



The Cursor

*Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group*



Meeting Location
Fairfax County
Government Center



Next Meeting:
November 22, 2008



Presidential Bits

November 2008 Meeting

by Paul Howard

At our October meeting, Geof Goodrum introduced many of us to the convergence of two technologies we've talked about at a number of past WACUG meetings - digital photography and GPS - the Global Positioning System. Geof described the process for "geo-tagging" photographs. While some high end cameras directly incorporate GPS receivers, a more common approach is to closely synchronize the camera's clock with that of a GPS receiver. Using a variety of software tools that allows GPS information to be merged with the data incorporated in the digital photo, to allow the location of photo to be imparted to web displays of the area covered by the pictures.

WACUG's November meeting will be held on the fourth Saturday of the month, November 22nd. Fire alarm testing will make the facility unusable on our regular meeting date. This month's meeting will feature two topics sure to be of interest to our members. Bob Mason will be demonstrating Microsoft's new "Virtual Earth" on-line program and a tutorial outlining the steps needed to sell items on the eBay auction site.

"Virtual Earth" is similar to "Google

Earth" in displaying satellite-based photographic views of most places on Earth. Like Google's program, you can zoom down to display individual houses, streets and other landmarks and overlay the pictures on maps, naming the streets and highways. However, "Virtual Earth" uses much more recent scans than does "Google Earth" and incorporates a "Birds-eye View" of selected areas simulating low altitude angled views from various directions. Use of the site is free.

The demo: "Selling on eBay" will include the various steps necessary to place your items up for sale or auction on the eBay site as well as a number of hints that can make your sales effective and more profitable. Bob plans to actually list an item for auction during the demo and will explain the rationale for each step in the process.

WAC's annual meeting and election of officers will be held in January. Please contact an officer immediately if you are interested in running for office, or wish to be appointed to a board of directors position.



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**Plus Bonus Articles in
the Download Edition**

Lloyd's Web Sites for November, 2008

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

Sites for November 2008:

1. The Elements of Style – www.bartleby.com/141
2. The United States Postal Service – www.usps.com – Get shipping rates, buy stamps, print postage, track a package, look up a ZIP Code? - Find the mailing products and services you need at USPS.com.
3. Mayo Clinic: First-Aid Guide – www.mayoclinic.com/health/FirstAidIndex/FirstAidIndex – Medical emergencies don't occur every day. But when they do, information can help you deal with these situations. A Mayo Clinic website.
4. Merck Veterinary Manual electronic reference for animal care – www.merckvetmanual.com/mvm/index.jsp
5. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) – www.fdic.gov/ – The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) was created in 1933 in response to the thousands of bank failures that occurred in the 1920s and early 1930s. Since the start of FDIC insurance on January 1, 1934, no depositor has lost a single cent of insured funds as a result of a failure.
6. Do It Yourself.com: Home Improvement Information – www.doityourself.com – Site includes home improvement projects, home repair, kitchen remodeling, plumbing, electrical, painting, real estate, and decorating.
7. WorldAtlas.com – www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/world.htm – This site includes a world atlas of facts, flags and maps including every continent, country, dependency, exotic destination, island, major city, ocean, province, state and territory on the planet.
8. Digital History – www.digitalhistory.uh.edu – Provides a U.S. history textbook, essays, documents, maps, photos, audio files, and more for teachers and students of American history in schools and colleges.
9. FamilySearch.org: Family History and Genealogy Records – www.familysearch.org – Welcome to the FamilySearch Internet Genealogy Service. We have designed our site to give everyone, from beginner to expert, the training and tools they need to do family history research. To begin, just click one of the tabs (Home, Search, Share, or Library) across the top of the screen to go to corresponding sections. Related site: [Cyndi's List of Genealogy Sites](#) on the Internet.
10. Ellis Island – www.ellislandrecords.org/default.asp – Ellis Island is the symbol of American immigration and the immigrant experience. Use our Free Search to find your immigrant ancestors arriving through the Port of New York at Ellis Island between 1892 and 1924.
11. Computer Security Day Sunday 30 November 2008 – www.microsoft.com/protect/yourself/password/checker.mspx



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

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GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum, WAC

Internet Phone Service Revisited

My apologies for those who may have called the WAC AnswerLine phone number since September and received an out of service message. A couple of years back, I transferred my phone service from Verizon to SunRocket Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) service, which provided two phone numbers (including a port of my previous Verizon number), unlimited local and domestic long distance, and multiple call features for an annual pre-paid plan. Last year, SunRocket went out of business with little notice, so I scrambled to move my phone service to Vonics Digital, another VOIP service with similar features and pricing. In September, I started getting fast busy signals on dial out and reports of problems dialing in. Other Vonics Digital customers reported similar problems in online forums (<http://www.dslreports.com/forum/r20453949-Vonics-gone>), the customer service phone line is down, and the company website comes and goes.

I am in the process of moving the WAC AnswerLine number to ano-

ther VOIP service, Vitelity Communications (<http://www.vitelity.com/>), which has an established record since 2003, is a Better Business Bureau Accredited Business, and has received good customer reviews. Vitelity offers a variety of services for residential or business use.

Here are some lessons learned and resources for those considering VOIP phone service.

Pay as You Go vs. Prepaid Plans: Pay as You Go plans reduce your risk. While prepaid annual plans may be less expensive in the long run, the service provider could go out of business before the end of the plan term. You might be able to recover some of the cost through bankruptcy proceedings. However, I was successful getting a pro-rated reimbursement from SunRocket through my credit card company by filing a dispute on the original charge and submitting a printed copy of the plan terms with appropriate sections highlighted.

Terms of Service: Always read through and understand the Terms of Service to understand your rights to cancel service, be reimbursed for unused service, and other costs.

