



The Cursor



Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group

Meeting Location
OLLI, 4210 Roberts Road,
Fairfax, VA



Next Meeting:
November 20, 2010



Presidential Bits

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

I hope that all of you took an opportunity to get away from your computers to enjoy the Fall weather and the changing leaves. I've taken a few Saturdays to enjoy long day hikes in the Shenandoah, but even the local trees have been putting on a pretty good show this year.

Even so, it was worth attending the WAC meeting in October to hear Lorrin Garson's Learn 30 session about the benefits of running a home server (Lorrin uses [Microsoft Windows Home Server](#) on HP hardware). A home server provides a common place to store and share files (photos, music, movies, documents) between computers, as well as keeping file backups for your computers. Since a server is mostly about storage, it really does not need to be a very powerful system (i.e., it can be an older, spare computer that might be gathering dust in your closet), and doesn't require a monitor since it can be accessed through a web browser interface from another computer. As an advocate of Open Source software, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that there are several free Linux-based distributions that provide [similar capabilities](#) to the commercial MS product, and are equally easy to setup and use with computers running Microsoft Windows (as well as GNU/Linux and MacOS) operating systems.

Gabe Goldberg kept the discussion lively with the main October topic of Fundamental Technologies. As he suggested from the start, he was unable to cover the wide variety of topics listed on his handout, but we will pick up where he left off at the November and December meetings. One tip from Gabe was to select the custom installation for new software instead of the easy/typical/default settings, as this allows you to tailor the installation and skip installation of add-ons that may slow down your computer and that you probably don't need.

At the meeting on November 20th, several WAC members will be demonstrating their favorite utility programs, including PowerDesk and File Locator Pro (one of the programs listed in Gabe's handout under "Utilities for productivity"). If you have a favorite utility program that you would be willing to demonstrate, please provide the information by e-mail to info@wacug.org.

See you there!

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Lloyd's Web Sites for November, 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. All Time 100 Novels – <http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/0,28757,1951793,00.html> – TIME critics Lev Grossman and Richard Lacayo pick the 100 best English-Language novels.
2. Web's guide to all things sports – www.hickoksports.com
3. Online Writing Lab at Purdue University offers free writing resources to improve communications – <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl>
4. Online Conversion – www.onlineconversion.com – Convert just about anything to anything else. Over 5,000 units, and 50,000 conversions.
5. Instructables – <http://www.instructables.com> – Instructables is the Biggest How To and DIY community where people make and share inspiring, entertaining, and useful projects, recipes, and hacks.
6. Better online shopping requires sign-up – <http://www.ShopItToMe.com> – According to a yearlong survey certain items tend to cost less on certain days of the week. **Mondays:** Men's and women's dress pants. **Tuesdays:** Men's apparel. **Wednesdays:** Shoe's and kids clothing. **Thursdays:** Women's hand bags. **Fridays:** Accessories (jewelry, belts, and scarves). **Saturdays:** Jackets and outerwear. **Sundays:** Swimsuits
7. Avoid waiting on-hold when contacting customer service. Free – <http://www.lucyphone.com> – Go to LucyPhone search for company you are trying to contact, enter your telephone number, click start. LucyPhone will contact the company and call you with options. Similar services: <http://www.gethuman.com> and <http://www.dialahuman.com>
8. Atlas of the Body – <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/7140.html> – American Medical Association site presents an atlas of the human body
9. City Passes. A trip to a big city can cost plenty of cash, but one way to save is to buy a city pass – <http://www.citypass.com>.
10. Similar to reverse phone directory. Locate your partner – <http://www.track-your-partner.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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NCTCUG

WACUG

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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 30 – November 3, 2010.

[ArchBang Linux 2010.10](#)

[Calculate Linux 10.9](#)

[CRUX 2.7](#)

[Edubuntu 10.10](#)

[Fedora 14](#)

[Finnix 100](#)

[iMagicOS 10](#)

[Kubuntu 10.10](#)

[LinEx 2010](#)

[Lubuntu 10.10](#)

[MeeGo 1.1](#)

[Mythbuntu 10.10](#)

[Network Security Toolkit 2.13.0](#)

[Parted Magic 5.6](#)

[Peppermint OS Ice-10012010](#)

[Sabayon Linux 5.4](#)

[Sabayon Linux 5.4 "SpinBase", "CoreCDX"](#)

