



The Cursor



*Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group*

Meeting Location
OLLI, 4210 Roberts Road,
Fairfax, VA



Next Meeting:
March 20, 2010

Presidential Bits

by Geof Goodrum, President WACUG, president@wacug.org



The February WAC meeting was one of our best attended since we joined up with OLLI and the OLLI PC Users Group (OPCUG). Fortunately, the weather co-operated, the roads were clear, and everyone had an opportunity to get a break from cabin fever and shoveling snow.

I started the presentations with a demonstration of Google's ad-supported e-mail service, Gmail (<http://gmail.com/>). I've used Gmail as my primary mail service for over one year after I had problems with Comcast's spam filters blocking legitimate e-mails. Even with 40 minutes, I only had time to skim over the features. Although I access Gmail with a web browser, Google provides instructions on how to use popular e-mail clients such as Thunderbird and Outlook Express. An advantage of Gmail is its integration with other Google services, such as Google Maps, Google Calendar, and Google Documents. Google Documents is particularly useful, as it allows Gmail users to view PDF files and edit attached documents without installing software on the PC. Gmail also features effective built-in spam and anti-virus filters. There were questions about Google's recent integration of Buzz social networking features into Gmail, which created a lot of concern over privacy. Although Google admitted to some early missteps deploying Buzz, Google quickly responded to the issues.

Chuck Roberts then brought us up to date with a demonstration of Adobe's latest release of their consumer photo editor and manager, Photoshop Elements (PSE) 8 (<http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshopelwin/>). After some introductory discussion, Chuck demonstrated new PSE8 features such as recomposing photos to reduce size by removing unnecessary details and merging photos to create a better one. Chuck also showed why he preferred to use another Adobe product, Lightroom (<http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshoplightroom/>), to alter characteristics of RAW images from his camera. RAW images have an advantage over JPEG images because they preserve the original image quality as captured by the camera sensor, but may not be an option on lower-end "point-and-shoot" digital cameras.

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Lloyd's Web Sites for March, 2010

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

1. Who's Alive and Who's Dead – www.wa-wd.com; Who's Alive and Who's Dead: a reference site to help you find out which famous people are alive and which are dead.
2. Free Product Manuals – www.Retrevo.com/samples/index.html ; Download electronic and appliance manuals.
3. Crossword Fun – www.CrosswordSite.com ; Hundreds of puzzles to print out or solve online.
4. RootsWeb.com – <http://searches.rootsweb.com/share.html> ; The primary purpose and function of RootsWeb.com is to connect people so that they can help each other and share genealogical research.
5. Check out traffic situation before driving – www.trafficland.com Video Camera coverage of Fairfax Boulevard, Route 236/Main Street and Route 29/Lee Highway (plus other routes in Washington area)
6. Mathway – www.mathway.com Free step-by-step math solver answers your pre-algebra, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and calculus homework problems.
7. Hulu.com – www.hulu.com "Hulu.com is a online video service that offers hit TV shows. No registration or downloads required."
8. WalletPop – www.walletpop.com "Web's first full-fledged personal finance and consumer finance site. Learn about your money, ask and answer questions and read opinions from the blog."
9. Forms from the Federal Govt. Search by name or agency – www.forms.gov
10. Text to speech – www.oddcast.com/home/demos/tts/tts_example.php?sitep Type a phrase and a person will say what you typed. *Note an underscore between tts and example*



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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Our Members**

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WACUG

OPCUG



GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum, WACUG

GNU/Linux distributions are bundled collections of software including a set of applications and an operating system built on the Linux kernel. Some distributions include general applications such as office suites, music players, and web browsers, while others may have specific purposes such as computer system recovery, network firewall, media center, or gaming. Individuals, community projects, or businesses create distributions. While some distributions are commercial and include fee-based technical support, other distributions are freely downloadable or can be ordered on CDs or DVD at low cost.

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 downloadable distributions do not include official technical support nor printed documentation. 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. 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.

DistroWatch.com lists the following distribution release announcements for the period February 4 – March 3, 2010.

| |
|--|
| Distribution |
| Absolute Linux 13.0.8 |
| Calculate Linux 10.2 |
| eBox Platform 1.4 |
| Element 1.0 |
| Epidemic GNU/Linux 3.1 |
| Gibraltar Firewall 3.0 |
| Igelle 1.0.0 |
| Linux From Scratch 6.6 |
| Linux Mint 8 “Fluxbox” and “KDE64” |
| Linux Mint 8 “KDE” |
| NetSecL 2.6 |
| PapugLinux 10.1 |
| Parsix GNU/Linux 3.0r2 |
| PC/OS 10.1 “OpenWorkstation GNOME” |
| PC/OS 10a “Open64 Workstation”, 8.5 “OpenServer” |
| Skolelinux 5.0 |
| SystemRescueCd 1.4.0 |
| Tiny Core Linux 2.9 |
| Toutou Linux 4.3.1 |
| Vine Linux 5.1 |

Linux Software of the Month



See *Linux* page 4

The software described below is downloadable at the links provided or copied onto a USB flash drive at the WAC meeting.

March 2010

Fish Fillets Next Generation – v0.9.3. <http://fillets.sourceforge.net/>. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable by Ivo Danihelka & team & ALTAR interactive. Fish Fillets is strictly a puzzle game. The goal in each of the seventy levels is always the same: find a safe way out. The fish utter witty remarks about their surroundings, the various inhabitants of their underwater realm, quarrel among themselves, or comment on the efforts of your fish.

