



The Cursor

Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group



Meeting Location
OLLI, 4210 Roberts Road,
Fairfax, VA



Next Meeting:
October 16, 2010



Presidential Bits

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

During the Learn 30 tutorial session at the September meeting, I had the opportunity to promote the use of the style features included in modern word processing software (I use the free, Open Source OpenOffice.org Writer application, but the feature is also available in Microsoft Word). I demonstrated how styles are useful to maintain consistency in simple documents like the WAC Board of Directors meeting agendas and letter templates (as created by the OpenOffice.org Writer Wizard) to more complex documents with automated Table of Contents, indexes of Illustrations and Tables, and cross-references within document text to automatically numbered figure and table captions. My main point was to convince the audience that using the style features lets the word processor software take care of the document formatting details automatically. More information about using styles with OpenOffice.org Writer v3.x is available at http://wiki.services.openoffice.org/wiki/Documentation/OOo3_User_Guides/Writer_Guide/Introduction_to_Styles.

As a sidebar during my session, I also mentioned an interesting website I found while preparing a sample document for my demonstration. I needed some filler text quickly, so I looked for a source of the "Lorem ipsum ..." text often used for this purpose. A Google search led me to <http://www.lipsum.com/>, a site that not only provided the text I was looking for, but a history (dating its use by typesetters back to the 1500's), the original source material, and translation. The site also includes a text generator.

WAC member Walter Fraser gave the main presentation in September, and provided an introduction to the concepts behind the databases in general and Microsoft Access 2007 relational database management system (RD-BMS) in particular. Walter admitted that it takes some planning to design a database, and it is not an easy skill to pick up, but a skill that is often driven by necessity. In general, it's usually easier to download or buy a database someone else created than build one from scratch. However, Walter did demonstrate a number of databases he created for his own use, including a database of his movie collection that he could search based upon a number

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Lloyd's Web Sites for October, 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. Photos of flowers and Plants – <http://www.bhg.com/gardening/plant-dictionary>
2. Phone Scoop. Detailed info on new phones, news, reviews, and forums – <http://www.phonescoop.com/>
3. How Stuff Works: History and updates – <http://history.howstuffworks.com/>
4. The Pulitzer Prizes. Beginning in 1917, and continuing to the present day, the Pulitzer Prize is awarded in 21 different areas of journalism and photography, including published books and music. This site allows you to search or browse each year's winners using the timeline at the top of each page – <http://www.pulitzer.org/>
5. Inoplease Homework Center Encyclopedia, Dictionary, Almanacs, and Homework Help on English, math, history, geography, science, and social studies. – Related site: <http://FactMonster Homework Center>. <http://www.infoplease.com/homework>
6. All Time 100 Novels. TIME critics Lev Grossman and Richard Lacayo pick the 100 best English-Language novels from 1923 to the present – <http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/0,28757,1951793,00.html>
7. Public Record Locator (such as Fugitive reports, government salaries and more) – <http://publicrecords.onlinesearches.com/>
8. Thinking of starting a business? Measure your entrepreneurial instinct – <http://www.forbes.com/serialstartups>
9. Family-Friendly Jokes. Check these sites <http://www.AhaJokes.com> also <http://kids.yahoo.com/jokes>
10. Money Management Free Personal Finance Software, Online Money Management, Budget Planner and Financial Planning – <http://www.mint.com/>



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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Press Release: Sybase Survey Finds That One In Four Americans Likely To Replace Laptop With A Tablet Device For Work Or Personal Use

Approximately One Quarter of Americans would Purchase an Android-based Tablet; Over Half Prefer to Buy a Device at a Lower Cost with an Attached Data Package

DUBLIN, CA — SEPTEMBER 22, 2010 — Sybase, Inc., an SAP company (NYSE: SAP) and industry leader in enterprise and mobile software, today released the results of a survey on consumer appetite for tablet PCs, conducted by Zogby International.

Strong desire for Android tablets

- Approximately one in four Americans surveyed (23 percent) would purchase an Android-based tablet. In addition, one in every two Android phone owners showed a preference to purchase a tablet, illustrating that brand loyalty could translate into higher tablet sales.
- Only 13 percent of non-Android phone owners stated intent to purchase an Android tablet, indicating an opportunity for creating awareness and education.
- One in four surveyed stated that they are likely to use a tablet device as a laptop replacement for work or personal use.
- When purchasing a tablet, 56 percent said they would prefer to buy a device at a lower cost with an attached data package versus purchasing a tablet at a higher cost with no contract.

Tablets in the enterprise

- One in four Americans, expect their employer to provide access to tablets in the enterprise.
- Improvements in creativity and innovation was cited as the number one benefit tablets could bring to the workplace (18 percent), closely followed by efficiency, time savings and problem solving (16 percent) and communication, collaboration and productivity (14 percent).