[Sabily 10.10](#)

[Salix OS 13.1.2 "KDE"](#)

[Smeegol 1.0](#)

[Super OS 10.10](#)

[Tiny Core Linux 3.2](#)

[Ubuntu 10.10](#)



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[Ubuntu Privacy Remix 10.04r1](#)

[Ubuntu Rescue Remix 10.10](#)

[Ultimate Edition 2.8](#)

[Xubuntu 10.10](#)

[ZevenOS 1.9 "Neptune"](#)

Linux Software of the Month: November 2010

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

JStock – v1.0.5s. <http://jstock.sourceforge.net/>. Free GNU General Public License Java source code and executable by yccheok. JStock is stock market software for 25 countries. It provides a stock watchlist, an intraday stock price snapshot, a stock indicator editor, a stock indicator scanner, portfolio management, and market chit chat features. Free SMS/email alerts are supported.

Krecipes – v2.0 beta2. <http://krecipes.sourceforge.net/>. Free GNU General Public License source code by José Manuel Santamaría Lema, Martin Engelmann, and others, and executable packages for Fedora, Mandriva, Debian, and Ubuntu variants. Krecipes is a highly configurable recipe manager, designed to make organizing your personal recipe collection fast and easy. Features include shopping lists, nutrient analysis, advanced searching, recipe ratings, the ability to import and export various formats, and more. Krecipes requires the KDE libraries and MySQL, PostgreSQL, or SQLite relational database manager.

Rigs of Rods – v0.36.3. <http://rigsofrods.blogspot.com/>. Free GNU General Public License source code by Pierre-Michel Ricordel (aka Pricorde) and Thomas. Rigs of Rods ("RoR") is a simulator in which you can drive trucks, cars and other heavy machinery, operate cranes, fly airplanes and sail boats in an open environment. Most of the fun in RoR comes from its innovative and realistic physics engine that simulates the flexibility and deformation of bodies, chassis and wheels under the stress they bear. RoR requires a 2 GHz or faster processor (dual/multicore supported) and 3D video card (e.g. NVidia) to run well.

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



JStock - Realtime

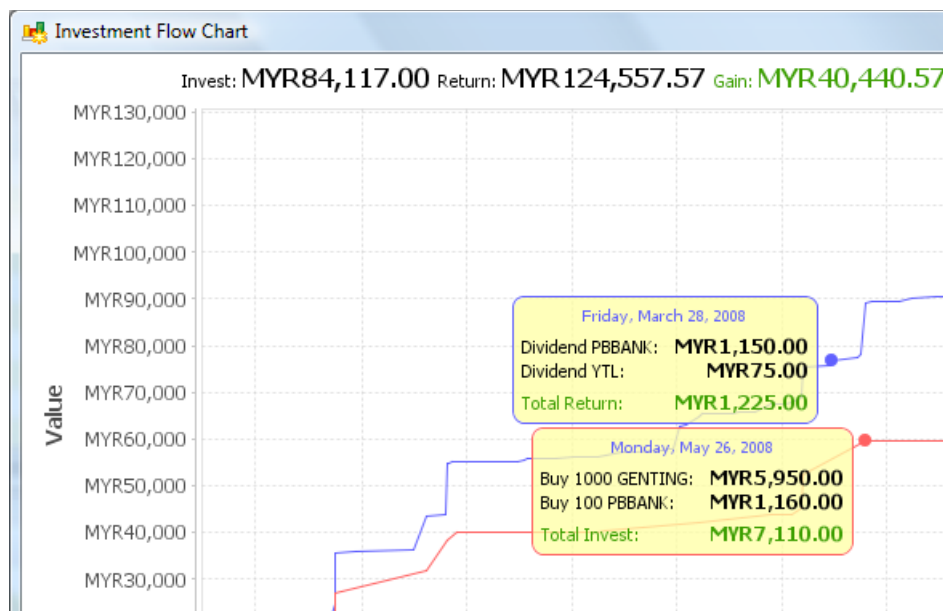
Real-Time Info					
Stock Indicator Editor					
Stock Indicator Scanner					
Portfolio Manager					
Code	Symbol	Prev	Last	High	Low
2267.KL	TANJONG	15.08	14.98	15.14	14.92
1295.KL	PBBANK	10.24	10.26	10.28	10.24
2836.KL	CARLSBG	4.23	4.23	4.25	4.2
3255.KL	GAB	6.96	6.98	6.99	6.98
4162.KL	BAT	44.88	44.54	44.9	44.48
2615.KL	JTINTER	4.8	4.75	4.76	4.75
0090.KL	ELSOFT	0.465	0.0	0.0	0.0
0097.KL	VITROX	0.45	0.485	0.485	0.475
3182.KL	GENTING	7.19	7.16	7.2	7.11
4715.KL	GENM	2.84	2.82	2.83	2.8
1155.KL	MAYBANK	6.69	6.68	6.69	6.64
4197.KL	SIME	8.58	8.58	8.59	8.57
5681.KL	PETDAG	8.6	8.6	8.7	8.59
6033.KL	PETGAS	9.7	9.7	9.74	9.68
4588.KL	UMW	6.31	6.3	6.3	6.3
2291.KL	GENP	6.2	6.25	6.25	6.19
1961.KL	IOICORP	5.35	5.34	5.38	5.33
4065.KL	PPB	16.04	16.02	16.1	15.96
4677.KL	YTL	7.26	7.3	7.3	7.22
6742.KL	YTLPOWR	2.17	2.18	2.18	2.16
5282.KL	MAMEE	2.77	2.77	2.77	2.76