MyPaint – v0.8.2. <http://mypaint.intilinux.com/>. Free GNU General Public License source code by Martin Renold. MyPaint is a fast and easy open-source graphics application for digital painters. It lets you focus on the art instead of the program. You work on your canvas with minimum distractions, bringing up the interface only when you need it. Features include support for pressure-sensitive graphic tablets, extensive brush creation and configuration options, unlimited canvas size, and basic layer support. MyPaint comes with a large brush collection including charcoal and ink to emulate real media, but the highly configurable brush engine allows you to experiment with your own brushes and with not-quite-natural painting.

OpenOffice.org – v3.2. <http://www.openoffice.org/>. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable installer by Sun Microsystems, Inc and the OpenOffice.org community. OpenOffice.org is the leading open-source office software suite for word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, graphics, databases and more. It is available in many languages and works on all common computers. It stores all your data in an international open standard format and can also read and write files from other common office software packages. It can be downloaded and used completely free of charge for any purpose. This release features faster start times, better handling of merged spreadsheet cells, better compliance with OpenDocumentFormat 1.2, better support for proprietary file formats, more intelligent database imports, and new chart types

Rapid Photo Downloader – v0.1.3. [http://damon-](http://damon-lynch.net/rapid/)

lynch.net/rapid/. Free GNU General Public License Python code by Damon Lynch. Rapid Photo Downloader is an application for professional and amateur photographers, designed for use on the Linux desktop. It can download photos from multiple cameras, memory cards, and portable storage devices simultaneously. It provides many options for subfolder creation, image renaming, and backup.

Generates meaningful, user configurable file and folder names; Downloads images from multiple devices simultaneously; Backs up images as they are downloaded; Easy to configure and use; Runs under Gnome, KDE and other Linux desktop environments; Available in fourteen languages; Program configuration and use is fully documented.

Kernel Source – v2.6.33. <http://www.kernel.org/>. Free GNU Public License source code for all platforms by the Linux community.

Screenshots follow...