BYOD: Some services include an Analog Telephone Adapter (ATA) or "Gizmo" to connect your existing modular phone to your broadband Internet connection, and some require or allow you to Bring Your Own Device (BYOD). The devices provided by a service may be configured specifically for that service and "locked" to prevent the customer from using the device with other services. Some services may require that you return the device at your own cost if you cancel service.

E911: VOIP services may or may not provide emergency 911 (E911)

services. Unlike traditional phone service, you must register the location of service with the VOIP service provider. Keep in mind that you can use the ATA in other locations with broadband Internet, so it is the user's responsibility to make sure the registered location is always correct. Emergency services will respond to the registered location regardless of the actual device location.

Reliability: With VOIP, the reliability of your phone service is dependent upon your VOIP provider, your broadband Internet Service Provider (i.e., your Internet connection must be up), and power to your Internet equipment (e.g. cable or DSL modem, phone). Ideally, your VOIP provider will have backup services. Putting your phone, ATA and broadband modem on an Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) will help ensure service during local power outages.

Number Porting: Porting a phone number from one service to another can take several weeks, and may be rejected for several reasons. Cell phone numbers may not be portable to VOIP services, and VOIP companies may refuse to release numbers if you change services later. Certain features like distinctive ring on a phone number may prevent porting of the number to another service. Even if the process works, it can take several weeks to complete transfer of a phone number to a new service. There is a good guide to number porting rules at <http://www.dslreports.com/forum/remark.12997657>.

Reputation: Look for customer reviews of the various VOIP services. Some have excellent reputations, some don't. DSL Reports has a good list at <http://www.dslreports.com>.

See *Linux* page 4

com/isplist?t=voip.

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 lists the following distribution release announcements for the period October 4 – November 4, 2008.

Distribution
Absolute Linux 12.1.08
ALT Linux 4.1 “Desktop”
Bluewhite64 Linux 12.1R1 “LiveDVD”
CDlinux 0.6.2
CentOS 4.7 “Server CD”
Debian GNU/Linux 4.0r5
EnGarde Secure Linux 3.0.21
Foresight Linux 2.0.5
Kubuntu 8.10
Linux Mint 5 “Fluxbox”
Mandriva Linux 2009
Momonga Linux 5
Mythbuntu 8.10
Parsix GNU/Linux 1.5r2
Parted Magic 3.1
Plamo Linux 4.5
Puppy Linux 4.1
Puppy Linux 4.1.1
Ubuntu 8.10
Ubuntu Studio 8.10
VectorLinux 5.9 “Live”
XO Software 8.2.0
Xubuntu 8.10

Linux Software of the Month

The software described below is downloadable at the links provided or may be requested on CD. In addition, 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 in-

clude official technical support nor 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 2008

OpenOffice.org – v3.0.0. <http://www.openoffice.org/>. Free GNU LesserGeneralPublicLicense source code and executables for Ubuntu and Fedora 9 by the OpenOffice.org community. OpenOffice.org (OOo) is an integrated office productivity suite including a word processor (Write), spreadsheet (Calc), presentation manager (Impress), relational database (Base), and graphics editor (Draw). This version introduces support for OpenDocument Format (ODF) 1.2, Microsoft Office 2007 XML formats, Solver for spreadsheet optimization problems, spreadsheet collaboration, increase of spreadsheet limits from 256 to 1024 columns, display of multiple Writer pages while editing, and native tables in presentations. OOo requires Linux kernel version 2.4 or higher, glibc2 version 2.3.2 or higher, Java runtime environment 1.5 or later, 256 Mbytes RAM (512 MB recommended), 400 Mbytes available disk space, X-Server with 1024 x 768 or higher resolution with at least 256 colors.

Privateer: Ascii Sector – v0.4.4. <http://www.asciisector.net/>. Free-ware 32 and 64 bit Linux executables by Christian Knudsen. Privateer: Ascii Sector is a 100% free space combat/exploration/trading game for Windows, Mac OS X

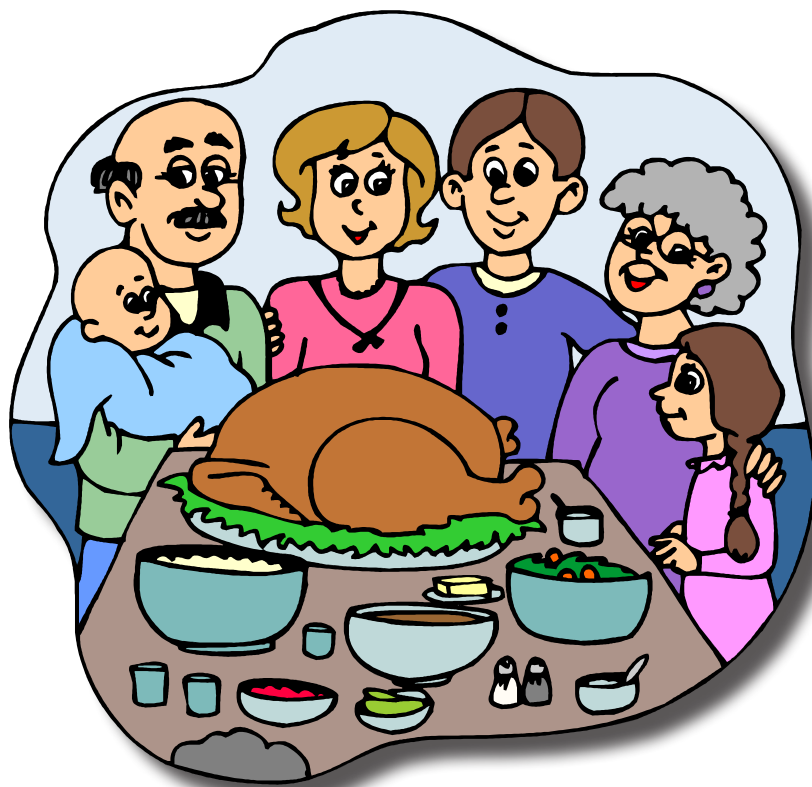
and Linux. You start with a simple spaceship and can then accept missions or trade goods to earn enough money to upgrade your ship or buy a new one. The game offers a wide variety of missions, commodities and ships – a lot more than the original Wing Commander: Privateer, on which this game is based. You can engage in deadly fights both in space and on the ground, and using the Privateer: Ascii Sector quest language, you can create your own stories in the Ascii Sector universe, or have fun with other players' stories. What sets this game apart from most others is its' graphics'. Privateer: Ascii Sector uses only ASCII characters in 16 different colors to present its environments. This might take some getting used to for most players, but it also means that the game's single designer and programmer can concentrate on gameplay instead of fancy graphics. Music files for the Linux version are included. The game requires SDL libraries and X Window server (included with major GNU/Linux distributions). See *Screen Shot next page*