	3rd Buy	2nd Buy	1st Buy	1st Sell	2nd Sell	3rd Sell
Price	5.31	5.32	5.33	5.34	5.35	5.36
Qty	5	515	15	5358	257	104

Screenshots of the Rigs of Rods application are included in the download edition

See Linux page 5

JStock Investment Flow



JStock Transaction

Portfolio Management

Share (\$): 82,156.10 Cash (\$): 8,320.85 Paper Profit (\$): 21,227.10 (34.84%) Realized Profit (\$): 3,200.00 (65.04%)

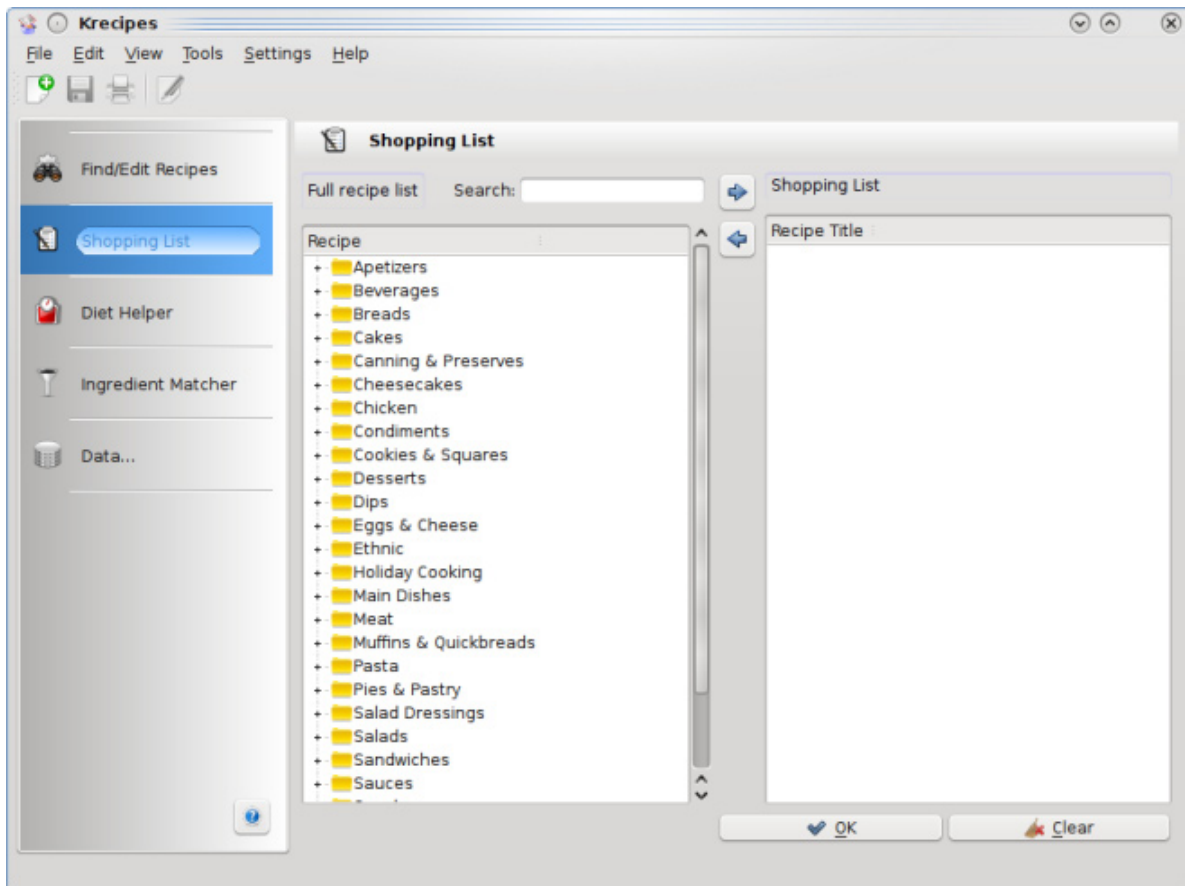
Buy										
Stock	Date	Units	Purchase Price	Current Price	Purchase Value	Current Value	Gain/Loss Price	Gain/Loss Value	Gain/Loss %	Broker
Buy					60,929	82,156.1		21,227.1	34.839	
AMMB		1,000	2.57	4.11	2,570	4,110	1.54	1,540	59.922	
CARLSBG		2,000	5.3	4.29	10,600	8,580	-1.01	-2,020	-19.057	
● CARLSBG	30/08/05	1,000	5.35	4.29	5,350	4,290	-1.06	-1,060	-19.813	
● CARLSBG	16/09/05	1,000	5.25	4.29	5,250	4,290	-0.96	-960	-18.286	
GENTING		2,200	6.809	6.68	14,980	14,696	-0.129	-284	-1.896	
● GENTING	10/08/07	100	7.4	6.68	740	668	-0.72	-72	-9.73	
● GENTING	14/12/07	100	7.9	6.68	790	668	-1.22	-122	-15.443	
● GENTING	06/02/08	1,000	7.5	6.68	7,500	6,680	-0.82	-820	-10.800	

