everything stored on your hard drive is encoded in the binary computer language. This language is composed of 1's and 0's only. This limitation is imposed by the electromagnetic character of hard drives as well as the "pits and hills" of optical media. So a "bit" is one character, a one or a zero. A computer word is a "byte" which is composed of eight "bits." The imaging software is examining every bit on your hard drive and copying it to the backup media. In order to save space, the bit-map is compressed before it is written to the backup site. The method of compression varies with the software used. Sometimes, the compressed file may be written in a proprietary format that can be read only by the specific application that originated the backup. In other words, Ghost's image file can't be read by any program other than Ghost.

So now we have a bit-map image of our hard drive on whatever we chose for the backup media. In my case I use external hard drives. If I were to store the backup on a partition of my original drive and that drive failed - I would lose the backup. So store it somewhere else if you ever expect to need it.

What does this image file contain? It has the entire contents of your hard drive. That means operating system files, including the Windows Registry, all of your software applications and all of your data. It also has all of the hardware driver information that Windows needs that relates to your hardware. That includes drivers for your motherboard and processor, network card, USB ports, printers, scanners, video cams, etc. This is a very important point, especially if you want to clone your drive to a new computer. More

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about that later.

Since an image file contains a complete copy of your hard drive it can be very useful in restoring individual files. It can also be used to restore an entire hard drive in case of a drive failure. There are several methods available for this process. Some image file programs allow you to create a bootable disk (floppy or CD-ROM). When the computer is booted from this disk, it will install the image file program and can then be used to restore all the files on the backup. This includes the operating system files. In other cases you have to first install the operating system and then the image file program before you can restore the rest of the files. In both cases, it is not necessary to reactivate Windows as changing the hard drive is not enough of a change to cause Windows to demand that you go through reactivation.

Microsoft instituted a copy protection process called "activation" with the release of Windows XP. This has been continued with Vista. The activation of Windows plays a very important role in any situation where hardware changes are made to your computer.

If you have a brand name system that you did not have to activate it only means that the manufacturer pre-activated it for you. In the activation process, a small file is placed on your hard drive, and sent to Microsoft, that contains the information related to these ten items:

Display Adapter
SCSI Adapter
IDE Adapter (effectively the motherboard)
Network Adapter (NIC) and its
MAC Address

RAM Amount Range (i.e., 0-64mb, 64-128mb, etc.)
Processor Type
Processor Serial Number
Hard Drive Device
Hard Drive Volume Serial Number (VSN)
CD-ROM / CD-RW / DVD-ROM

This file contains a number based on the identification of the first item in every category. The file also contains the complete product key for your Windows installation. Every time your computer boots, this hardware is checked to determine if any changes have occurred. You can make changes to your hardware. However, "substantial" changes will result in a notice that you have to reactivate Windows.

The XPinfo software, can read your activation file and compare it to the reported hardware. The report for my computer shows that none of the hardware has changed since the last activation. Also, in my computer, there are eight checked items out of ten. Should that figure drop below seven unchanged or never installed items, Windows would have to be reactivated. The interesting point is that the NIC or internet card carries three votes. Changing this card to a motherboard with a built-in NIC might put you on the way to reactivating Windows.

Suppose that you decide to move your hard drive to a new computer or you want to "clone" your old drive to a new drive in a new computer. Your hardware will have made a substantial change and it will be necessary for you reactivate Windows. But that is not the only catch in this situation. If you restore the entire image file to the new computer or simply clone the hard drive, the Windows Registry from

your old computer will not have the correct hardware information. It may or may not boot. If it does boot you will receive warning after warning that files are missing. There will also be requests for driver disks for the new hardware. So when you move to a new computer, the only files in your image backup that can be used without difficulty are the data files. Even the applications that were running successfully on your old computer will really have to be reinstalled on the new computer. This is because the Registry not only stores hardware information, it also has all the information on the location of all files required to run your applications. Although you might think that the .exe file is all that is needed to run an application, you would be surprised at the number of subsidiary files that are required. Sometime, do a search of your computer for files with a .dll suffix. These are the library files that are required by applications running under Windows. These files are also shared by many different applications at the same time. There are hundreds of library files on any Windows computer. They make up a large part of the more than 2 GB of files in the Windows folder.

As long as you use the image file backup to restore files or hard drives in your original computer, it will work beautifully. The problems arise when you want to upgrade to a new system. Then, the image file is less useful.

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

*Dr. Lewis is a former university & medical school professor. He has been working with personal computers for more than thirty years.