Kernel Source – <http://www.kernel.org/>. 2.6 kernel source code for all platforms (stable 2.6.27).





Screenshot of Privateer: Ascii Sector



Happy
 Thanksgiving
 from your
WACUG
 Board of
 Directors

Keeping Up

By Paul Howard, WACUG
President

The shift to digital TV has engendered lots of articles in the newspapers, and in this forum, as well as regular public service announcements on all your favorite TV channels. We've talked in this column, and in presentations at several computer user groups, about utilizing a digital TV converter box with rabbit ears or a more elaborate antenna system to receive over the air broadcasts of digital channels on older, analog TVs.

I've seen part of a segment on Verizon's FiOS channel 1 about a guy who fixes up antique TVs from the late 40s - early 50s era, and hooks them to a digital converter box - I bet those sets never had a better picture, even on the day they were new! But sometimes, you just want to extend the signal from a cable, satellite, or FiOS box, to another TV in different room, without running a bunch of wire.

It's not uncommon in many households to have cable, FiOS, or satellite "set top" boxes connected to the principal TVs in living room, family room or den. However, perhaps the monthly cost of the boxes, or difficulty getting coax cable to a bedroom, has left those sets with signal only from rabbit ears, for example. Suppose one member of the family wants to watch something only available on a TV with a "box" but wants to view the show in question on a TV without a "box"? Tough luck, right?

Well, not necessarily - for only \$49.99, our old friends at X10.com, the home automation system folks, who've also got lots of home security alarm and household camera systems, have a possible solution. Several months ago, computer group colleague Ron Schmidt loaned me a version of this kit that included

two transmitter units, one to hook to a TV device - set top box, VHS or DVD player, for example. The second transmitter hooked to computer, and the other unit in the kit was a receiver that would plug into a TV set. Suffice it to say that the results from the computer video transmitter unit were pretty lame - most TVs, prior to high def, made lousy computer monitors. For the same price, the kit now includes the TV transmitter unit, receiver unit, and a universal remote control - no more computer transmitter unit, a wise decision.

I hooked the transmitter unit up with the included composite video, and Left / Right audio cables, to the FiOS set top box in my family room, and plugged in the power wall wart. The FiOS set top box has S-VHS, composite video, and two flavors of digital audio, two pairs of L/R analog audio outputs, along with coax RF output for channel 3/4. I pointed the transmitter unit's antenna (looks like a plastic 3" satellite dish) in the general direction of our second floor bedroom TV. Upstairs, I placed the receiver near the TV, hooked up the composite video and audio cables, and powered on the unit with its wall wart.

Turning on the TV, and switching to the auxiliary input, I got - lots of raucous noise and some black bars wandering across the picture. Yup, there I was, in Cuba, trying to tune in the Miami TV stations <grin>! Tried the receiver on several other TVs, better, but not perfect. Then I remembered - these units work on the same 2.4 MHz band as WiFi home networking equipment. Turned off same - no joy! Aha - the same band is used by some home wireless phones. Ran to the basement, and unplugged the wireless phone down there. And with a bit of twist of the receiver's antenna - living room TV's producing reasonable picture and good sound!

Unplug everything, and head back to the bedroom. Hook up the X10 receiver and Radio Fidel still be jammin' me, mon!! Of course - I've got another wireless phone base station in the bedroom! Unhook that, and here comes the GAC country music channel pouring forth from the bedroom TV. Well, by golly - now I cain go to sleep with "Honky Tonk Badonka Donk" videos playin' on the TeeVee!

FiOS Follies (*Continued*)

Back in May, Verizon sent a letter to its FiOS TV customers that system changes adding more than a hundred new hi-def channels would result in the analog RF and QAM signals on the system going away. The letter was in "dumb customer"-speak, but that's what was going to happen, scheduled for July 21st. So, no more hooking TV's up to the FiOS coax cable without a box - it wouldn't work.

But, how enlightened - Verizon was offering free digital adapters to its customers for those sets not hooked up with another flavor of set top box or DVR/set top box combo unit. The digital adapters can't do hi-def, video on demand, or the really nifty super program guide, but were supposed to get all the standard def TV content. I immediately called up, and, being a greedy little bugger, asked for five adapters - hey, I've got lots of TVs, not to mention TV tuner cards in two computers. Only three per customer, said the rep. Oh, well - still a deal. They cost three or four bucks a month - apiece, when I got service in March. I received three units two days after my call.

Well, the analog / QAM TV signal didn't go away until early September. Trying the digital adapter on all the other channels yielded - a light blue screen, with a notice

See *Keeping Up* page 7

about technical difficulties. The local tier channels worked fine, along with the expanded local channels - the extra standard def channels being broadcast by the local stations' digital channels, and some of the local government channels.