Sell										
Stock	Date	Units	Selling Price	Purchase Price	Selling Value	Purchase Value	Gain/Loss Price	Gain/Loss Value	Gain/Loss %	Broker
Sell					8,120	4,920		3,200	65.041	
I&P		2,000	2.35	1.55	4,700	3,100	0.8	1,600	51.613	
● I&P	07/07/07	2,000	2.35	1.55	4,700	3,100	0.8	1,600	51.613	
MAGNUM		1,000	3.42	1.82	3,420	1,820	1.6	1,600	87.912	

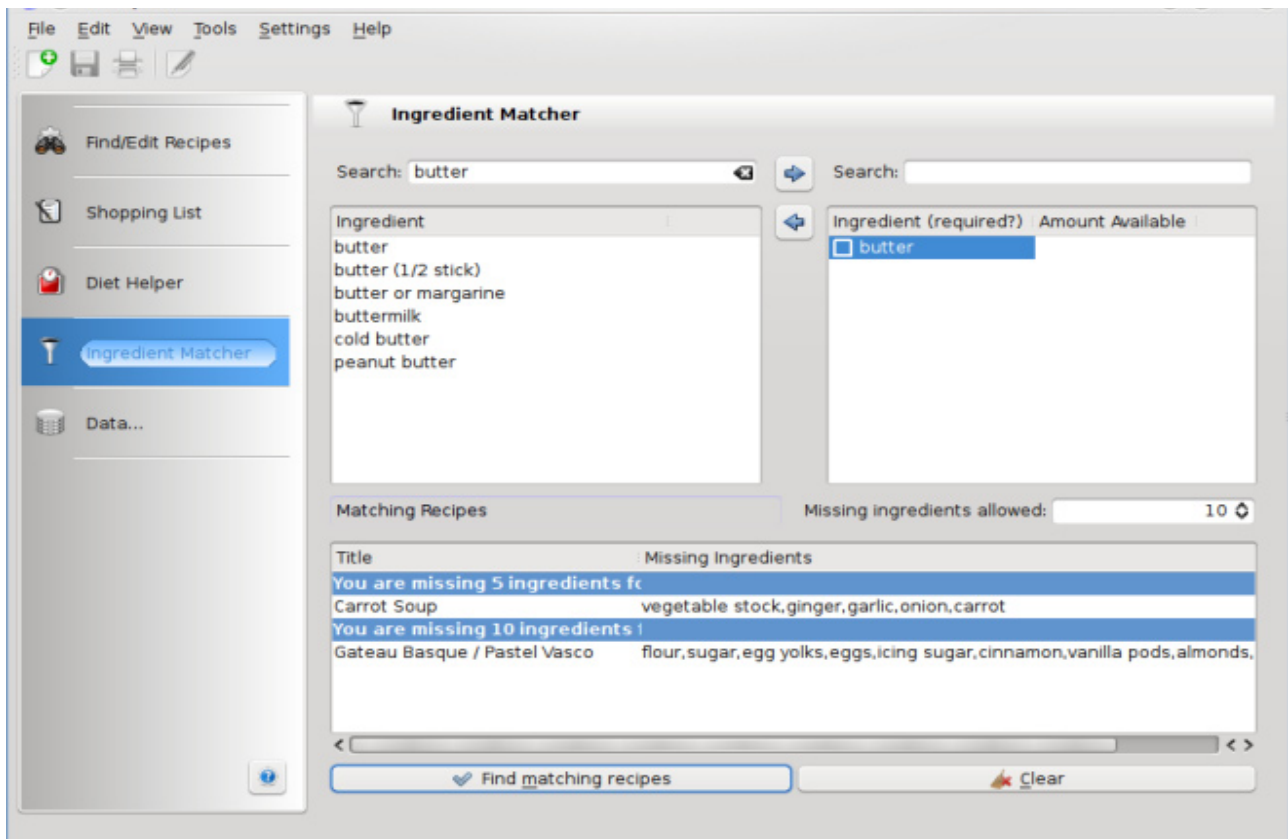
Buy... Sell... Cash... Dividend...