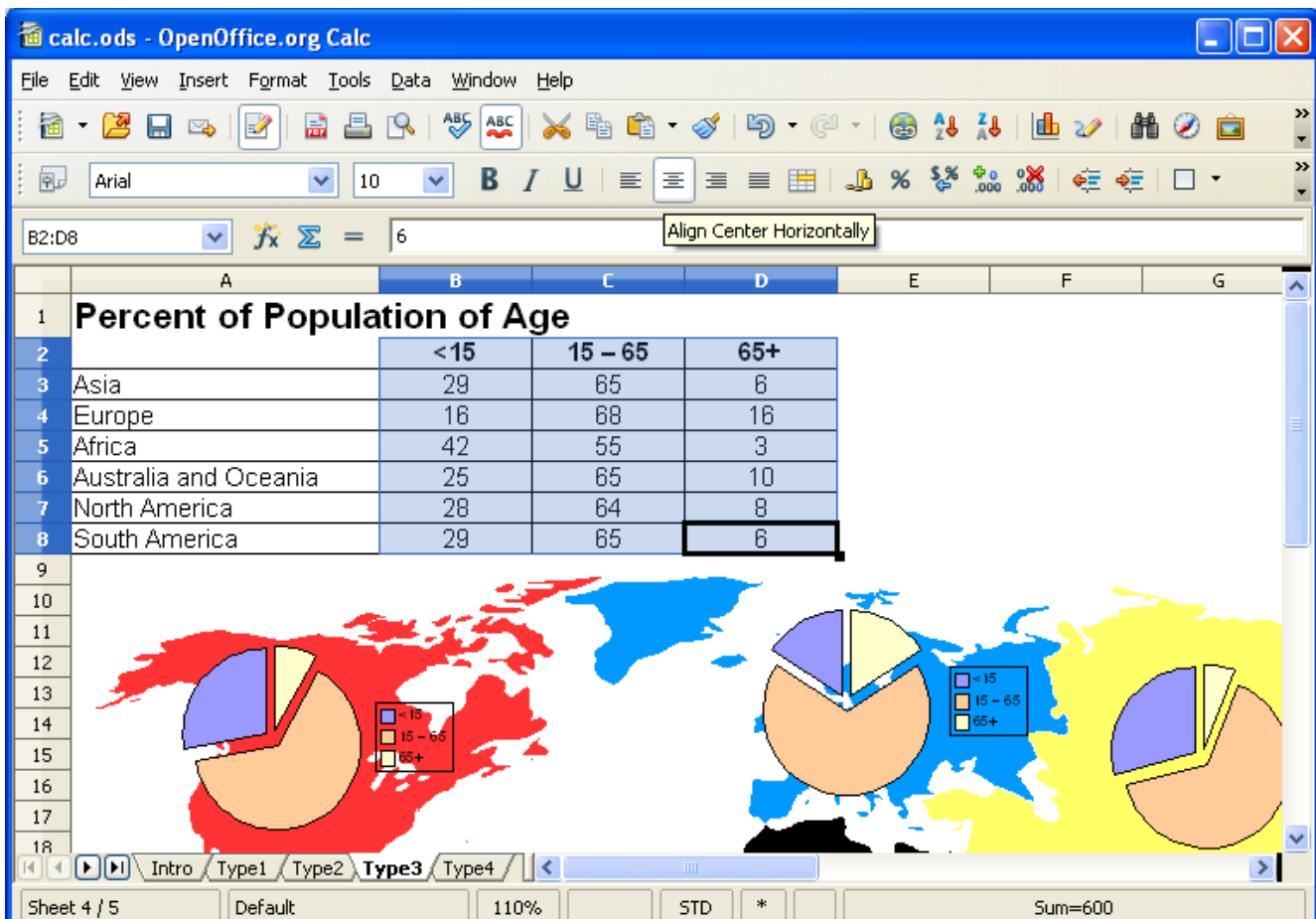


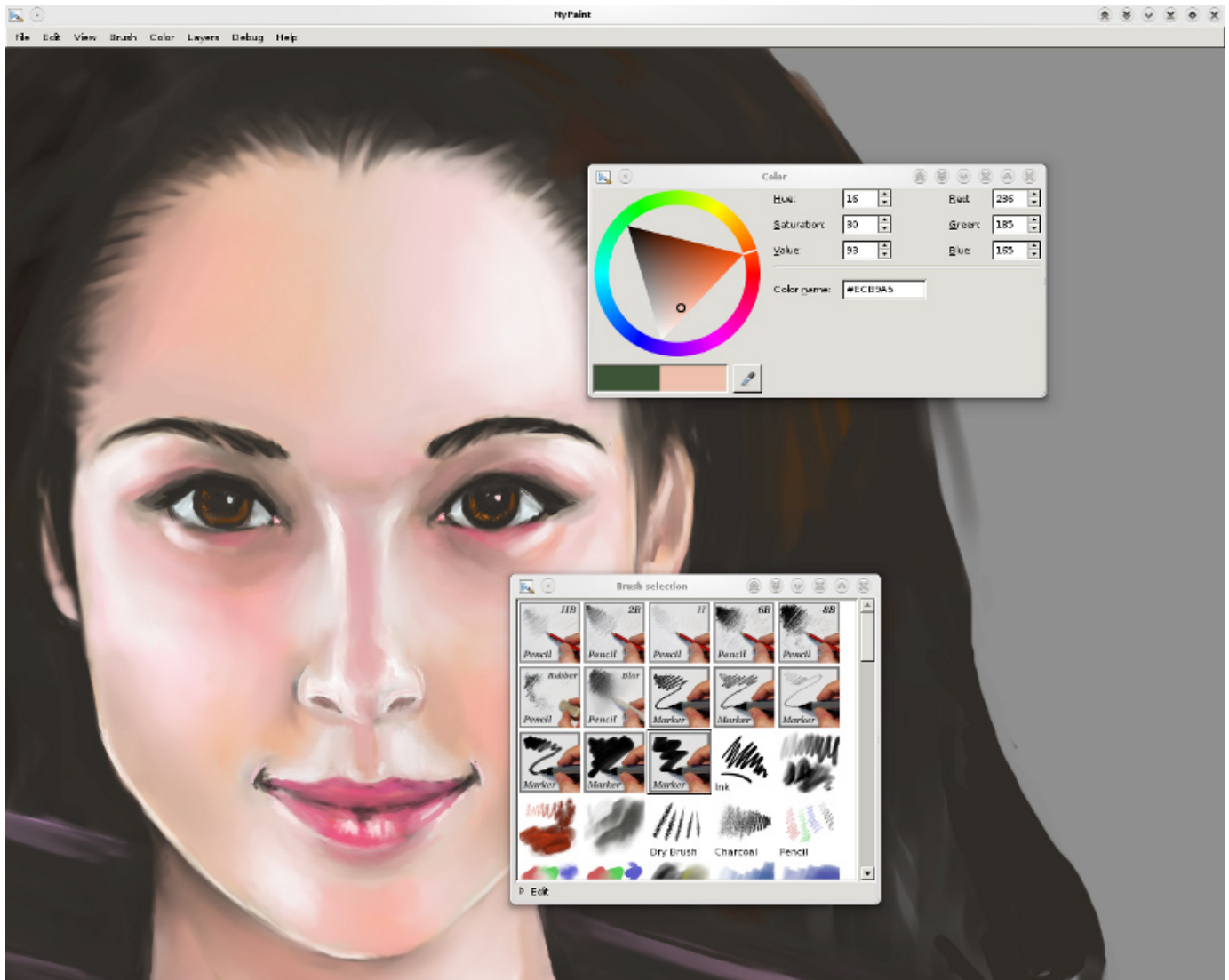
OpenOffice.org



Screenshots next two pages

Fish Fillets Next Generation



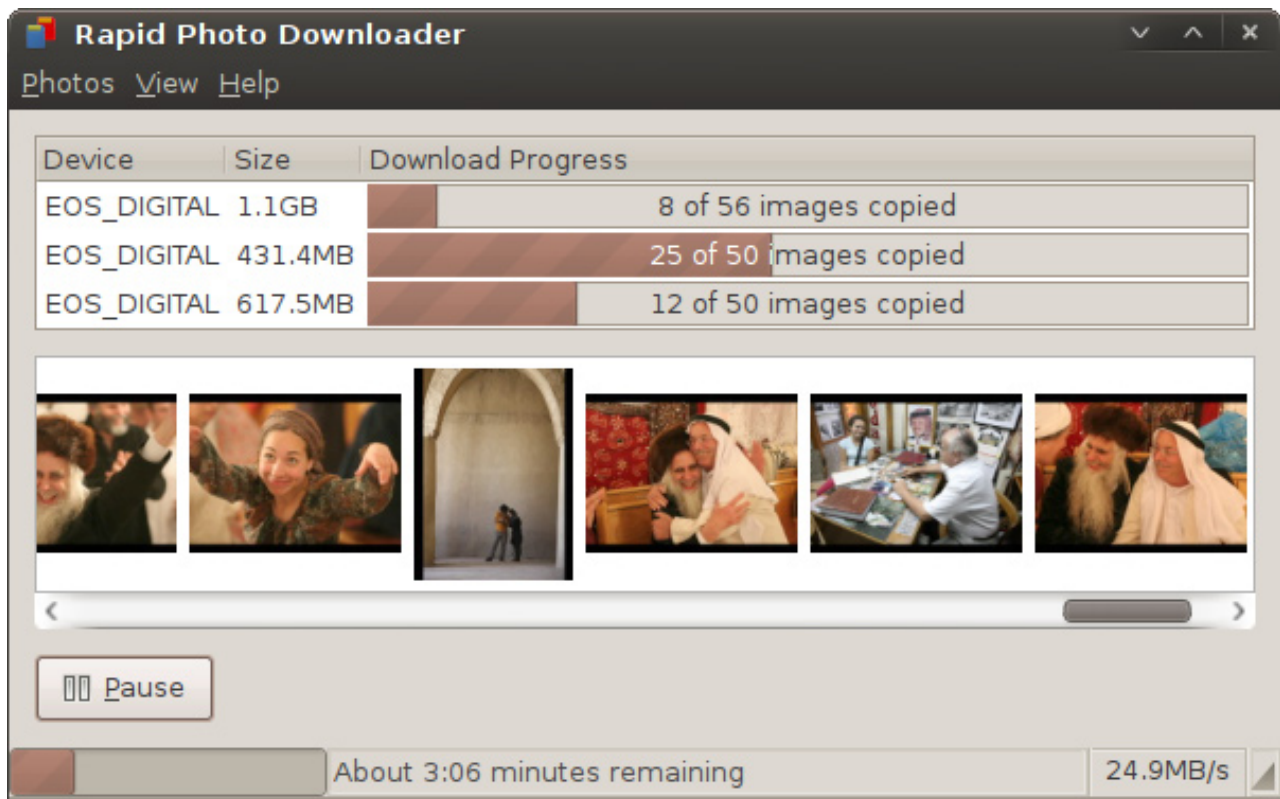


MyPaint

Also at the February meeting, Paul Howard and Mel Mikosinski showed how the Random.org website can be used to randomly select names from the OPCUG membership list for a drawing of free magazine subscriptions (courtesy of Sandhill Publishing). WAC will hold similar drawings for members at the March 20th meeting.

Also at the March 20th meeting, Paul Howard will demonstrate CutePDF and FoxIT Reader, two popular alternatives to Adobe Reader for viewing and printing PDF document files. Paul will also demonstrate RoboForm, a utility to help you fill in forms on web pages. I cajoled Chuck Roberts and Jorn Dakin to review Secunia, free personal-use software recommended by security professionals to notify of and manage updates for all software installed on Windows PCs. Finally, Bill Walsh will present a “Learn 30” session explaining the differences between 32-bit and 64-bit operating systems.

Here’s hoping that the last full day of winter won’t give us any weather surprises. See you there!



Rapid Photo Downloader

BeWARES!

By Berry F. Phillips, Member of the Computer Club
of Oklahoma City
www.ccokc.org
[wijames \(at\) sbcglobal.net](mailto:wijames(at)sbcglobal.net)

The wares have often perplexed computer users with numerous decisions regarding software. The multitude of wares have been even more confusing. Comware is commercial software which generally has more “bells and whistles” but requires the highest financial expenditure without the option to try the software in advance. Trialware is usually characterized on the Internet as a free download for a limited time but requires a purchase to continue using the software. Shareware is also free to download but often has