More applications, lower price

- When considering purchasing a tablet, 56 percent of respondents listed more software and applications as an important deciding factor.
- Almost 33 percent of those surveyed stated that having a physical keyboard is a crucial tablet component.
- The highest percentage of respondents preferred a nine to 10 inch screen size for a tablet (50 percent), followed by 12 inches (26 percent), seven inches (21 percent) and five inches (three percent).
 - Video conferencing and camera functions for tablets were of limited interest, with only seven percent and four percent of respondents interested in these features, respectively.
 - 29 percent of respondents stated that their ideal price for a tablet would be less than \$300 USD.



“As users clamor to bring the latest devices into the workplace, enterprises cannot avoid evaluating the business case for tablet and other new device support,” said Willie Jow, vice president mobility, Sybase. “Sybase is focused on continuing to deliver industry-leading enterprise mobility solutions that help transform businesses to better connect with their customers and better enable their employees.”

For graphical representation of the survey findings please, [download the PDF](#).

About the Study

The referenced study was commissioned by Sybase and conducted by Zogby International. The study consists of online surveys of 2,100 adults in the U.S.A sampling of Zogby International's online panel, which is representative of the adult population of the U.S., was invited to participate from 8/27/10 to 9/14/10. Slight weights were added to region, party, age, race, religion, gender, and education to more accurately reflect the population. The margin of error is +/- 2.2 percentage points. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups. The MOE calculation is for sampling error only.

About Sybase

Sybase, an SAP® company, is an industry leader in delivering enterprise and mobile software to manage, analyze and mobilize information. We are recognized globally as a performance leader, proven in the most data-intensive industries and across all major systems, networks and devices. Our information management, analytics and enterprise mobility solutions have powered the world's most mission-critical systems in financial services, telecommunications, manufacturing and government. For more information: www.sybase.com. Read Sybase® blogs: blogs.sybase.com. Follow us on Twitter at [@Sybase](https://twitter.com/Sybase).

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GNU/Linux Distribution Releases

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.

The following list summarizes distribution release announcements from Distrowatch.com for the period September 1 - 29, 2010.

[aptosid 2010-02](#)

[ArchBang Linux 2010.09](#)

[CAINE 2.0](#)

[Chakra GNU/Linux 0.2.2](#)

[Clonezilla Live 1.2.6-24](#)

[Element 1.4](#)

[IPFire 2.7 Core 40](#)

[Kiwi Linux 10.08](#)

[Kongoni GNU/Linux 1.12.3](#)

[Legacy OS 2010](#)

[Linux From Scratch 6.7](#)

[Linux Mint 201009 "Debian"](#)

[Linux Mint 9 "Fluxbox"](#)

[Momonga Linux 7](#)

[NuTyX Attapu](#)

[Parsix GNU/Linux 3.6](#)

[PelicanHPC 2.2](#)

[Qomo Linux 1.0.0](#)

[Quirky 1.3](#)

[Salix OS 13.1.1 "Xfce Live", "LXDE Live"](#)

[Super OS 10.04](#)

[Superb Mini Server 1.5.3](#)

[SystemRescueCd 1.6.0](#)

[Tiny Core Linux 3.1](#)

[Toorox 09.2010](#)

[Trisquel GNU/Linux 4.0](#)

[UberStudent 1.0 "LXDE"](#)

[Ubuntu Privacy Remix 9.04r4](#)

[UHU-Linux 2.2](#)

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Linux from page 4

[VectorLinux 6.0 "SOHO Deluxe"](#)

[VortexBox 1.5](#)

Linux Software of the Month: October 2010

The software described below can be downloaded at the links provided or copied onto a USB flash drive at the WAC meeting.

Brain Workshop – v4.8. <http://brainworkshop.sourceforge.net/>. Free GNU General Public License Python script by Paul Hoskinson. Brain Workshop is an implementation of the Dual N-Back mental exercise. This exercise is a mental activity that has been scientifically shown to improve your working memory (short-term memory) and fluid intelligence. The game involves remembering a sequence of spoken letters and a sequence of positions of a square at the same time. Brain Workshop includes additional challenging game modes beyond Dual N-Back.

LGeneral – v1.2. <http://lgames.sourceforge.net/index.php?project=LGeneral>. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable packages for Mandriva 2010.1 and Ubuntu (v1.1.1). LGeneral is a turn-based strategy engine heavily inspired by Panzer General. You play single scenarios or whole campaigns turn by turn against a human player or the computer. Entrenchment, rugged defense, defensive fire, surprise contacts, surrender, unit supply, weather influence, reinforcements and other implementations contribute to the tactical and strategic depth of the game. This game requires SDL (>= 1.1.4), included with GNU/Linux distributions. For sound you'll need the SDL Mixer (Optional: LGeneral runs without it as well.)