Then, about September 23rd, the great channel re-alignment occurred. That's the TV signal supplier's equivalent of the old parlor trick where the guy in the tux yanks on the table cloth, leaving all the dishes, silverware, and water goblets standing on the bare table. Only, in TV land, all the stations whose channel number you'd finally memorized have changed. Some have moved up by twenty numbers. Other channels, well, hey, I can rent you a GPS and the prison's tracking hounds from "Cool Hand Luke!"

I was still getting the "light blue screen" for all the standard def channels I'd hoped were going to be added to the digital adapter's channel lineup. Went to the Verizon Experience store at Fair Oaks Mall, to get five copies of the new channel lineup brochure, and the reps confirmed that I should get all the standard def channels. All I could find new were the ninety seven channels of music up in the quad digit range. So I broke down, and called the FiOS service number. I broke out of the voice response system too soon, and wound thru the maze - but within four minutes I was talking to Ed in Virginia Beach. He sent the magic reset signal, and voila' - CNN was appearing on channel 100. Had I stayed in the voice response system, I could have gotten the reset signal sent automatically if I indicated my problem was with FiOS TV. But now, life is good - "all Badonka Donk, all the time!" <grin>



Almost everyone needs a little help with Word 2007

By Linda Gonse, Editor and Webmaster, Orange County IBM PC Users' Group, California
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editor (at) orcopug.org

Bear with me while I quote John Dvorak from his August 2008 PC Magazine column, then I will tell you what my point is.

Regarding Vista, he said: "Vista isn't completely unusable; It's simply hard to use. Menus have been reorganized for no apparent reason, features of XP appear to be missing or need to be turned on from some remote directory, and basic functions are now obfuscated.

"In a nutshell, Vista manages to be more complicated than XP, performs more poorly than XP, and is more expensive than XP."

Now, substitute Word 2007 for Vista and Word 2003 for XP and my point is made. Compared with Word 2003, Word 2007 is an involuntary learning experience for anyone already proficient in Word and productive with one or more of the features. To name a couple I use often, are: Mail Merge, tables, labels, and fields. But, first users have to discover where basics like Help, Save As, Print and Close are.

To say Word 2007 has a steep learning curve may not scare everyone. But, to say it has a steep learning curve for experienced Word users should scare everyone, as well as be a cause for serious concern.

Unfortunately, I didn't fully understand how an Office 2007 upgrade for Office 2003 functioned. If you haven't taken the step, yet, let me caution you. The upgrade wipes out Office 2003 and you cannot downgrade. I believe this step was

automatically taken by the installation. Perhaps with a full version, you would be given a choice to install the newer version into another directory, leaving the older version intact.

The first thing you notice when you open Word 2007 is the highly touted "ribbon." Nine tabs take the place of menu items across the top of the window. The tabs do not have the same names as the old menu items. In fact, a couple of the tab categories—Home, References and Add-Ins—are enigmatic. And as they say on "Dancing With The Stars," the tabs "are in no particular order."

Clicking on a tab opens a segmented toolbar of options across the top of the window that relate to that tab's category. Although you may want to add to or rearrange the commands on the Ribbon or change or remove a command or group on the Ribbon — as you might have done with the menu and toolbar of earlier Word versions — you cannot.

And, you can forget about being able to revert to Word's old style toolbars and menus. But, Microsoft helpfully advises that if you are fluent in XML programming code, you can add tabs to the Ribbon.

In Photoshop, the ribbon concept is intuitive and natural, and actually speeds up productivity. In Word, it can be chaotic and time-wasting.

Now, that you have this background in mind, you will better understand the images and steps that follow which is a short tutorial for simplifying Word 2007. My suggestion for anyone using the new Word version is to first set it up to make the features you need easy to locate.

With that in mind, I'll show you how to create a custom toolbar for the tasks that you need to perform most often. It will help to take the

See *Help with Word 2007* page 8

aggravation and time-wasting practice of hunting around and calling on Help to figure out where things are and how to use them.

Incidentally, speaking of Help, here's a tip. When you need to turn to Help, don't look for a tab or menu item. Just as in the old days of DOS, you must press the F1 key to make it appear!

In the upper left corner of the Word window is a round Windows logo, called the Microsoft Office Button. It will remind you of the Start button in Windows. Click on this button, it is a kind of command center temporarily until you get Word customized the way you want it. Or, it's possible, you may prefer to use it, rather than the Quick Access Toolbar. (Nah.)

The Quick Access Toolbar is just to the right of the Microsoft Office Button. It can be likened to the Quick Launch Toolbar in Windows. (Do you see a pattern here?)

When you first open Word, the Quick Access Toolbar is empty. Click on the down arrow a slight distance away from the Microsoft Office Button. A dropdown list appears, similar to the ones you saw at the end of toolbars in Word 2003. It contains many of the general commands that you might use frequently.

Click on the commands that you want to be on the Quick Launch, er... Quick Access Toolbar. The icons will be added to the bar and available to you with one click.

It's almost too easy isn't it? Well, keep in mind that with this Word version, whatever effort you save in one area, you are going to earn by working harder somewhere else.

You may want to fill in the basic commands on the Quick Access Toolbar with different commands not on the dropdown list. In that case, right click on the down arrow for the dropdown menu and go to More Commands... at the bottom. There are five

categories, so click through them to see what they offer. You'll be surprised. In each category, there are dozens of commands for just about any task and circumstance.

When you find a command you want to use, click to select it in the left window (see screenshot below) and click on the Add button with the arrows to move it to the right window.

Alternatively, you can click on the Microsoft Office Button. At the bottom of the dialog box click on Word Options. Then, in the list that appears on the left, click on Customize.

A familiar box with a double window will open. It is the same box that you can open from the down arrow next to the Quick Access Toolbar.

My Quick Access Toolbar has several preset command buttons and one macro that I recorded (to add the pathname to the bottom of documents). Without intentionally

doing so, I nearly recreated the Standard Toolbar offered in earlier versions of Word.