features turned off or has an expiration date unless you purchase the software. Trialware and Shareware do offer an opportunity to use the software before making the decision to purchase. Freeware is free for personal use on the Internet but it may contain adware, viruses, or be poor software. Further, the marketing promotion of the wares can be even more misleading, causing you to download and then delete software that you thought was freeware when you discover it is, in fact, pay ware.

The world of wares can be very frustrating as well as expensive to the computer user. One can spend considerable time, frustration, and even expense downloading and deleting various wares on the Internet. Beware, retailers will not accept returned comware after it has been opened for a money back guarantee. Relax, my holiday gift to my readers is a solution to the problem that I have used for several years, saving me considerable time and money! However, I have had to endure personal comments from some of my fellow computer users that I am “cheap!” Since my ancestry is Scottish who are known for being thrifty, I do not consider that comment an insult. However, I do prefer the use of the word “conservative” to the rather blunt, “cheap.”

Excluding my operating system, I have nothing but freeware downloaded from the Internet on my system! Aha, you are thinking, but what about adware, viruses, or poor freeware, and the considerable time in downloading and deleting it takes to find the best freeware on the Internet? There are several sites that contain only freeware. However, I recommend Gizmo’s Freeware site because I have used it for several years and found it to be very effective in reviewing

freeware and efficient to use in going quickly via links to safe and secure freeware sites for downloading. I am reluctant to recommend other sites that I have not used for purposes of this article.