LinkChecker–v5.3. <http://linkchecker.sourceforge.net/>. Free GNU General Public License C source code and Python script by calvin and executable package (v5.2) for Fedora 13. With LinkChecker, you can check HTML documents and Web sites for broken links. It features recursion, robots.txt exclusion protocol support, HTTP proxy support, i18n support, multithreading, regular expression filtering rules for links, and user/password checking for authorized pages. Output can be colored or normal text, HTML, SQL, CSV, or a sitemap graph in DOT, GML, or XML format. Supported link types are HTTP/1.1 and 1.0, HTTPS, FTP, mailto:, news:, nntp:, Telnet, and local files.

WebGUI – v7.9.15. <http://www.webgui.org/>. Free GNU General Public License PERL script code by JT Smith

and Plain Black Corporation. WebGUI is a content management framework built to allow average business users to build and maintain complex Web sites. It is modular, pluggable, and platform independent. It was designed to allow the people who create the content to manage it online, rather than content management taking up the time of busy IT staff. WebGUI comes with a full host of features including shopping cart, subscriptions, forums, photo galleries, FAQs, link lists, blogs, SQL reports, a Web services interface, and a very configurable user privilege and profiling system.

Kernel Source – v2.6.35. <http://www.kernel.org/>. Free GNU Public License source code for all platforms by the Linux community.



Presidential Bits from page 1

of criteria.

For the meeting on October 16th, WAC's Gabe Goldberg will give us a refresher course on Fundamental Technologies - important but easy-to-forget tips and resources for on-line and computing productivity/safety, aiming at retirees, employees, freelance workers, work-at-homers, and essentially everyone. It covers procedures, opportunities, suggestions, and pitfalls for hardware, software, networks. Gabe never fails to provide interesting and timely insights on this topic, so you don't want to miss it!

For the October Learn 30 tutorial, WAC member Lorrin Garson will demonstrate the advantages of running a home server to automate system backups and provide a central repository of files, including documents, movies, music and photos, for all computers in a home network. Lorrin will use his own Hewlett-Packard MediaSmart Server running Microsoft Windows Home Server software for the demonstration.

See you there!



Geof's screen shots follow on page 7

October's Learn

Benefits of a Home Server

by Lorrin Garsor, WACUG, OPCUG

Increasingly many families now have two, three or more desktop and/or laptop computers. Linking these computers in some meaningful way, sharing information among users and devices, and maintaining multiple computers (especially backup) presents a significant challenge and a market for devices and technology to meet this need.

Networks and servers have long meet this essential need in the workplace. However, until a couple years ago, these technologies have been too expensive and complex for home use. Numerous companies now offer home servers running Microsoft's Windows Home Server operating system. These systems are easy to implement and maintain in a home environment. These home servers provide a rich set of functions, including...

1. Automatic backup of both Windows and Apple home computers.
2. Restoration of backed up files as well as restoration of entire computer systems.
3. Sharing digital files across the home network, including word-processing files, photos, movies, music, etc.
4. Worldwide access to home computers and files via the Internet.
5. Centralized storage of the family's electronic information with appropriate privacy.

This presentation will include a "demonstration" of the Hewlett-Packard's MediaSmart Server, with emphasis on backup and recovery of home computers.



October's Presentation

Fundamental Technology

by Gabe Goldberg, WACUG

Technology advances faster than the eye or mind can follow, but what tools and practices do 21st century people (from novices to experts) really require?

This presentation provides important but easy-to-forget tips and resources for online and computing productivity/safety, aiming at retirees, employees, freelance workers, work-at-homers, and essentially everyone. It covers procedures, opportunities, suggestions, and pitfalls for hardware, software, networks.

Safe Mode

By Bill Pryor, Internet SIG Leader, Lehigh Valley
Computer Group, Pennsylvania
www.lvcg.org
bpryor (at) ptd.net

Windows Safe Mode available in Win 95, 98, ME, 2000, XP, Vista, Win 7 allows you oftentimes to boot up Windows when you can not normally run Windows at all.

For example, if you can't run Windows at all, upon boot up, press F8 to get Windows to boot in the Safe Mode. In Safe Mode just the essential programs and files are loaded; this allows you to remove some spyware, adware, and viruses that cannot be removed in Normal Mode.

For example one of our office networked computers last week picked up a virus type program that would not allow XP to run at all! Every time an .EXE file needed to run, nothing would happen. Click on any icon to run, nothing would happen. The system was completely dysfunctional in the Normal Mode. Nothing would run at all!

Not wasting time in Google, or the listed "miracle ways" of solving this "sneak attack" by all the "virus experts" and their companies which are often really tiresome to read in all their verbosity. I just booted up by pressing F8, went into the XP Safe Mode. In the Safe Mode the anticipated programs ran fine, and at that point, I ran my Malware Bytes program which did not respond or run in the Normal Mode, but in this Safe Mode, Malware Bytes ran fine and picked up the Hijack.exe virus and quarantined it! I then rebooted the computer normally and everything ran fine again! (Not sure of the System Restore points in this instance, I elected not to use System Restore to save current essential data, and only ran the current Malware Bytes).