Moving on to Vista – Part 1

by Neil Stahfest, Shareware Librarian, Tacoma Area PC User Group, WA
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I tested a pre-release version of Windows Vista last year. I thought that the eye candy was nice but there really wasn't a lot about the program to make it worth upgrading my PC to use it. Since then I've heard stories about problems with Vista that made me even reluctant to upgrade to it. But, things happen. I "needed" a new laptop to demonstrate programs for the Flight Simulator S.I.G. <wink><wink> Many of you will be buying new computers in the next year or so, so I'll share some of my experiences and impressions with you.

I took the plunge in August 2007 and bought a new HP laptop. And of course it only comes pre-loaded with Windows Vista. (Note - If you buy a new PC, make sure you get at least the Vista Home Premium Version. The Home Basic Version is crippled, you wont like it, and the manufacture may even provide the Premium version as a "free" up-grade.)

I opened the box, plugged in the battery charger, turned the PC on (per the instructions) and the computer worked. HP pre-activates Windows Vista saving you from going through the exercise of activating it. I had to answer a few questions of course; name, password, my preference for mydesktop, etc. Nothing too difficult. So now I have Windows Vista and it works.

Connection to my wireless home LAN was important to me; fortunately Vista made that very easy. Just follow the Internet Wizard, a click here, a click there and you are connected. The first thing I used the Internet connection for was to check for Windows Vista updates. There were about 18. I'm not sure what they were all supposed to do, but for now, I decided to trust Microsoft and installed all of them.

The next few days were spent playing with the computer, learning what things did. I sure miss the days when you got a "real" manual with a PC. It took me five days to discover a pressure sensitive strip at the top of the keyboard that lets you increase and decrease speaker volume by sliding your finger over it. Searching the Hewlett Packard web site I located a manual for my computer (in .pdf format) and downloaded it for future reference.

I never have cared for the touch pads that they put on laptop PCs to provide a mouse function but this one works pretty good. Still, I prefer a real mouse. Unfortunately, this laptop doesn't have the standard mouse connector like my old laptop. HP only provides USB connections so none of the mice I have will work on it. A check at the web site of my favorite PC supply store indicated that they were out of stock. As luck would have it, later the same day, I was walking past the writing supplies area in my local Safeway when I spotted a laptop mouse manufactured by Targus. For $19 and change I bought a cute little two button USB optical mini-mouse (no mouse pad required) with a little thing on the connecting wire that lets me pull out as much or as little wire as I need. Problem solved! (Update – I lost my original mouse after about three weeks. I discovered that Office Max sells a variety of mini-mice made by different manufacturers. I bought another Targus mini-mouse.)

Personal computers are very personal. I spent most of the first week that I owned this computer, customizing it. I added utility and application programs that do what I need to do the way I like to do it. Vista may offer "better" ways to organize and present information. If so I'll probably discover them. In the meantime my desktop looks similar to my old Windows XP computer, littered with desktop icons that are shortcuts to various programs.

Buying a New Vista Computer? Read This First!

By Sandy Berger, Compukiss.com
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Windows Vista is finally ready for prime time. Over the last several months, the drivers for many devices like printers and scanners have been updated to accommodate Vista. Most software has also been updated to be Vista compatible. If you are ready for a new computer you may be ready for Vista. However, you might want to do a little

homework before you make your purchase.

While many devices and much software has been made compatible, not every software program or every piece of hardware will work with Vista. So before you make the move you should check with the manufacturer of your peripheral devices like printers and scanners to make sure that they can be used with Vista. You should also check the compatibility of software programs that you use. Most hardware manufacturer's offer updated drivers which you can obtain at their website at no extra cost. Although some software manufacturers offer free updates, for some, you will to have to purchase a new version that is compatible with Vista. For instance, the anti-virus program that you are using on your Windows XP computer will probably not work with Vista. While many of today's computers come with anti-virus software, they are usually only good for one or two months. So be sure to leave a little extra in your budget to purchase any necessary software updates. With careful investigation, you should be able to decide which of your programs will need to be updated and how much it will cost before you make your computer purchase.

Purchasing a Windows Vista computer is a bit more difficult for the average computer user because there are several very different versions of Vista. Windows XP came in two main versions, Home and Professional. The choice was fairly easy. Home suited most home users and Professional was better for businesses. With Vista, Microsoft has muddied the water by offering five versions: Home Basic, Home Premium, Business, Enterprise, and Ultimate.

Let me clarify your options.