Gizmo’s Freeware is easy to use and makes it very simple to locate the best freeware on the Internet because it is extensively reviewed before it is recommended. Until July 2008 Gizmo was the editor of “Support Alert”, a highly recommended technical newsletter that was distributed to over 150,000 subscribers. The site evolved from his highly popular list of the “46 Best-ever Freeware Utilities.” The site grew well beyond 46 and reached the point that it could not be maintained by one person. Today, the site has grown into a kind of Wikipedia for Freeware utilizing contributions of dozens of volunteer editors who edit and moderate suggestions from thousands of site visitors. As a result, the range of free software covered by the site is ever increasing and the quality of the reviews are ever improving. Gizmo’s Freeware has, in a real sense, become the “Wikipedia for Freeware.” I strongly suggest you check your freeware on your system against the recommendations of the best and consider downloading the best.

The primary purpose of Gizmo’s Freeware is to make it easy to select the best freeware product for your particular needs. The best freeware programs are as good or better than their commercial counterparts but finding the most appropriate programs can be challenging. There are dozens of freeware download sites but few of these actually help you select the best program for your needs. The site has no downloads just honest advice and useful guidance. Links are provided where you can safely and securely download the product you want. Furthermore, you will know that what you have selected is the best available. Gizmo’s Freeware is easy to use and will save you time, money, and lots of frustration!

BE SURE TO BOOKMARK GIZMO’S FREEWARE BECAUSE YOU WILL USE IT FREQUENTLY TO SOLVE PROBLEMS — SAVING YOU MONEY, TIME, AND LOTS OF STRESS:

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

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Excel Tips

Quickly Updating Values

Many people use Microsoft Excel to keep track of important information, such as price sheets or cost tables. This data is then used to help calculate proposals or to figure out how much should be charged to customers. It is not uncommon to need to update information in these tables on a periodic basis. For instance, your company may decide that it will increase all prices in the company by ten percent this year.

If you have rather large pricing tables, you may not know the best way to update the prices by the ten percent. Obviously you could make a secondary table and then base the information in that table on a formula, such as `=B3 * 1.1`. This is actually more work than is necessary, however. Excel provides a much quicker way to update values in a table by a uniform amount. Simply follow these steps:

1. Select an empty cell, somewhere outside the range used by your pricing table.
2. Enter the value 1.1 in the empty cell.
3. With the cell selected, press **CTRL+C** to copy its contents to the Clipboard.
4. Select the entire pricing table. You should not select any headers or non-numeric information in the table.
5. Choose the Paste Special option from the Edit menu. Excel displays the Paste Special dialog box.
6. In the Operation area of the dialog box, make sure you select the Multiply option.
7. Click on OK.
8. Select the cell where you entered the value in step 2.
9. Press the **DELETE** key.

If you are using Excel 2007, then the steps are slightly different:

1. Select an empty cell, somewhere outside the range used by your pricing table.
2. Enter the value 1.1 in the empty cell.
3. With the cell selected, press **CTRL+C** to copy its contents to the Clipboard.
4. Select the entire pricing table. You should not select any headers or non-numeric information in the table.

5. With the Home tab of the ribbon displayed, click the down-arrow at the bottom of the Paste option (left side of the ribbon). Excel displays a drop-down list of pasting options.

6. Choose the Paste Special option from the drop-down list. Excel displays the Paste Special dialog box.

7. In the Operation area of the dialog box, make sure you select the Multiply option.

8. Click on OK.

9. Select the cell where you entered the value in step 2.

10. Press the **DELETE** key.

That's it! All the values in your pricing table now show a ten percent increase from their previous values.

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The Paste Special dialog box.



Word Tips begin page 10

MS Word Tips

Inserting the Total Number of Pages in Your Document

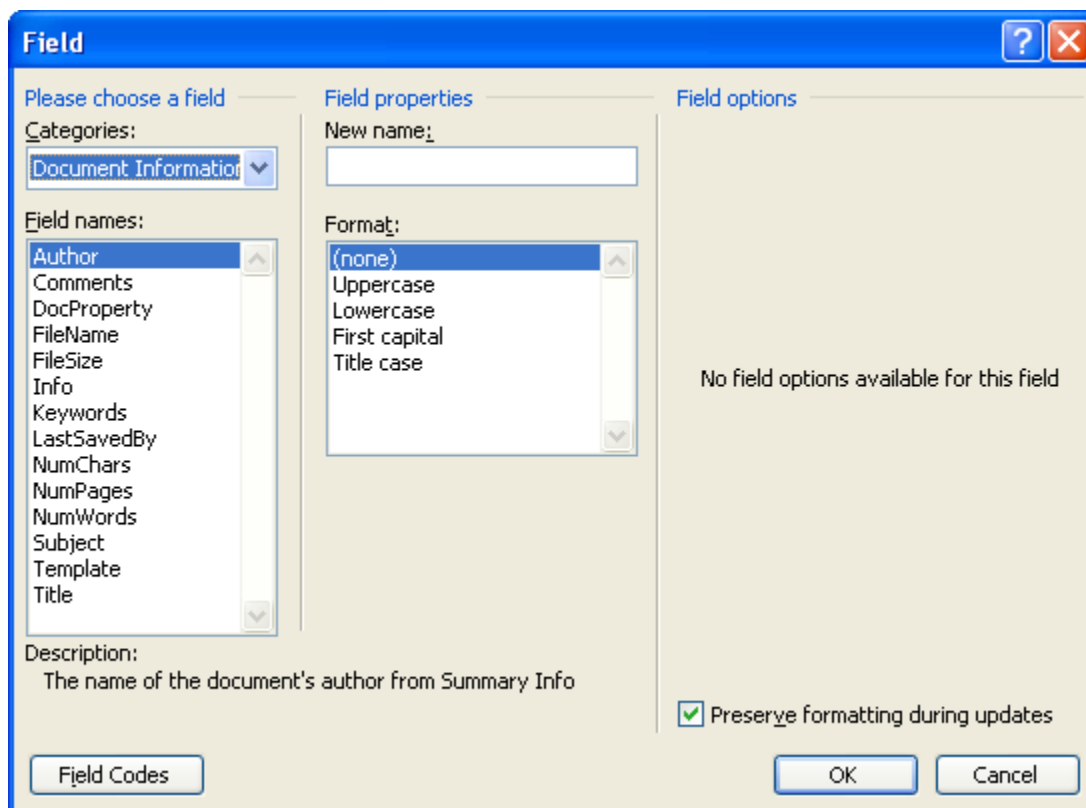
It is not unusual to put a page number in your headers or footers, if you choose to use headers and footers with your document. You can also, however, insert a field that indicates the total number of pages in a document. This can be used in a header or footer or directly within the text of your document. To insert the total number of pages in your document, follow these steps if you are using a version of Word prior to Word 2007:

1. Position the insertion point where you want the total number of pages to appear.
2. Choose Field from the Insert menu. You will see the Field dialog box.
3. In the Categories list, choose Document Information.
4. In the Fields Names list, choose NumPages.
5. Click on OK.

The process of inserting a field is a bit different in Word 2007. Follow these steps:

1. Position the insertion point where you want the total number of pages to appear.
2. Make sure the Insert tab of the ribbon is selected.
3. In the Text group, click Quick Parts. You'll see a drop-down menu.
4. Choose Field. Word displays the Field dialog box.
5. In the Categories drop-down list, choose Document Information.
6. In the Field Names list choose NumPages.
7. Click on OK to close the dialog box and insert your field.

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The Field dialog box.

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Send membership inquiries and address changes to: membership@wacug.org

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

WAC Membership/Renewal Application

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Individual/Corporate/Family Dues: \$25.00
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List the computer systems you own / use (in order of preference)

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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

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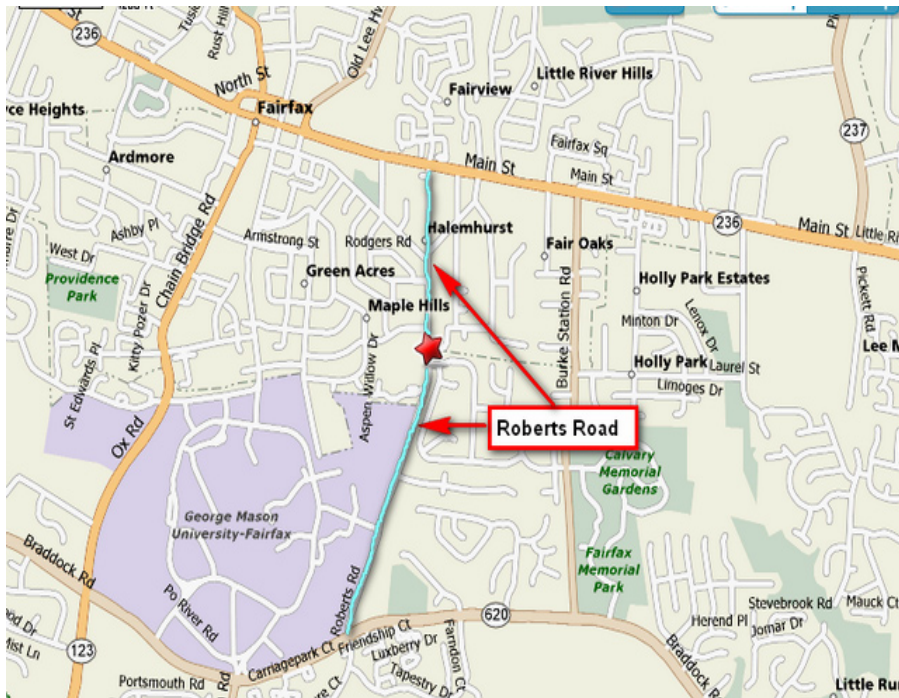
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March 12, 2010

Controlling System Restore

By Vinny La Bash, Member and Regular Columnist,
Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.,
Florida

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Did a shareware application you were enamored of turn out to be an unmitigated disaster? Perhaps a device driver installation, system update or modification to a registry key went bad, and your system wandered into an alternate universe. Windows has a utility called System Restore that takes a picture, called a Restore Point, of your system before certain types of operations are started. System Restore is a very handy feature that allows you to go back in time to erase actions you have come to regret. If a problem occurs you can revert back to the way things were, and all is well again.

System Restore, for all its utility and convenience, has its drawbacks. Some argue that if there is not enough free disk space, System Restore will fail to create a restore point, so an unsuspecting person may discover that there is no restore point available when trying to put things back to normal. There is also no way to make a permanent restore point that will not get deleted after a time when automatic restore points need the disk space. This could be a predicament if a problem is intermittent.