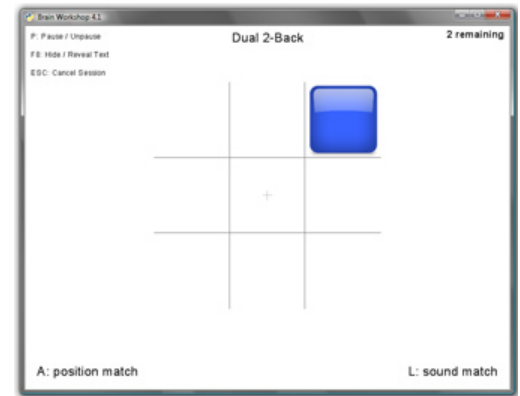
No special programs to download, no special techniques to use, no mystifying and complicated definitions to comprehend. Just use your computer and programs in Safe Mode. Pragmatically it is that simple!

In another instance I had an old Sony VIAO laptop that would boot up, and you would see the Desktop, and the whole screen would be frozen making the laptop really unusable. In this instance, I booted up in Safe Mode as I explained above, and removed a corrupt startup program that was in the Start Up folder. And now the whole laptop runs like new!

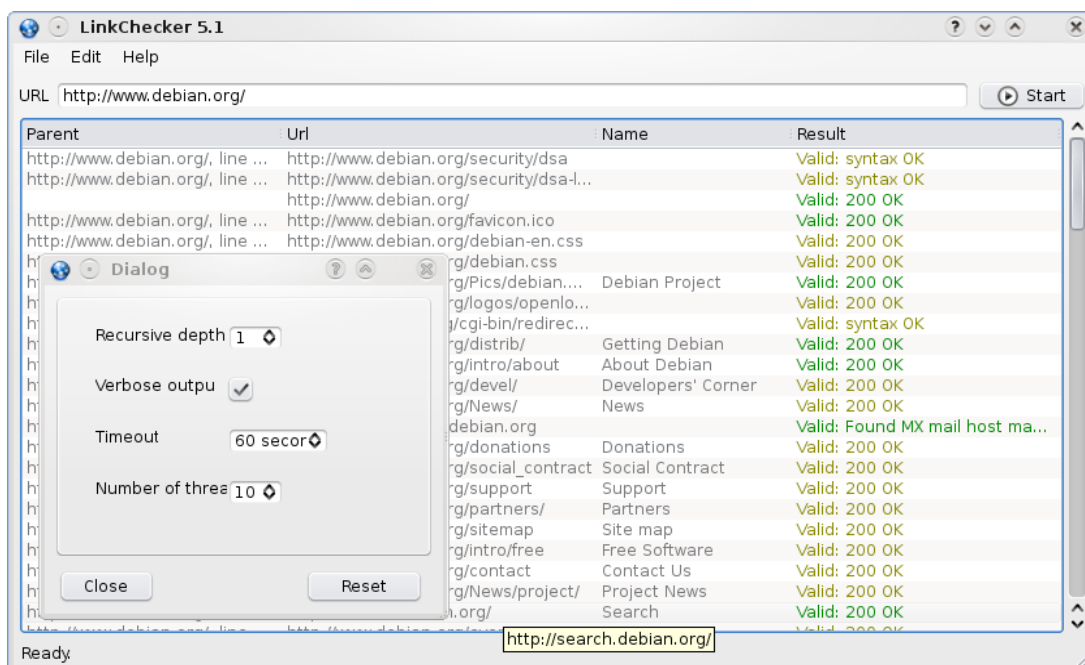
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Safe Mode from page 6

Problems, let's not over complicate, or get excited, or look at the long faluten' explanations that most people love to hear from the mouths of virus experts. Just PRESS F8 and get into the Safe Mode! Use this simple procedure in a simple way, and your computing life will be much easier!!



Top-to-bottom
Brain Workshop
LGeneral
LinkChecker



Finicky Flash

By Rick Curry, President, Channel Islands PCUG,
California

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president(at)cipcug.org

Flash is a special sort of movie player program that runs inside your browser. It usually opens a rectangular window inside the browser. Often a video advertisement, a movie clip, television clip, or a flashing repetitive cadence of words will be in this rectangle. It can also be complex enough to play a video game.

Toby (CIPCUG tech guru) has shown us how to block Flash using the NoScript add-on to the Firefox browser because Flash can be a source of continuous nuisance in the form of distracting images and sounds as well as being powerful enough to serve as a way for malicious programs to get inside your computer.

Alas, with all of its faults, many useful websites will not run without Flash. There will almost certainly be times when you find yourself telling NoScript that it is OK at a particular website (like your bank). So we want to have Flash installed.

Much like Windows or other programs, Flash gets updated to fix problems and introduce new features. Fortunately, Flash is configured to automatically tell you when it needs to be updated. Unfortunately, the netherworld of Internet-based thieves has come up with ways to pop up a window that look just like Flash telling you to update.