Whether you are a home user or a business, the Ultimate version will give you everything that Vista has to offer including remote access, scheduled backups, special encryption, Windows faxing, and all of the entertainment features in Vista. Although you will pay more for Ultimate, it does include everything you could possibly want.

While home users can certainly use the Ultimate version, for most the Home Premium version will suffice. This is an excellent version that includes the Media Center which gives you great features for working with photos and music. With a TV tuner in your computer, this version, like the Ultimate version, will let you watch TV on your computer and record television programming just as you would with a stand-alone digital recorder or TIVO, but with no monthly charges. It has a themed slide shows and DVD Maker software included. It also has several cool games like Chess, Titans, Mahjong Titans, and Inkball. In reality, Home Premium is the only fully featured home version.

The Home Basic version of Vista is one you will want to avoid. It seems that Microsoft created this version for the sole purpose of getting people into Vista cheaply and having them pay more to upgrade to a better version later. The Home Basic version is stripped of many of the features that make Vista so good. It has none of the television, photo, or music features that are found in the Home Premium version. It doesn't even include the scheduled backup that is included in all of the other versions. So Basic is stripped of many of the features that make using the computer easier and more entertaining.

Home Basic doesn't have the Aero Glass interface that is standard in all other versions. This interface is what makes Vista so visually appealing when you are using it. It also gives you a smoother-performing desktop. In my opinion, it is also easier on the eyes. While some may say it is just cosmetic, I think it is a great loss not to have it.

If you purchase a computer with Home Basic, Microsoft makes it easy to upgrade to Home Premium online. Just pay them more money and download the upgrade. However, Home Basic only requires 512MB of ram, while all the other versions require 1GB (twice as much) of memory. Also Home Basic will run on a computer with lower graphics requirements. So you may find that the new computer you just purchased with Home Basic does not have the power to run the better versions of Vista like Home Premium or Ultimate without adding more memory and upgrading the video card. Also since Home Basic is so "basic" it does not even come close to meeting the requirements for most networked businesses.

The bottom line is… Stay away from Vista Home Basic. If you purchase a new computer for home use, stick to Home Premium or Ultimate. If you purchase a new computer for your business, the choices in Vista are not always clear cut. Check with a knowledgeable consultant to determine which version of Vista best suits your needs.

If you do a little research before you purchase that Vista computer, you will be happier with your purchase.

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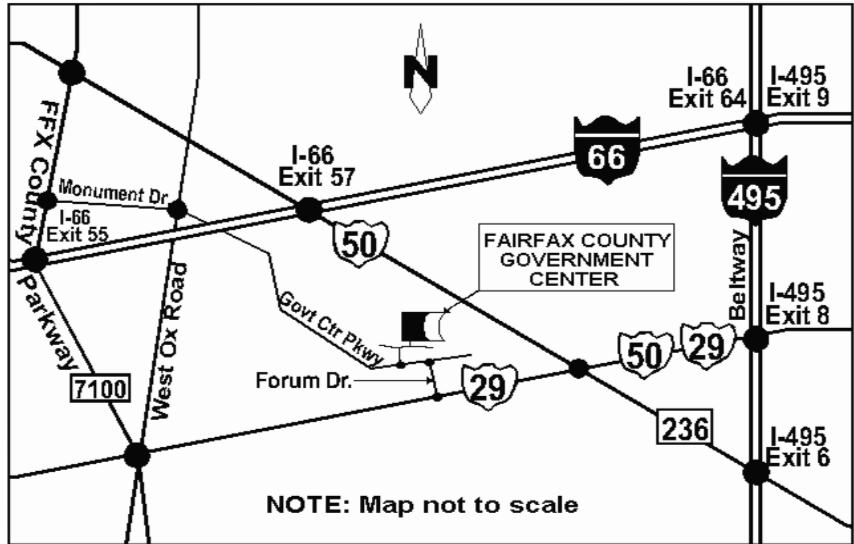
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Vista Backup and Shadow Copy

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Windows Vista helps easily back up computer settings, files, and applications. The new Windows Backup feature provides more choices for storing backed information. You can choose to back up to CD-ROM, DVD-ROM, external hard disk, another internal hard disk, or to another computer or server connected to your network. Automated scheduling allows for backup when and where you choose. Just use a wizard to schedule when and where you want to backup. If a disaster strikes and you need to recover a wizard helps select the files or folders to restore and prompts you for restore media. Then it restores the selected files.