It is possible that System Restore may be responsible for your disk drive running out of room. While today's super-sized drives make that less likely than a few years ago running out of disk space could still happen, especially if you load up your system with videos. You can reduce that likelihood even further by configuring System Restore properly.

The snapshots we talked about in the first paragraph are taken by a built-in program called the Volume Snapshot Service (VSS). There is no way to access this utility in the standard Windows Graphical Utility Interface (GUI). This means you can't get to it with a menu option. You need to open a Command Prompt window with elevated administrator privileges.

Click on the Start orb located down at the bottom left corner of your screen, select All Programs, and open the Accessories folder. Right click on the Command Prompt icon, and then select Run as Administrator from the menu. That will open up a Command Prompt window with enough authority to configure

System Restore.

Before doing any configuration, let's take some time to understand how System Restore works. You can do this with the vssadmin tool. At the Command Prompt type vssadmin /? (Press Enter after typing a command.)

You see a list of all the commands supported by the utility.

(Note: Shadow copy = Restore Point)

Enter the command vssadmin list shadows

This displays a list of all the restore points currently on the system.

The list shadowstorage command displays the amount of disk drive space currently being used to store restore points, how much space is set aside to accommodate restore points, and the maximum permitted size for restore points.

To see what's available on your own system, at the Command Prompt type:

"Vssadmin list shadowstorage"

Take a few minutes to understand the way the information is displayed. If there is enough free disk space you can store up to 64 restore points before Windows automatically starts deleting old restore points to accommodate new ones.

Making backups is an essential task, but there is no reason why Windows should be allowed to consume every available byte of storage with System Restore points. The default settings allow Windows to run amok but you can reset the maximum value with the resize shadowstorage command.

Here is an example:

Vssadmin resize shadowstorage /for=c: /on=c: /maxsize = 12GB

The /for= switch specifies the disk drive where the storage space is to be resized.

The /on= switch tells Windows where to save the Restore Point.

The /maxsize= switch tells Windows how much space it can use for Restore Points.

If you don't specify a maximum size you are giving Windows permission to do anything it wants. The minimum size is 1GB. I have seen references stating

See *System Restore* next page

that the minimum size can be as low as 300MB, but I could not verify that information.

After entering the resize command the system needs to be restarted to take effect. Configuring System Restore points won't solve every problem you may have with Windows, but it will give you more control of how Windows allocates resources.

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Editorial Bits

By Patrick Libert, Editor, Danbury Computer Society, CT

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[dacseditor \(at\) optimum.net](mailto:dacseditor@optimum.net)

Computers and Healthcare

CWe have all probably had it “up to here” with the health care debate. Medicine is in the twenty-first century; medical record keeping in the nineteenth!

Pet peeve? When I visit my physician's office, a new computer monitor adorns the exam room. Is it used to access my medical history during my visit? Not in the least! It's much easier to leaf through a copious file folder, unable to find (once again) whether or not I had a recommended exam the previous year. Time wasted: several minutes which could have been better utilized to discuss current health topics.

In my opinion, the only in way in which we are going to accelerate this modernizing process is to use the populist approach. Tell your doctor(s), your hospital, your medical insurance company that you demand an immediate improvement. You will be pleasantly surprised at the power of a letter or of an email. I do it all the time; so can you!

Social Networking

That relatively new phrase now permeates our daily conversations and actions. The press sometimes depicts this new web-based activity as a waste of time, a fad which will eventually disappear. On the contrary, this is a technological evolution which can help everyone.

Whoa! Hold on for a minute. Let's not just think of this as an online dating service, or an activity reserved for teens. On the contrary, social networking is a remarkable way to communicate with existing and long-lost friends and family with little delay.

In my case, having several siblings and friends in Europe, we are now able to rapidly exchange comments, photo albums and various files thanks to social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. I would even include Skype as a form of social network because we can speak to and see each other and bring our family communications to a degree never before possible without crossing the Atlantic.

Were I not retired, I surely would be actively participating on LinkedIn to broaden my professional knowledge and network.

New and Notable

Readability! (<http://lab.arc90.com/experiments/readability/>)

How cool is this! How many times have you opened the link to a web page and seen a gobbledygook of mixed messages and ads surrounding the article you really want to read?

Install this free bookmarklet in your browser's bookmark bar, click on the bookmark after you have chosen the page you want to see. Abracadabra! All the clutter on the page is removed.

Many of you may already be aware of this site <http://www.komando.com/>. Kim Komando has a syndicated nationwide radio show and columnist. Her site has a multitude of useable information for all computer users, PC or Mac. I have bookmarked many links found on her web site.

Snowtape (<http://snowtape.com/>)

I have been experimenting with the free version of Snowtape. This software allows me to listen to a radio stream and record at my choosing any portion of the broadcast. It then transfers automatically to my iTunes music gallery for future listening. There are other similar applications but, so far, this is my favorite.

Browser Speed

Being primarily a Mac nut, my principal browser is Safari. I also use Firefox and Opera 10.10 regularly. Less frequently, I have used Flock and, very recently,

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Chrome now that I have an Intel mac.

I like Firefox but find it to be at times a little slow compared to Safari 4. There appears to be a lot more going on in the background with Firefox which may explain the speed differential.