So if a window pops up and tells you to update Flash, treat it like a phishing scam where someone is pretending to be your bank and is sending you a false link. Do not do what it says to do. Close that window and ignore the instructions just the way you would ignore the email message that tells you:

HI! WE ARE YOUR BANK!

>>>click here and see what happens <<<

We must not click on links to get our Flash updates. Type in the addresses by hand to check for new versions of Flash, for now. It is a nuisance, but it is the best way to be safe for the time being. Close all of your open browsers and any pop-up windows, like the one telling you to update Flash. I check with Task Manager at this point to make sure that all of the browsers have been closed, but that step is very rarely necessary and somewhat dangerous if you do not know what you are doing.

Next open a new copy of your browser and see if you

actually need any updates from the official Flash website by typing in this address:

<http://www.adobe.com/software/flash/about>

If you use NoScript, make sure you allow JavaScript on this page! Your current Flash version will be displayed under the big rectangular picture. It is on the right under the heading "Version Information." Further down the page is a table listing the latest versions of Flash. If you are already running the latest version, you are done. If you want to get the latest version of Flash, you can get it here:

<http://www.adobe.com/support/flashplayer/>.

My children just told me that they are having Flash programs hang (stop and never resume) while displaying: "loading." They also told me that clearing the browser cache, closing all browsers, and then starting over seems to always be the fix.

These strange problems reported in Flash are reason enough that most of us should check for updates to Flash. While writing this article, I started checking. The first two computers at my house needed to be updated, and I never saw any update notice for either machine. Just make sure to go to the real website for your Flash updates.

If you update Flash and the update notice keeps coming back every time you start your browser, you may have picked up a virus or Trojan horse. If you think this has happened, it is time to seek assistance from a professional.

Happy computing!



Free Utilities from CPUID Describe System Details

by Ira Wilsker

WEBSITES:

<http://www.cpubid.com>

<http://www.cpubid.com/softwares.html>

As regular readers of this column know, I am a fan of utilities, especially if they are free! Frequently, situations arise where it is necessary to know the details of a computer, including specifics about its software, hardware, drivers, and other components in order to diagnose a problem and make recommendations. There are several fine utilities that can perform these functions, but several that I have been using recently come from the historical city of Dunkerque, France, courtesy of their publisher CPUID Software.

CPUID software is best known for its namesake product, CPUID, which is as it says, a utility to identify the details of the CPU chip installed in a computer. This is often necessary to know if the computer is being benchmarked (performance measured), upgraded, or undergoing major repairs. The latest CPUID software is named CPU-Z, version 1.55. This small utility displays the processor brand and model number, the type of socket it uses (necessary to know for replacement or upgrades), speeds, and other details about the CPU chip, which is the central “brains” of the computer. Sometimes it is desirable or necessary to replace a motherboard, or determine the BIOS on the motherboard. The motherboard is the central platform on which most of the other internal components are either directly attached to, or otherwise connected to, and provides much of the internal communication between the components. While generally very reliable and long lived, sometimes it is necessary to replace a motherboard. The BIOS, an acronym for “Basic Input - Output System” is typically attached to the motherboard, and contains the first code run by a PC when it is initially powered on. The BIOS identifies and initializes the video card, keyboard, mouse, hard drive, CD/DVD drive, and other key components. The BIOS contains software in a non-volatile ROM chip, and is typically firmly attached to the motherboard. Most BIOS chips can be updated and upgraded with software provided either by the BIOS manufacturer, motherboard maker, or computer manufacturer. CPU-Z identifies the brand of BIOS, the version of its software, and the date of the software stored in it; with this information, it is somewhat easy to determine if the BIOS contains the

latest software. Keeping the BIOS updated is not a critical task if everything appears to be working OK, but for those of us always trying to tweak our computers and capitalize in the latest offerings, this is good information to have. One warning is appropriate here; if the user is considering updating the BIOS, be absolutely sure to explicitly follow the manufacturer’s directions to the letter! In a worst case scenario, failure to do so will result in an expensive paperweight, but in many cases, there is a procedure to “roll back” or restore the BIOS to its earlier status.

When I ask people how much memory they have in their computer, they are often clueless, or erroneously confuse the memory with the storage capacity of their hard drives. Clicking on the “Memory” tab of CPU-Z displays the type of memory, the amount of memory, speed, and other characteristics. The “SPD” tap allows the user to cycle through the memory stick installed in his computer, displaying the capacity of each stick, the type, manufacturer, part number, and other information. This information may be necessary if the user wants to add or replace memory in the computer.

The “Graphics” tab displays information about the display device, including the brand, model number, chipset, speed, and memory. Since the video card makers often release updates, enhancements, and new features, this information could be very useful.