The commands that I found useful to add were Open, Blank Page, Save, Undo, Redo, Page Setup, Print Preview, Print, Show/Hide, PathName (the macro), and Close.

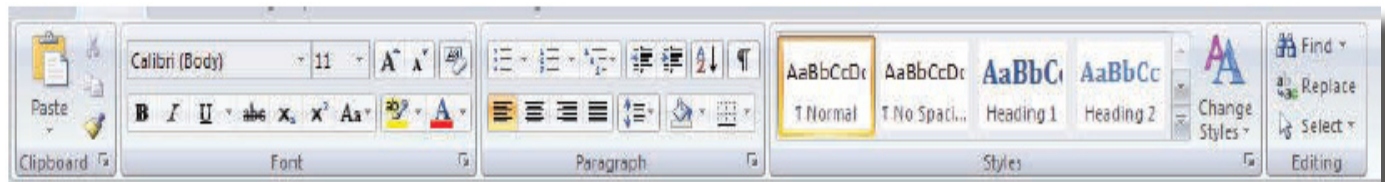
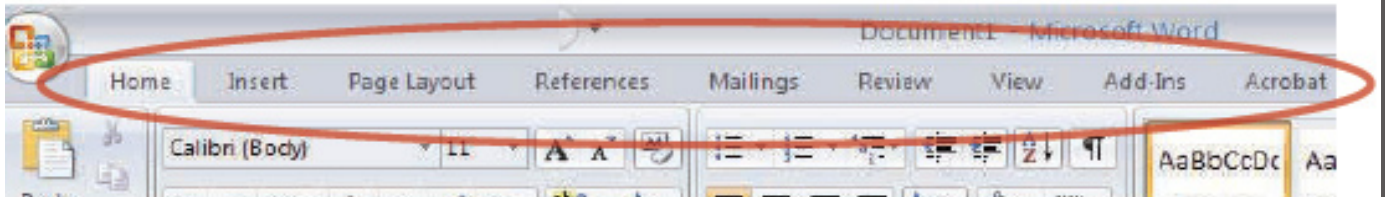
Although a couple of the commands are available by clicking on the Microsoft Office Button, it is still faster and less distracting to have them at the top of the window and only one click away, rather two or more.

This article has been obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups; all other uses require the permission of the author (see e-mail address above)

Screen shots for this article appear below and on the next two pages...



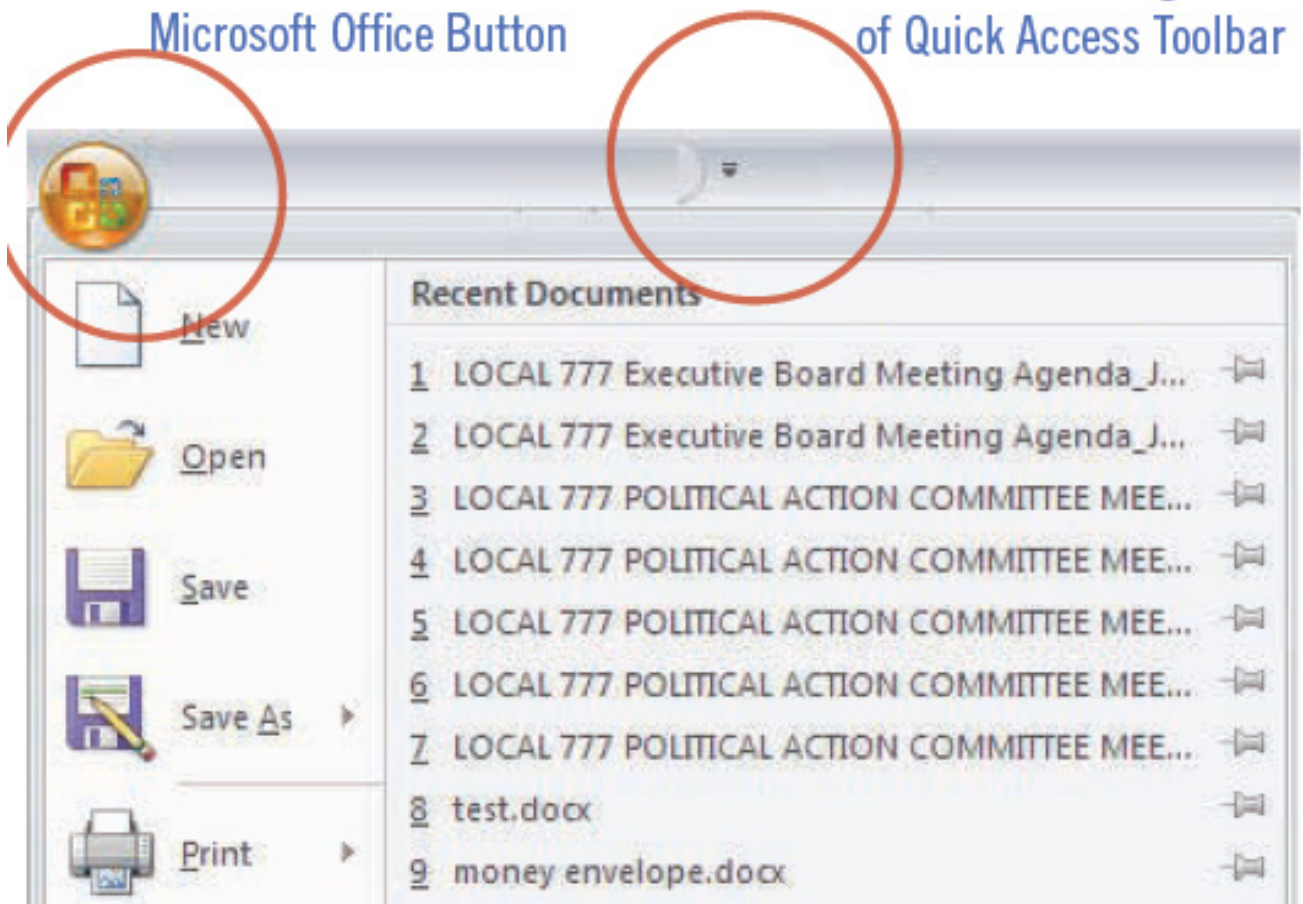
Tabs that open contextual “ribbons”