Accidental file deletion or modification is a common cause of data loss. Windows Vista includes Volume Shadow Copy to help protect data. Shadow Copy automatically creates point in time copies of files as you work, so you can quickly retrieve versions of a document you accidentally deleted.

Shadow Copy

Shadow Copy is one of Vista's new features. It is available with Vista Ultimate, Business and Enterprise editions. Windows uses Shadow Copy to store copies of files and folders. With Shadow Copy, you can go back to an earlier version of a document or restore entire folders.

If you ever accidentally deleted or saved over a file you know how easy it is to loose data. Accidental file deletion or modification is a common cause of data loss. Windows Vista includes a useful innovation to help you protect your data: Shadow Copy. It automatically creates point in time copies of files as you work, so you can quickly retrieve versions you may have accidentally deleted. Shadow copy is turned on by default in Windows Vista and creates copies of files that have changed on a scheduled basis. Only incremental changes are saved, so little disk space is used.

To access shadow copy, right click a file or folder and select "Restore previous versions." Preview each file in a read-only version to determine which file to restore. To restore it drag the file to a folder, or select it and click "Restore" to restore it to its original location.

Shadow Copy archives the current version of your files when a restore point is created. So if you delete your restore points, you lose the saved copies of a file. All the copies are stored on the computer's hard drive. So think of Shadow Copy as a version restorer for emergency use not a backup utility.

Windows Backup and Restore Center

The file backup and restore features in Windows Vista make it easy to keep data safe from user error, hardware failure, and other problems. The Windows Backup and Restore Center provides a single place to manage backup and restore features.

Automatic Backup

Automatic File Backup is available in most editions of Windows Vista (not included in Starter and has only basic functionality in Home Basic edition). It aids in keeping data files safe by backing them up. Windows Complete PC Backup is available in the Business, Ultimate, and Enterprise editions. It performs a complete, image-based backup of the entire computer.

Scheduled and Network Backup

Two features in Automatic Backup are the ability to do a scheduled backup and the ability to back up files to a network location. (Available in all editions of Windows Vista except for Home Basic.)

With Automatic Backup, you can back up files to an external hard drive, secondary hard drive, writable CD or DVD, or to a network location. File Backup Scheduling Wizard lets you schedule when to backup. Then Windows Vista will automatically make backups on the schedule you set.

Backups are incremental so they require only a small amount of disk space. If only a small part of a file changes (one slide in a presentation), only that portion gets tracked and saved.

Recovery

Windows Vista makes the recovery process a snap. A recovery wizard helps select the files or folders to restore and prompts you for the backup storage medium used. Then it restores the files or folders.

Windows Complete PC Backup and Restore

Available in Windows Vista Business, Ultimate, and Enterprise editions, Windows Complete PC Backup and Restore is a comprehensive, image-based backup tool in case you need to recover your entire system.

While file restore is useful for file loss and data corruption, Windows Complete PC Backup and Restore is useful for disaster recovery when your computer malfunctions. It helps create complete computer backups. Then in the event of a serious system issue or data loss, Windows Complete PC Backup and Restore can restore your entire computer environment, including the operating system, installed programs, user settings, and data files.

Restore your computer back to its original state or onto another computer. Windows Complete PC Backup and Restore can be initiated from Windows Vista or from the Windows Vista installation CD. So even if the computer can't start up normally from the hard disk it can be restored.

System Restore

System Restore allows a computer to be restored to an earlier state without losing data. This is ideal if the computer is not operating well because of a configuration change, a problem with an application, or the introduction of viruses or unwanted software. Restoring to an earlier point, before the computer began displaying problems, may resolve the problems. System Restore automatically creates identifiable restore points. Or you can manually create restore points at any time.

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DUFFERDOM – Tales from the Kingdom of the Ordinary User

by David D. Uffer, a Member of
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Of Avery, CDs, Squaring the Circle, Selected Greek Classics, and Tantalus C Plus a Resolution

We have all heard of the name AAvery@, the global leader in assorted office supplies, self-adhesive labels (but probably not yet the US Postal stamps), dividers, markers, and such. You may not have heard of Paxar, whose Monarch Division seems to be the culprit behind those wonderful price and info tags attached to clothing and other goods and hanging by tough, tiny plastic strings you cannot break or pull loose but must cut and then seek the remaining portion which is often inserted out of signt, waiting to annoy you further by scratching your skin if not removed. Well, Avery just acquired Paxar in a deal worth 1.3 billion bucks. Such is the price of the right annoyance. So Avery deserves respect, maybe even reverence if judged by revenue. It is after all the standard index referred to by more reasonably priced packs of blank labels for use in PC printers. But this user may have lost some respect for this global leaderBas if they careBbecause of a wild, redundant search they placed in my path.