CPUID also publishes several other utilities, and another one that I found useful is PC Wizard 2010. PC Wizard was first published in 1996, and is considered one of the most comprehensive system information utilities available. Since the hardware industry is very dynamic, with new hardware being introduced on a daily basis, PC Wizard is frequently updated, typically monthly. In addition to identifying and displaying the details of the hardware and software on the computer, PC Wizard can also benchmark the performance of the individual computer components, as well as the entire computer. By noting which components and software are the performance laggards, the user can then determine what, if any, practical solutions may improve performance. PC Wizard utilizes a series of icons representing each of the components or software titles installed on the computer, and can determine the hardware, configuration, system files, and resources used by the computer. The benchmark selection can test and display the performance of the entire computer, the CPU (processor chip), memory, video, hard drive, external storage devices (like CD/DVD and USB drives), and other hardware components. In addition to displaying the performance of the hardware

CUPID utilities continues page 10

itself, a “Compare Results” shows how the user’s computer compares to others. The results are also displayed and announced (audio) using the wizard avatar and voice synthesis similar to the “Vox Proxy” PowerPoint accessory. PC Wizard provides the user with a wealth of information.

While CPUID has several utilities available for free download, one of those that I also found very useful is HW-Monitor, which is a shortened “Hardware Monitor”. This utility is also available in an enhanced commercial version, HWMonitor Pro, which adds additional features and functionality. HWMonitor (the free version) can identify the power supply in the computer, and display the real-time voltages, temperatures, and fans in the power supply. This is important to monitor the health of the power supply, and consider a replacement or upgrade if necessary. Many users are unaware that their computers report the temperatures of various components in the computer, which is important in that heat is one of the big killers of components. Being somewhat colonial, I selected to display the temperatures in Fahrenheit (F) rather than Celsius (C). Usually there are some fans in each computer which are critical in exhausting the heat from the components, and bring in cool outside air. HWMonitor tracks and reports the performance of the fans, which can enable the user to easily and quickly see if a fan is failing; a dead fan can lead to overheating and damage or destruction of the computer’s components. This utility can also track and report on the temperatures of the motherboard, CPU chip, video card, and hard drive.

Most of these utilities are available for 32 and 64 bit Windows PCs using recent versions of Windows such as XP, Vista, and Windows 7, although some of the utilities also have builds that are explicitly for Windows 98. The files are relatively small and fast to download, and consume minimal system resources, such that they do not noticeably degrade system performance. These utilities could be a useful asset to anyone who wants to keep up with the performance, condition, and health of his system.



From the September meeting, Walter Fraser discusses the finer points of databases

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

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

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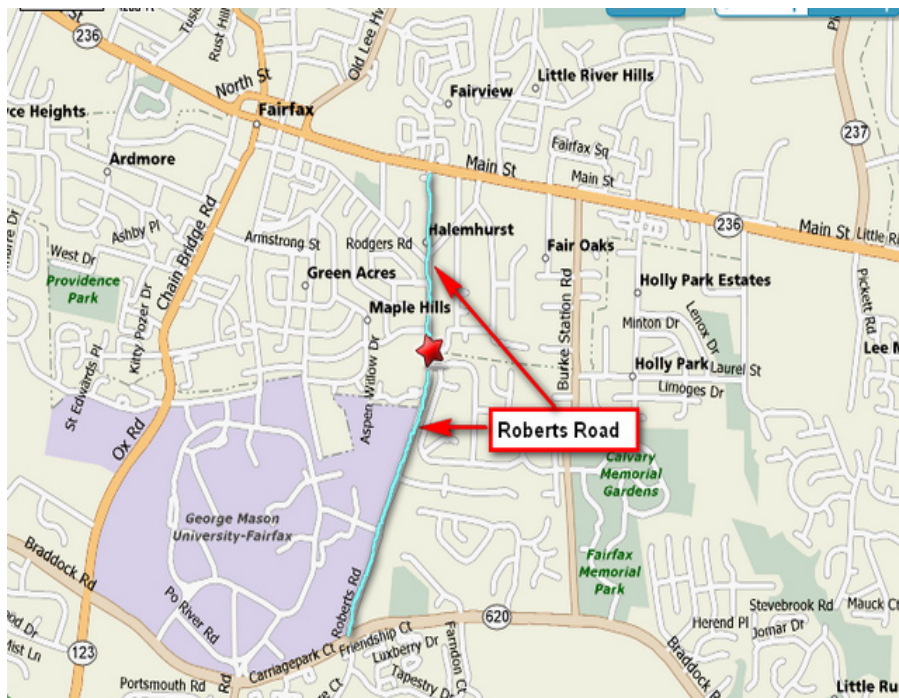
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By Dick Maybach
n2nd(at)charter.net

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Use creativity to expand picture taking capabilities without flattening your wallet

By Constance Brown, President, Canton Alliance Massillon

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August 2010 issue, The Memory Map

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Ever since the cost of photography was drastically reduced with the development of affordable digital cameras, it has been possible for the hobbyist to use creativity to expand picture taking capabilities without flattening his wallet. Often things we have around the house can be used to provide special effects in color and lighting.