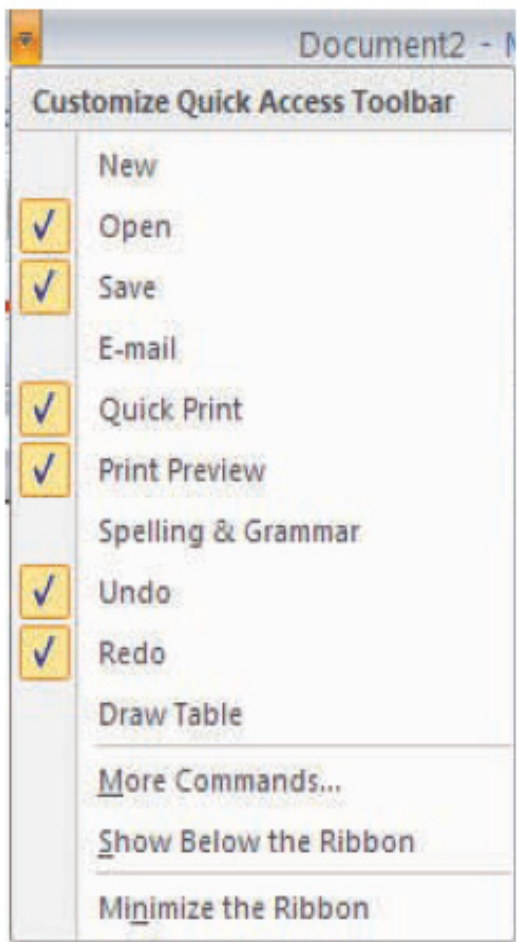


The “Ribbon” options that correspond to the Home tab

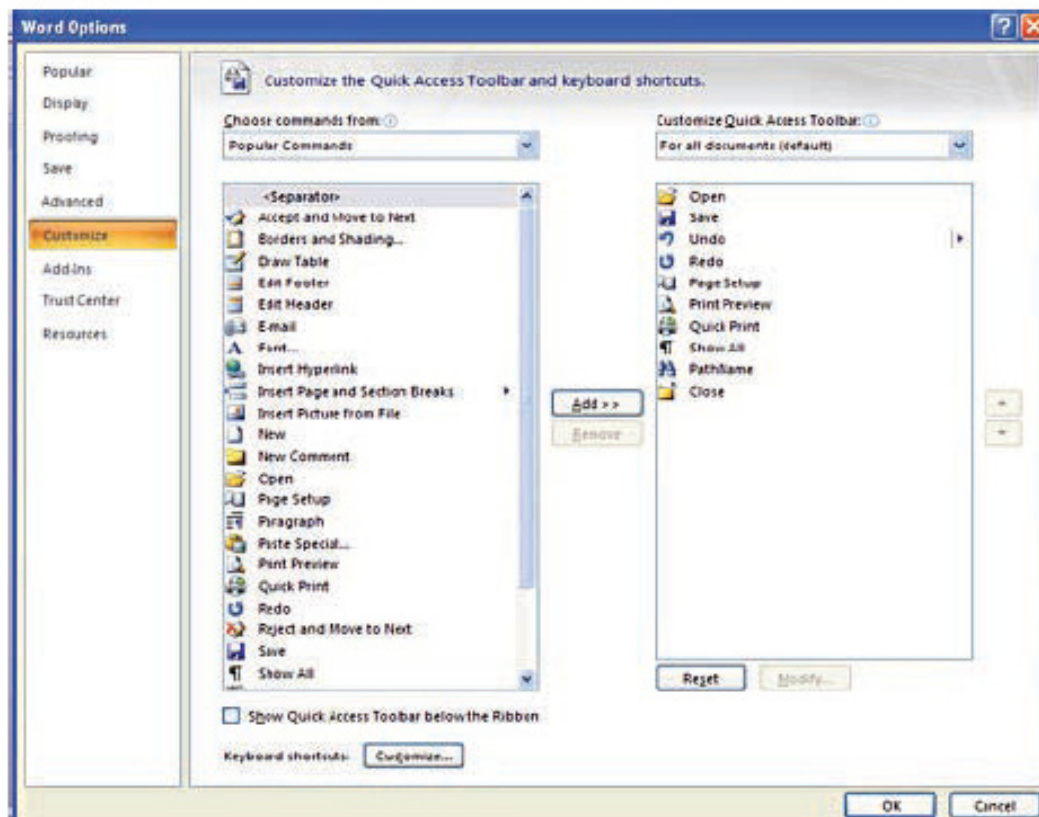
Microsoft Office Button

Down arrow at right end
of Quick Access Toolbar





Select commands here for the Quick Access Toolbar.



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Send article submission and reprint requests to the Editor: cursor@wacug.org

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Individual/Corporate/Family Dues: \$25.00
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Make checks payable to WAC. Please do not send
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City: _____

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Phone: () - _____

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Membership Survey: Help us to help you by completing this survey.