In an effort to avoid losing sight of most other users= progress, I tried to catch up to a common practice in this age of proliferating digital photos. I collected some pictures taken in Greece onto some CDs, learning how to do it by trial, error, and reading instructions when desperate. Results were impressive. Buoyed up by approaching the League of the Big Guys, I wondered why their handwritten CD content titles were so curt and scruffy when labels were available to display more readable and detailed information. A single label might conceivably cause imbalance problems as a CD revved up its speed as the drive=s internal laser moved to the outer tracks. But a pair of properly placed labels could offset each other for a smoother spin. OK, two labels could also display more information than one, fine. But Avery makes these disk-shaped labels with

the core hole to cover the entire disk and display anything the user wants to fit in the still larger space, even graphics. Finer, better. Big league catchup.

Beset by pride and hope of grandeur, I bought a set of holey Avery disk labels. Swallowing my pride, I looked at the instructions. Those that came with the labels explained the technique for correctly applying the label to the disk, center holes exactly aligned. Neat. The package and online directions, showing an imprinted disk, said to use an indexed template, Avery=s # 8931 or 5931, in Word or WordPerfect. Each had 2 variants, CD face and CD case. AlI I wanted at the time was the round disk face, maybe later for the almost square disk case label if I wanted to venture further. But, in actual use, all the templates allowed was an image without a central hole. Worse still, all the patterns for the circular disk were square.

OK, so maybe Avery wants users to use Avery=s printing software. It is available online, for free. So they claimed. A slightly larger version with more graphics is also offered for sale. Both would do at least some graphics as well as a blank face for imprinting just text. So they claimed. I=ll spare you the details of repeated and finally successful attempts to secure the software. Guess what. It was the same as what I found earlier online. I could print text all over a solid square to go onto a holey disk. A square on top of a circle. Not right. No help.

Now, squaring a circle is one of three classical problems in the early development of Greek geometry. (The other two were doubling the cube and trisecting an angle.) It was known to be difficult and proved impossible in precision in 1882 because it involved the imprecise term,

pi, though a near approximation could get the job done for those who were interested. One of the sites referenced in Google for "squaring the circle" delivers a 7-page article replete with a barrage of real and legended ancient Greek names. [If you enjoy their rich pronunciation, you may be amused by the names pun near the end of this tale.]

So it would seem that Avery has squared the circle, at least to their own satisfaction. Now if they could only work it in the other direction, circling the square to the users= satisfaction and punching a hole in the center, it might increase my respect for this global leader. Indeed, in consideration of my pain and suffering, if Avery were to send some workable softwareBor a minute share of 1.3 billionBin this direction, that wavering respect just might become a bit reverential. That upgrade in regard seems unlikely since it appears they think a square is the working equivalent to a circle with a center hole. There may be some hidden transformation formula there. If so I consider it well concealed. It does offer Options, which merely present other Avery patterns, none applicable to the problem at hand. For that matter, Avery=s CD/DVD patterns

Tantalus – Joseph Heintz the Elder, 1535   www.mythman.com

weren=t either so one could say the others were no worse.

But yet all their promotional illustrations show attractive disks with text and graphics plus a range of alternates, all just out of reach. This

user is reminded of the mythical Greek god Tantalus, a son of Zeus, who must have messed up pretty badly since he was later doomed to the Underworld, up to his chin in water with delicious fruits just out of reach. That=s the origin of Atantalize@, which also applies to Avery=s promo pictures of decorated, circular disksBin your dreams. However one thing becomes clearer, why I had seen the hand-written CD title inscriptions. We are not alone, as they say, just ignored.

[There is this two-word pun on classic Greek names which has a man showing his torn pants to a tailor who asks, "Euripides?". The customer nods and replies, "Eumenides?"]

As it usually happens in children's books–and sometimes in real life–there is a happy ending to this tale of corporate woe. It comes from Brøderbund (a "band of brothers" in a loose translation of mixed Swedish, Danish, and German). Now spelled more simply as Broderbund and part of Riverdeep, they have over 20 years developed and offered The Print Shop software, now in version 22. It is now substantially more than the basic graphic printing application it was originally but remains readily available and reasonably priced. In the last few years they began enabling printing your choice of graphics and text on CD and DVD labels. No hype, no fanfare, just competent performance, good to know, and a pleasure to use. So, you can buy your blank CD and DVD labels from Avery but print them with software from the brethren.