Chrome is mean and lean. It is very fast on my Mac and as it adds more functions and extensions, I may use it more often, ever mindful that as a Google product, it probably is the equivalent of having a spy cam watching all my actions.

Opera continues to amaze me with its multiple capabilities allowing the browser to serve as your email program, your RSS reader and many other functions integrated in the browser. The latest release is version 10.10 but there is much more coming from the developers. I have been a beta tester for Opera since mid-2003 and I can tell you that this is an exciting venture. The speed of the latest version matches that of Chrome but in a much more complex offering. Stay tuned.

Lala (<http://www.lala.com/>)

After reading last month that Apple had bought lala, I joined their site and began to delve into their music library. According to some, Apple's motivation for this investment was to have the capability of having members not only download their mp3 music but to have the option of assembling a music collection "in the cloud." Great idea!

Lala has an extensive music library which one can download to one's computer or, at a much lower cost, buy and add to one's lala "cloud" collection. I used the free 30 song credits offered for joining to save many different songs in my new account. I can sign on to my account on the lala.com site, access my "collection" and play it through my computer. If networked to my home audio system, I can listen to this music in different rooms.

The cost? The price to download a song varies from \$0.79 to \$1.29. However, adding a song to the cloud collection: TEN CENTS! In my opinion, that makes it a very attractive way to compile a substantial collection of one's favorite music.

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Neat Things You can do with a Flash Drive

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By now you're probably tired of reading about how much better Windows 7 is than Vista. Come too, so let's spend some time examining some of the things you can do with a flash drive other than mere data storage. A USB flash drive consists of a flash memory data storage device integrated with a USB (Universal Serial Bus) interface. USB flash drives are easily removable, and much smaller than a floppy disk. They are rewritable, and usually weigh less than an ounce. There is a wide range of storage capacities with the most common being from 2 GB to 32 GB. Higher capacities up to 256 GB tend to be pricey.

One of the most useful things you can do with a flash drive is to run portable applications. Open Office, for example, is a free suite of programs that includes a word processor, spreadsheet, data manager, presentation tool, and drawing package. You can store the suite as a portable application, and run it on any computer that supports Windows. Firefox and Thunderbird are also available as mobile applications.

Having office applications, email, and an internet browser all pooled in a portable drive you can carry on a key chain is a powerful combination. If you want more go to www.portableapps.com for an open source platform that works with iPods and portable hard drives in addition to flash drives. The platform is not only free, but it's a full function site. You are not limited to a trial period or a limited function subset. There is no sign in requirement, and no necessity to provide even an email address. Go for it.

Everyone wants a faster system. With either Windows Vista or Windows 7, the built-in ReadyBoost feature can speed up your computer with a USB flash drive. ReadyBoost takes the storage space on a USB flash drive and converts it into an additional memory cache that supplements the main memory cache on your primary disk drive. It can do this because flash memory is faster than regular disk drives. It's faster

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because it has no moving parts, and you can get a noticeable improvement in response time. Implementing ReadyBoost is simplicity itself. Insert the USB flash drive into the USB slot on your computer and follow the configuration prompts.

If you work or live in an environment where other folks have physical access to your computer you can use your flash drive to lock everyone else out of your PC. There is no built-in utility like ReadyBoost for this, but you can download a free tool called Predator from www.brothersoft.com that provides this function. Predator uses a standard USB flash drive as an access control device. After performing a short installation and configuration process, your flash disk becomes a key that will lock and unlock your PC. When you leave your PC remove the USB flash drive. This causes the screen to go blank while disabling the mouse and keyboard. When you ready to resume, put the flash drive back, and everything returns to normal. Move over, Mr. Bond, Predator is here.

All the preceding capabilities are very convenient, but how would you like to carry around a portable operating system? If you are willing to expend a little time and energy you can configure a USB flash drive to be a bootable Windows 7 drive. You will need a flash drive with a capacity of at least 8 gigabytes, and of course a Windows 7 installation disk. Start out by inserting your flash drive into its USB socket and inserting the Windows 7 installation disk in the optical drive. Please make a note of the drive letters. This is essential for successful installation.

Preparing the flash drive is the next step. Click on the Start orb and type: Diskpart

Pressing Enter opens a command window. (After typing a command at the command prompt always press Enter to execute the command.) At the prompt type: List Disk

You will see a list of all your hard drives, partitions, optical drives, card reader drives, and flash drives. Identify the optical drive that contains the Windows 7 installation disk and the flash drive you're working with. For this example we'll assume the flash drive is disk #4, also designated as G and the optical drive is disk #2, also designated as D.

At the command prompt type: Select Disk 4

Run the following commands:

Clean

Create

Primary

Partition Select Partition 1

Active Format FS=FAT32

Assign

Exit

This series of commands erased extraneous material from the flash drive, created an active primary partition, and formatted it with the FAT32 file system. The next step is to copy the Windows 7 installation files to the flash drive.

At the command prompt type: Xcopy D:.* /S/E/F
G

In this example D is the drive housing the Windows 7 installation disk and G is the USB flash drive. The command copies the installation files to the flash drive, and when it finishes you have a bootable Windows 7 flash drive. The last thing you need to do to make this work is go into the BIOS and make the first bootable device the flash drive.

Carrying a flash drive around is obviously far more convenient than carrying a DVD, and has the additional advantage of being faster than a DVD. This procedure also works for Windows Vista, but why bother when Windows 7 is here?

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