List the computer systems you own / use (in order of preference)

Operating System(s): _____

Modem(s): _____

Printer(s): _____

Other Hardware: _____

Favorite Software: _____

Connection: (circle one) Dial-up or Broadband

Circle Your Interests: Photo Printing Investing Games

Digital Photography Internet Access Education Music

Graphics/Animation Genealogy Video Finance

Programming Language(s) _____

Hardware Upgrades/Repair List others below

Next WAC Meetings: • Nov 22 • Dec 13 • Jan 24 • Feb 21 • Mar 21

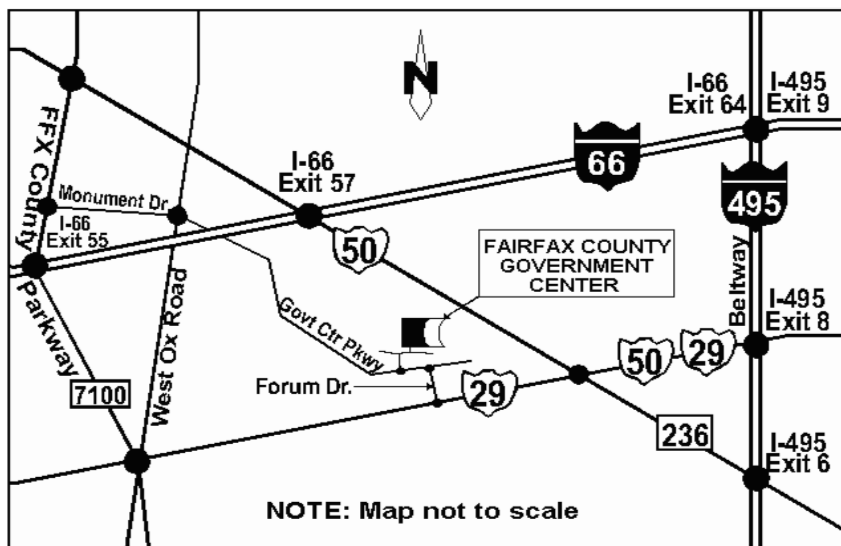
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<http://www.wacug.org>

November Meeting will be
held at the Fairfax County
Government Center
Fairfax, VA

Go through front door
about 25 feet then turn
left and follow sign to the
Meeting Room on the right

Service Desks Open at
12:30 Meeting Starts at
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Traveling Then and Now - “Technically” Speaking

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In 1974 Richard Nixon was the first US President forced to resign, while gasoline pricing rose to a whopping 55 cents a gallon US (14.5 cents a liter). They claim the reason was that “gasoline shortages and price increases throughout the world help to cause problems in most of the western worlds’ economies” (www.thepeoplehistory.com).

Sound familiar? What isn’t familiar is the technology that accompanies us on vacations.

I remember in 1974 driving to Fort Wilderness Disney World, Florida in a Volkswagen van built into a homemade camper, all decked out with plywood beds and a Coleman cooler for a fridge with a never-ending request for ice. CAA supplied the trip tik maps that marked out the route and the construction sections of the highway. We had the best of the best for navigating the trip. As well, we had a brand new Instamatic camera with 7 rolls of 126 film that cost us a small fortune. Our son, four years old, rode a small tricycle back and forth inside the van to while away the hours and hours of monotonous driving as seatbelt legislation was non-existent.

Today, we still face the gas increase excuses and we are well aware of the price of a liter of gasoline today. In that regard, nothing has really changed, only the numbers and

the fact that we are all buckled into our seats. Although, one thing that has changed for travelers in 2008: “tech toys”; they have now become a “must have” for every family that does ground travel on vacations.

Our kids have been replaced by grandkids and the Volkswagen homemade camper van is long gone. People today are now hauling RVs of all sorts that host most of the comforts of home.

The CAA maps and my son’s tricycle have been replaced by the latest technical and computer gadgets. Let’s have a peek at how technology has changed road travel, some 34 years later.

Kids today are buckled tightly into the back seats as airbag protection in the front restricts them to the back seats only. While in the back seat they have the option of viewing DVD movies run through a DVD player onto 2 separate monitors that attach to the head rests of both front seats. They listen to the movies via the vehicle stereo system or individual headphones. When they tire of the movies they can play video games by switching over to their PSP or a PS2 that plugs through the inverter. Of course there is always travel bingo if the tech stuff gets boring, but we won’t hold our breath on that one.

For the driver and co-pilot there is a GPS display with voice directions, saving the hassle of trying to read the fine print on wrinkled and torn maps. Many travelers bring along laptops while traveling as their uses are many. For example, you can record your trip’s information, download pictures and videos from digital cameras. The big thing these days with computers is reading digital books, or listening to audio books that have been previously downloaded from the Internet. Of course, when a live Internet connection becomes available

(most RV parks have free Wi-Fi) you can check email, use Skype to call home, and research the places to see, all from your laptop.

The days of praying that there will be a pay phone nearby if we break down are long gone as many people have both a Canadian and American cell phone. For instance, one can purchase a Motorola TracFone that works only in the USA for under \$10 and buy a “pay-as-you-go” card, making long distant calls back home cheaper and giving one more security on the highways in the USA.

Don’t leave without your MP3 player. Podcasts of your favourite shows and lectures can be easily downloaded from the Internet. All MP3 players come with headphones that make for easy listening and do not disturb the other passengers or driver.

Walkie talkies are not a new item while on vacation, but the price certainly has come down and the range has expanded greatly. A quick stop in the grocery store for supplies will help you utilize your group to ensure precision targeted shopping whereby we all search out different items and meet at the same cashier, thus saving time. The walkie talkie is also used in many other scenarios for security and locating purposes. These units are a must have for anyone traveling with children. The Instamatic camera has been replaced by the digital camera, thus allowing people to take hundreds of pictures during a trip without any real cost. If some of the pictures are not that great they are easily deleted and forgotten without the worry of paying for more film.

An inverter will allow the truck bat-

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tery to convert power from DC to AC so you can run the laptop while traveling to edit photos, read books, watch movies and connect to Wi-Fi hotspots. This also allows for the use of a PS2 plugged into the truck battery power as if you were at home plugging into a wall outlet. You can even plug in a refrigerated cooler with this inverter, making life just that much easier.

We can only imagine what traveling 34 years from now will be like and what 2042 will offer its road travelers.