See Linux on next page

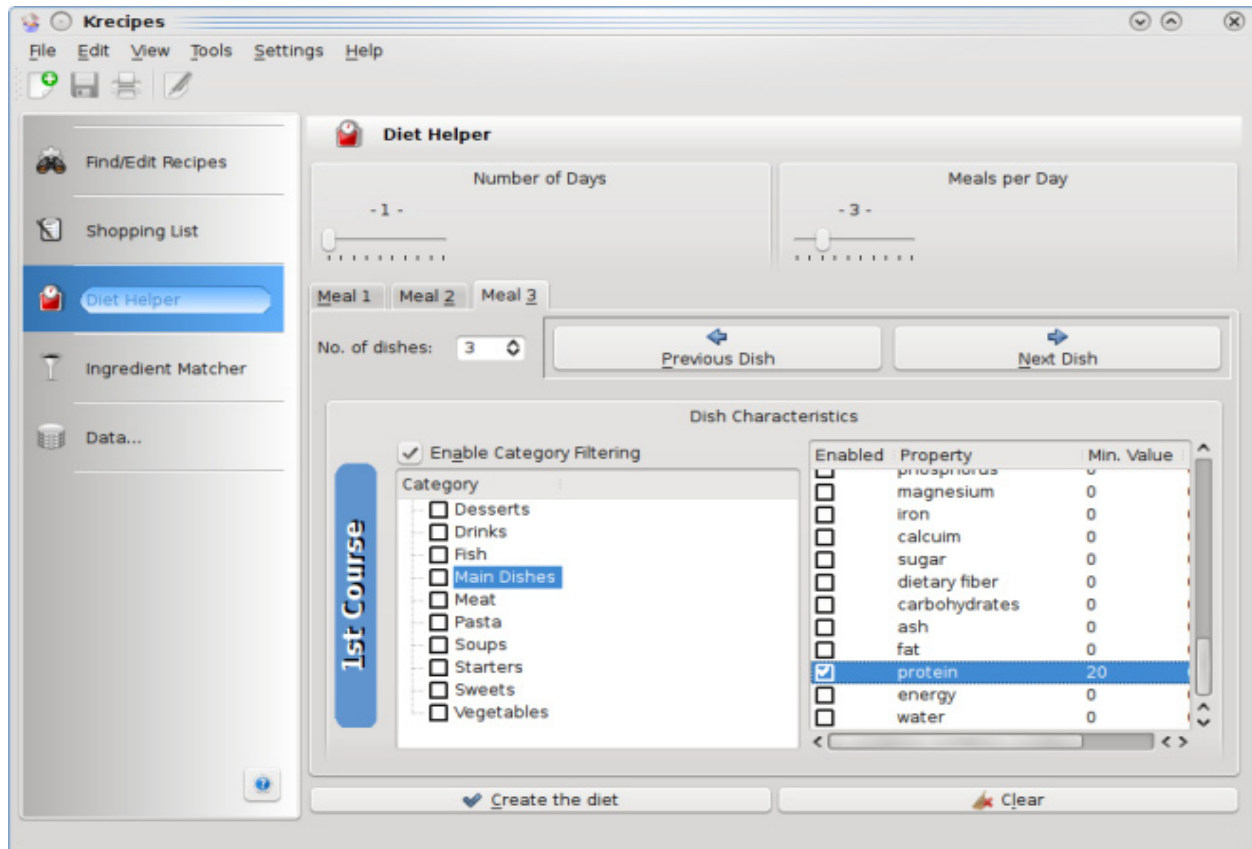
Krecipes Shopping List



Krecipes Ingredient-match



Krecipes Diet-help



November's Topics — Favorite Utilities

Presentation by Gabe Goldberg and Paul Howard, WACUG

What's a utility? A program that performs specialized functions in a computer, often part of the the operating system. A utility isn't required to make the computer run, but falls into the category of useful tools that often improve performance and add functionality.

Life's too short to live with just what's built into Windows — no matter which Windows version you use! Gabe Goldberg will talk about some of his favorite utilities, selected from these:

CaptureWizPro — dynamite/flexible screen capture tool

BeyondCompare — compares files to detect and reconcile differences

Directory Printer — fills a ridiculous gap in Windows function

PPT Minimizer — shrinks PowerPoint files

Belarc Advisor — inventories PC configuration, suggests fixes

FileLocator Pro — finds files on hard drive

Rename — renames files

Tinyurl.com — shrinks URLs to tolerable size

ClickBook — adds amazing print flexibility

Paul will talk about PowerDesk 8 Profesional, a file manager for Windows.

Dozens of Free Utilities from NirSoft

by Ira Wilsker, APCUG

WEBSITES;

<http://www.nirsoft.net>

http://www.nirsoft.net/about_nirsoft_freeware.html

http://www.nirsoft.net/false_positive_report.html

It is no secret to regular readers of my column that I am somewhat of a software junkie, often very willing and eager to download and install interesting software. I am especially fond of free software (freeware), and recognize the great contributions that the freeware authors have made to the computing public. One of my favorite sources of freeware is a one-man software operation aptly named NirSoft, a combination of the developer's name, Nir Sofer, and the word "software". While this is a part time one-man operation, Nir Sofer has developed over one hundred excellent programs and utilities that are well written, enormously popular, lack any form of advertising pop-up or adware, and are totally free of charge.