If you like to experiment, you will want a camera that allows you to add filters. For example, my camera does not have an interchangeable lens. However, the lens is threaded, allowing me to add filters or a threaded adapter ring on which I can screw filters. With a cheap UV filter, I can make my own fog or blur filter simply by smearing petroleum jelly on the filter, a light coat for fog and a heavier coat for blurring. I can wash it off when I am through with the photography session.

Caution: Do not use petroleum jelly on your camera lens!

Do you have red cellophane lying around the house? Try covering your lens with it and fastening with a rubber band instead of purchasing a red filter. Experiment with different colors of cellophane. Is the color too intense? Scribble on clear cellophane with a permanent marker for a subdued filter. Want an airbrushed appearance? Stretch a piece of fabric from an old pair of pantyhose over the lens and secure with a rubber band. For more ideas on creating homemade filters, visit http://painting.suite101.com/article.cfm/how_to_make_homemade_filters_for_cameras

I enjoy using shiny gift bags to provide special lighting effects although it requires two people or one person and a tripod and the use of the timer on the camera. Warm up a basket of flowers or intensify the reds in your Christmas arrangements by turning a red bag to reflect the light. The effect of sunlight shining on an object can be obtained by use of a gold bag. Light up your crystal angels by using a combination of green, red, and gold. You can also use the shiny windshield reflectors. The silver bags or reflectors give a steely harshness and exactness to the composition.

Do you need to photograph small jewelry items or watches for insurance or eBay purposes? Often the best way is to use your scanner. Just lay the item on the scanner and cover it with piece of heavy black or white cloth. Lower the scanner lid if possible and scan at picture resolution.

Do you have a worn out pair of jeans lying around the house? How about some dry beans? Cut a section from one of the legs of the jeans, sew one end closed, add beans and sew up the other end. Now you have a bean bag tripod, one of the steadiest and most portable tripods. Set it on top of a fence post and snuggle your camera into the beans. It won't go anywhere! It is a great way to steady a powerful telephoto lens or take timed exposures. The size of the bag needed depends on the size of your camera.

"A tiny rangefinder camera will rest comfortably on a 3" X 6" pants pocket filled to a thickness of less than an inch; a massive 500mm lens attached to a motorized 35mm SLR (single lens reflex) camera body might require a large bag as much as 6 inches thick. If you'll be resting your makeshift tripod over the windowsill of your car or truck, as my friend the wildlife photographer does, give it some floppy 'legs' to hang down either side of the door. And when maximum stability is your goal, think big." <http://www.motherearthnews.com/Organic-Gardening/1985-05-01/The-Incredible-Edible-BeanbagTripod.aspx?page=3>

Want to make sure your pictures are taken with the camera at the level? Pull the miniature bubble level out of your tool box and use some double-sided tape to mount it on your camera.

Want to soften your flash photos but a softbox isn't in the budget? Make your own using stiff picture mounting card, glue, heavy duty packaging tape and some type of translucent paper such as tissue or baking grease proof paper or drafting film. Visit <http://www.fredmiranda.com/A18/> for detailed instructions on how to measure your flash to determine the size. When you are finished, you will have a softbox that performs as well as or better than anything you would buy.

As you become comfortable with the idea of improvisation, you will find that more and more of your needs can be met with a minimum of expense and a little time. Some research on Google will yield you instructions on how to create a light box, a professional lighting studio, bicycle and vehicle mounts and much more. So be creative and escalate your skills to the next level!



Making Wireless Internet Faster

By Vinny La Bash, Regular Contributing Columnist, the
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A wireless network works on the same principle as any other communications network. It is a collection of various devices connected to each other in a way that allows data to flow unimpeded, and unchanged from one device to another. The main difference is that in a wireless network, there is no physical connection between or among the different devices. The main advantage of a wireless network is portability within the range of the network. The main drawback is that the quality of the communications signal can vary greatly within the range of the network sometimes resulting in disruption of communications services.

Some Basics: For simplicity, our discussion will be restricted to internet based home wireless networks. There is no need to delve into the complications of corporate, military or other kinds of complex communications networks. The basic equipment required to set up a home network is:

- An internet service provider (ISP) that provides access to the internet.
- A modem that provides access to the ISP.
- A router that broadcasts the wireless signal.
- Devices such as laptops, desktops and printers that receive the signal through a network interface card (NIC).

There are several standards for wireless networks developed by the group that regulates the industry's standards, The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). Amongst these standards are those that set criteria for data transmission speeds.

Don't buy, or accept from your ISP, a wireless router before determining how fast it transmits data. Manufacturers are required to display the standard in their product specifications. Either get the information from your ISP or look for these specifications on the box.

Regardless of your experience level with wireless networks, don't consider anything less than standard 802.11g. Most "g" devices are not only inexpensive, but far superior to the older 802.11 "a" or "b" wireless routers. Besides being competitively priced, "g" routers have far superior network security. 802.11b routers offer only Wired Equivalent Privacy security (WEP). 802.11g

routers have Wi-Fi Protected Access (WPA), which overcomes the weaknesses of WEP.