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SnagIt, a product review

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So what is SnagIt? It is a screen capture program (Like base level PrintScreen). Every computer user needs the ability to capture information off of the screen. Your basic operating system has always provided rudimentary capability to print or capture a full screen but it is woefully inadequate in today's environment. How many times do you need a screen region or maybe an area that scrolls off the display as many web pages do? How about having the ability to extract only the text or capture screen actions? All of these functions and many more are easily addressed with SnagIt.

SnagIt has been around since 1990. I remember my first exposure to this great utility back in those early years when computer expositions were held at the Javitz Convention Center in New York City. While today's functionality greatly supersedes those early days the neat scroll capture was the cool feature of the times and is still a main-stay tool.

For a screen capture program to be useful it needs flexibility beyond Microsoft's dismal screen and window capture. SnagIt provides every imaginable capture you could ever want with Image Capture, Text Capture, Video Capture, Web Capture, and Printer Capture. Each of these modes has additional control options such as delayed capture, capture the mouse cursor, set a timer, or capture multiple areas, to name a few. Video capture provides a very useful tool for creating instructional clips. You can play back the video or even save individual frames. The ability to capture editable text

from dialog boxes and other screens where it ordinarily can't be copied is extremely useful.

To make life easier you have the ability to set up profiles to reflect the way you like to work. Profiles coupled with a defined hot key can grab and process a clip all the way to the intended application. You can configure input, output, effects and options. Add-ons are automatically and/or optionally installed into several applications such as Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, Power Point and Internet Explorer) and other popular products. Wizards and tool-bars are available to simplify setting up profiles.

Having many capture options is only the front end of this versatile utility, there is also an overabundance of tools to annotate, mark up, organize, convert, edit and share captured content. The processing tools suite includes a very powerful editor that will bring your clips to life. No longer are you stuck with a blasé clip. With very little effort you can spruce up your clips by adding effects, borders, stamps, and hotspots to name a few. You can operate on one or many images at the same time. A batch conversion utility allows the user to modify and output a collection of clips into a wide selection of formats. This utility allows you to set up your output to selections such as File, FTP, Email, Printer, etc. The output properties are fully customizable.

Since SnagIt stores every capture you make, a first reaction would be –“how does one find the clip of interest”? Well search capability is automatically built into the software and can be further enhanced by the use of tags. Every capture you make saves the time, date, and URL information that will allow you to quickly return to the site of the capture.

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To fully appreciate the value of this great program, download the 30 day free trial and/or view some of the extremely informative and clearly illustrated tutorials available on TechSmith's website <http://www.techsmith.com/>. SnagIt lists for \$49.95, runs on all newer Windows operating systems including 64-bit Vista. A minimum of 1 GHz processor and 512 MB of Ram is required but double that for smoother operation. TechSmith has developed and improved on SnagIt over the years and has a product that belongs in every computer user's tool box.

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Let Me Count the Ways I Like Linux

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I used to use Microsoft Windows up to Windows 98. I then switched to Windows NT in a dual boot system with Linux. However, when I went to boot NT one more time and NT gave me a message to the effect "I'm sick, fix me," I said goodbye to Windows and Linux has been my main operating system since. I found Linux appli-

cations to match all my user data. I was able to move all that data from the NT file system (NTFS) to the earlier Windows file system (FAT). From there I copied all the data into the ext2 file system, which was used by Linux at the time.

Now let me count the ways I like Linux:

1. Linux resembled the HP-UX operating system (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HP-UX>) I was using at work. This made going between work and home easier.
2. The roots of the Linux operating system go back to the late 1980's. By the time I decided to switch to Linux, it was a viable (if little known) multi-user, multi-tasking operating system for Personal Computers. That meant I could establish more than one user for my PC and run multiple programs simultaneously—I was not restricted to either the Windows or MAC operating systems for those PC capabilities. And, of course, Linux was (and still is) free.
3. Linux comes with a distribution of the X windows protocol produced by an international consortium. To understand this capability, think of it as "...providing the basic framework for building Graphical User Interfaces (GUIs), and moving windows on the screen and interacting with a mouse and/or keyboard." (extracted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/X_windows). Because this capability was (and is) not built into the operating system, it provides greatly enhanced flexibility for anyone creating Linux applications.
4. For those familiar with the Windows and MAC operating systems, it is surprising to realize that the software that creates what you see as the "desktop" can actually be a separate application program. I use the GNOME desktop together with X windows. This desktop (one of several that can be used with Linux) allows me to use a number of different screens and switch between them as I wish. This allows me to open an application on one screen and switch to a different screen to open another application. From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNOME>: "The GNOME project puts heavy emphasis on simplicity, usability, and making things 'just work...'"
5. There are a wide range of user applications available, as well as tools to write your own applications.
6. Linux has (and has had for some time) a reputation for stability. The operating system doesn't crash unless the user does something to make it crash. Around 1997 (about the time I decided to change to the Linux operating system) I read an article (in a Linux magazine) professing to use two computers as near identical as production processes allow. They loaded one computer with Microsoft Windows and the loaded the second computer with Linux. They ran similar bench mark programs on both computers. The machine loaded with Microsoft operating system crashed in a short time. The machine loaded with

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Linux continued to run for as long as the comparison experiment was set to run.

7. Many distributions of Linux are as easy, or easier to install than Microsoft Windows.
8. A person can customize and/or build a Linux operating system to meet individual needs.
9. Many distributions of Linux include such primary applications such as the Firefox web browser, OpenOffice, an office suite similar to Microsoft Office (word processor, spreadsheet, presentations, etc.), and a number of other “name brand” applications.
10. Linux can be cost free. There are hundreds (or more) of applications written for Linux and there is a growing library of applications.

Microsoft Windows was the new kid on the block at the time I switched to Linux from my point of view and it did NOT do many ordinary things well.

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