Dave Uffer is a member of some standing in the Chicago Computer Society. Originating in Colorado deep in the last century, he arrived in the Midwest and settled in the Chicago area where he has held a variety of honorable but not especially honored positions in computer-related fields. He and his

wife are now retired, children grown and away; he sometimes writes about the often neglected concerns of real PC users.

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Make Vista Work Better

by Vinny La Bash, Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., FL
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No matter how good an operating system may be, someone will complain that it could have been better. Vista is a very good operating system that some people find wanting. Some people are never satisfied, but that is not the issue here. Of course Vista should have been better, but Microsoft has only so much time and resources to develop a system, and Vista was late to market in addition to being less than perfect.

In this article we'll show how to make Vista work better for you, and that's all we can reasonably ask of any operating system. Let's take care of the power users first. Power users are too impatient for menus. They think menus are for wimps. After encountering Vista User Account Control they may have a point.

Left-click the orb at the bottom left side of the screen.

In the Search box type cmd.exe.

Right-click on cmd.exe and choose Properties from the popup menu.

Select Pin to the Start Menu.
The Command Prompt is now always available from the Start menu. If you would like to make additional tweaks to the prompt, right-click the shortcut from the Start menu and choose Properties.

The blinking cursor, otherwise known as the insertion point, tells you where you can type or insert text. The cursor can be difficult to locate because it's so thin, but Vista has a way to fatten it up.

Open Control Panel.

A dialog box appears. In the upper right corner, type "Optimize visual display."

The Ease of Access Center icon will appear. Select the link below the icon.

Locate the Make the focus rectangle thicker box and put a checkmark in it.

Set the thickness to whatever you like. Don't get carried away with some ridiculous number. Bumping up the thickness by one or two points should be sufficient.

When you install a large high resolution monitor, you quickly become aware of the relationship between high resolution and eyestrain. Vista provides a way to make text easier to read without having to sacrifice resolution.

From the Start Menu open Control Panel.

In the Search box at the upper right corner of the dialog box, type adjust font size.

The resulting list will probably consist of one item, Adjust font size.

Select it and you can choose to accept the larger text option or click on the Custom DPL button and experiment.

Vista comes equipped with an excellent Snipping Tool that was originally designed for a different version of Windows. In its generosity, Microsoft chose to include the tool in every version of Vista except Vista Home Basic, which is fine because nobody should buy Vista Home Basic. Snippy lets you capture any portion of a screen, either rectangular or free form. You can then paste it into a document, email or save it as a graphic. Don't use it to copy and paste text for editing because a graphic image can't be edited like text. Here's how to get it:

From the Start Menu type snip in the search box.

The Snipping Tool should be at the top of the list. Right-click on it and select Pin to the Start Menu. You can also add it to the Quick Launch Bar if you like.

Vista has added several new wrinkles to the Quick Launch bar. It's been around since Windows 95, but it's never been more useful. If you hold the shift key down while right-clicking on a shortcut, you will see an expanded popup window with additional options. One option is to put the shortcut icon on the Quick Launch bar. You can still use the traditional drag and drop method, but having another alternative when the desktop isn't visible is always helpful.

When the Quick Launch bar is active, that means you can see it on the Task bar. If you need to activate Quick Launch right-click on a clean area of the Task bar. Drag your mouse to the Toolbars option, and select Quick Launch.

Each of the first ten shortcuts on the Quick Launch bar has its own custom keyboard shortcut. If the Calculator is the third icon from the left, press the Windows key and the number 3 and you activate the calculator. Limiting the number of built-in keyboard shortcuts may be Microsoft's way of telling you that more then ten items on the Quick Launch bar is too many.

Vista keyboard shortcuts are a great way of performing little tasks more easily. Instead of having to reach for your mouse, you can press two or three keystrokes. There are those keyboard shortcuts that are common to all versions of Windows and now there are some new ones. Among the new features introduced in Windows Vista, is a new set of shortcut keys that are used to launch various programs or perform different tasks. These new keyboard shortcuts are listed below.

Windows Key + G (cycles through the Gadgets)

Windows Key + L (locks the computer)

Windows Key + U (activates the Ease Of Use Center)

Windows Key + X (cycles through the Mobility Center)

Windows Key + Spacebar (moves the focus to the Sidebar)

Windows Key + Pause (opens the System Properties portion of Control Panel)

CTRL + + Tab (opens persistent Flip 3D) :

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