I have been using several of the NirSoft utilities since my Windows 98 days, and always found them efficient and useful. I have used some of the password recovery utilities, USB utilities, and several others. According to the website, nirsoft.net, the most popular utilities are IPNetInfo, Volumouse, MessenPass, and Protected Storage PassView.

IPNetInfo, available for download from nirsoft.net/utis/ipnetinfo.html, is designed to retrieve information about IP addresses, those numerical sequences that identify a particular computer or server. Typically in the format of 123.45.678.90, these IP (Internet Protocol) addresses point to a specific computer or server location, and can be used to determine the likely source of an email, website, server, or other internet connected appliance. The program is small and written in tight code, and requires no additional installation or utilities in order to run it. Accord to Nir, "IPNetInfo is a standalone program, so it doesn't require any installation process or additional DLLs. In order to start using it, simply copy the executable file (ipnetinfo.exe) to any folder you like, and run it." I copied the file to my desktop, and use it mostly to determine the (mostly) true location of the sender of an email, or the (likely) real location of a website or server; while this is not typically necessary for the casual user, I use it as a quick tool to forensically locate the probable source of spam email and scam websites.

Many of us routinely watch TV or videos over the internet, and listen to a variety of audio. Sometimes we need to adjust the volume in order to better hear the audio, and the standard Windows volume controls are often inconvenient or located on an external speaker. Not all computers have a volume control in the keyboard, so NirSoft provides a small utility that can control the volume by simply using the wheel on the mouse. Most computer mice today are wheel mice, and not many people use the wheel as a scroll tool as intended. By installing Volumouse (nirsoft.net/utis/volumouse.html), the user has complete control over all of the audio volume of the system, utilizing only the wheel on the mouse along with a function key, usually the "Alt" key. If the "Alt" key is pressed, the mouse wheel is a comprehensive volume control, otherwise it functions normally as a scroll device. This has proven to be a very handy utility to improve my enjoyment of computer audio and video.