How large are the files you upload and download from the internet? If you normally do not move large files in either direction standard 802.11g will do fine, and it has the additional advantage of being cheap. If you are moving large files, then go for a faster, Super G router.

The most common problem with home wireless networks is either loss of signal or a signal that is too weak to allow reliable connections. One way to solve this is by boosting the signal. If you're willing to spend a few bucks you can plug a Hawking HAI15SC Hi-Gain Wireless Corner Antenna into your router and enhance signal strength from the standard 2dBi to up to 15dBi. Before you run out and buy this enhancement be sure that your router has a removable antenna. Check your router's manual or contact the manufacturer for information.

If your router doesn't have a removable antenna there is an alternate, but higher priced method to increase signal strength. A Wireless-G Range Expander also does the job. It has a great advantage that it does not have to be physically connected to any part of your network. All that's necessary is that it be in range of the router. The device works similar to a "repeater" in cellular networks. It performs well in multi-story homes, back yards, lanais, and other outdoor venues.

The Expander is compatible with the Linksys WAP54G Access Point, and both the WRT54G and WRT54GS Wireless Routers. It also works with Wireless-G and Wireless-B clients.

Everyone who uses or who is contemplating using a wireless network is rightly concerned with performance. But don't let performance issues blind you to proper security. The fastest wireless network on the planet won't do you much good if a hacker is robbing you at the speed of light.

Wireless networks have become very common for individuals and organizations. A new PC is very likely to have wireless access pre-installed. Hackers have become adept at breaking into wireless networks, and you should not overlook this danger while enhancing performance.

At a minimum you should change any default passwords and select a method that will securely encrypt your data should your protection methods be compromised. Your local PC user group is a great resource for giving you this kind of assistance. Don't overlook this abundant source of expertise



Dick's Clicks

By Dick Ramette, President, Computer Club of Green Valley,
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October 2010 issue, Green Bytes

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Do you sometimes feel that your brain, like the *Old Gray Mare*, “Ain’t what it used to be/ Many long years ago?” Oh, I’m not thinking about how we forget where we parked the car. No, I mean there are factors largely under our control that are making daily changes in *HOW* we perceive and remember. This is something relatively recent in our lives, and it’s worth noting.

Long after Aristotle’s view that the function of the brain is to “temper the heat and seething of the heart,” the dogma of the 20th century was that the brain/mind organ, though open and malleable during its early years, becomes mature and rigid by the time one enters, say, junior high. New things, like algebra and a foreign language, can still be learned, but only using the neuronal network that the brain/mind already has established. However, the 21st century certainty is that brain plasticity is the rule, that the habits we pursue literally rework the complex interactions between our brain cells. For example, a writer who makes the leap from pencil and paper to keyboarding will subtly evolve new ways of thinking, planning and expressive style.

Old brains really can learn new tricks. The brain of our beloved Howard Benedict is doubtless rewiring his visual cortex to aid an enhanced sense of hearing, and of touch as he learns Braille. Brains are works in progress.

Such ideas appear early in Nicholas Carr’s new book, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*. He argues convincingly that our brains, attuned to linear thought and deep reading habits just 20 years ago, are now hammered relentlessly by our non-linear and flighty love affair with the Web. As we jump from link to link, seeking some nugget of information, we grow impatient, and so do our neurons, being all too willing to wade in “the shallows.” We find it trying to read entire articles, let alone full books. Skimming comes to be preferred by the brain because it is given little choice by the nature of the internet. It becomes less likely for information to go from sensory memory to short term memory and into long term memory. And some don’t care, saying, “I don’t have to remember it because I can easily look it up again.”

In Chapter 8, *The Church of Google*, Carr describes the

origin of this masterwork, its name a play on *googol* which is 10 to the 100th power, and goes on to discuss the philosophy and technology of the world’s greatest search engine, whose goal is to gather all knowledge in easily deliverable snippets, “ensuring that we are forever inundated by information of *immediate interest to us* - and in quantities well beyond what our brains can handle.” The data mining not only of information but of user browsing habits is a gigantic enterprise. We users don’t perceive the extent to which we are manipulated by algorithms.

I had a call last month from a GV woman who asked me to pick up her computer and donate it to the Club. It seems she’d decided to defect from the digital world and all its enticements. Few of us in CCGV will choose that option, because Google *et al* have successfully addicted us to the point of no return. And we feel pretty good about that. But this book makes me question the wisdom of faithful worship via the Googleplex. Chapter 10, *A Thing Like Me*, ends with the unsettling observation that we are welcoming the frenziedness of technology into our souls.

Thoughts of the Month:

“Everything that human beings are doing to make it easier to operate computer networks is at the same time, but for different reasons, making it easier for computer networks to operate human beings.” George Dyson

“The calculator, a powerful but highly specialized tool, turned out to be an aid to memory. The Web is a technology for forgetfulness.” Nick Carr