Many of us use one or more instant messenger programs, such as Yahoo Instant Messenger, AIM (AOL), MSN Messenger, Windows Live Messenger, and others. While I have a secure password manager on my home desktop computer, and I use difficult to guess alphanumeric passwords, sometimes I get confused or forget some of the many passwords I use while instant messaging. NirSoft has a utility to help find instant messaging passwords, MessenPass. Available for download from nirsoft.net/utis/mspass.html, MessenPass can find the passwords for all popular instant messaging programs, including MSN Messenger, Windows Messenger, Windows Live Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, Google Talk, ICQ, AOL Instant Messenger, AIM, AIM Pro, Trillian, Trillian Astra, Miranda, GAIM/Pidgin, MySpace IM, Paltalk-Scene, and Digsby. It should be noted that this is not a hacker or cracker utility, as it can only be used to "... recover the passwords for the current logged-on user on your local computer, and it only works if you chose the remember your password in one of the above programs. You cannot use this utility for grabbing the passwords of other users." One warning is necessary for users of MessenPass is that sometimes antivirus and other security programs occasionally report it as a virus of some type. This is a false positive, as MessenPass is not a virus or Trojan, and this false positive is documented at nirsoft.net/false_positive_report.html.

Protected Storage PassView is another small password utility that can display "... the passwords stored on your computer by Internet Explorer, Outlook Express and

Free Utilities continues next page

MSN Explorer. The passwords are revealed by reading the information from the Protected Storage.” Available for download at nirsoft.net/utills/pspv.html, Protected Storage PassView can display the users’ registered passwords for password protected websites accessed in Internet Explorer, Outlook and Outlook Express passwords, auto-complete passwords in Internet Explorer, and MSN Explorer passwords. As with the other password utilities, this is not a hacker program, as it can only display passwords of the current logged in user, and cannot display the passwords of other users. Also as with the other password utilities, some security software displays a false positive warning when the utility is opened; using a reputable third party utility, virustotal.com, I have personally verified that these original utilities downloaded directly from the NirSoft website were indeed clean of any malware, and that any such reports were indeed false positives.

Password utilities are not the only utilities available from NirSoft, as many of the one hundred plus utilities serve other functions. Some that I periodically use are the network utilities, some of which can be used to determine the actual download speed of my internet connection, view computers attached to the network, display details of wireless and Bluetooth networks in the area, and other network functions. There are about a dozen free internet related utilities available, including cookie managers, cache viewers, screen capture utilities, HTML converters, DNS utilities, and several other internet related utilities. Some of the free desktop utilities include a file search utility, uninstaller, and file type manager. NirSoft has about 10 free system tools, including a USB device manager (USBDeview, nirsoft.net/utills/usb_devices_view.html, one of my most frequently used tools), a hardware device manager, driver manager, registry scanner, and several other helpful tools. One of the system tools that I used a great deal with Windows XP was BlueScreen-View, which displayed the details of Windows crashes, making them easier to resolve. NirSoft also has a selection of free tools to improve the functioning of the Outlook email program.

Other than the occasional false positive warnings from some security software, I have always found that NirSoft’s free utilities can efficiently carry out their intended tasks with a minimum of effort. Nir Sofer personally writes all of his software, and frequently posts updates and bug fixes, helping to insure that the software is up to date. While NirSoft is only a part-time operation, and

Nir Sofer does not directly charge for any of his software, there is a link on the site for voluntary donations. For users that may need some small, free, well written, specialized utilities, NirSoft would be a worthwhile source for that software.



Switching to a New Windows 7 Computer

By Rod Zumbro, OPCUG

When you decide to switch from an older computer to a new one -- perhaps because you want either a faster computer or the new features that might come with a new system -- you face the dreaded but inevitable tasks of transferring files from the old computer to the new computer and re-installing programs on the new computer. I recently switched from an older PC running Windows Vista to a new PC running Windows 7, and I’ve learned a few tricks that might help others.

Transferring files. Windows 7 has a neat feature called "Windows Easy Transfer." I tried it, and it worked without a hitch. The Windows Easy Transfer wizard for copying files and settings gives you three choices: (1) use an Easy Transfer cable; (2) use a network; or (3) use an external hard drive or USB flash drive. I decided to use a network since I had already temporarily connected both the old computer and new computer directly to my home network’s router via separate Ethernet cables (so both computers could use the Internet connection). The wizard leads you through the process and lets you decide which folders and files should be transferred, then does the transfer and gives you a report on what has been transferred.

Dropbox. If you have only a relatively small amount of files (2 gigabytes or less), you could use a free program called Dropbox instead of Windows Easy Transfer ... although instead of a wizard leading you through the process, it’s up to you to select the files and move them. Once you register online and install the program on both computers, you can put files that you want transferred to the new computer into the Dropbox on your old computer, and the program automatically transfers them to your online Dropbox via the Internet, after which they instantly appear in your Dropbox on the new computer. Even if you’re not switching to a new computer, Dropbox is a useful tool for having secure information avail-

See Switching Computers on page 10

able to you online that you can access from any computer anywhere by logging in to your Dropbox.

Re-installing programs. For programs that you installed on your old computer using a CD or DVD, you'll have to re-install them on your new computer. If you want to use older programs that might not work with a new operating system, click here for a PC World article about running older software in Windows 7. An interesting option with Windows 7 Professional and Ultimate versions (to which you could upgrade) is a "Virtual PC" that you can install; it uses Windows XP as its operating system, so older programs that work with XP will work in the Virtual PC mode. I tried that for an older application, and it does work.

Some of your programs may not have been originally installed from CD or DVD but instead, you may have downloaded them from the Web. I discovered a Web application called Ninite Easy PC Setup that gives you a downloadable installer to install several of your desired applications in one fell swoop. It's free, with no sign-up required. Not all applications are covered, of course, but Ninite does include a good number of choices in various categories such as browsers (Chrome, Firefox, Opera, Safari); messaging/email (Skype, Thunderbird...); media (iTunes, Hulu, VLC Media Player...); imaging (Paint.Net, Picasa...); documents (OpenOffice, Adobe Reader...); security (AVG Anti-Virus, Ad-Aware, Spybot...); runtimes (Flash, Java...); other (Dropbox, Google Earth...); and utilities (CCleaner, Revo Uninstaller...). It's a fast way of installing programs all at once.

Wiping your hard drive(s). Here's something to consider if you plan to donate your old PC to an organization that re-cycles computers or give it to a friend or family member: to protect any sensitive, private personal or financial information on the PC, you should wipe clean your hard drive(s) first. Note that you cannot just reformat the hard drive and expect your data to be gone forever and unretrievable, because there are ways to recover data even after a disc has been reformatted. Fortunately, there's a popular, respected free program called Darik's Burn and Nuke ("DBAN") that does the job. You download and burn it to a CD, then use the CD to boot your old computer (put the CD into your primary CD/DVD drive, and it should load automatically when you turn on the PC). I used DBAN to wipe clean the two 500 GB hard drives in my old PC, using the "medium security" DoD Short Method of three passes, the default method.

It only took 12 and a half hours, but who's counting?

After wiping clean your hard drive(s), you can safely donate the PC. Or, if you're giving the old computer to a friend or family member, you may want to first install Windows from the install disc for the Windows operating system that came with the PC.

Rod Zumbro, a retired Navy Supply Corps captain, is the creator and editor of a weekly html email newsletter sent to more than 900 members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. Rod designed OLLI's Web site and helps maintain it.



User Group Discounts

Get 40% off books from O'Reilly, Microsoft Press, No Starch, Paraglyph, PC Publishing, Pragmatic Bookshelf, Rocky Nook, SitePoint, or YoungJin books and 50% off ebooks you purchase directly from O'Reilly. Just use code DSUG when ordering online or by phone 800-998-9938.

How about getting the book you want for free? Simply agree to write a review of the book and send it to the Cursor newsletter editor for publication and you will receive the book for free! There is no better price than free, so visit www.oreilly.com to pick your book and to download book review guidelines and you're done!

What could be easier???

The 2010 WAC Board of Directors, SIG Leaders and other Volunteers

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Web Site Team:..... Paul Howard and Chuck Roberts
Meeting Setup:..... Bill Walsh, 703-241-8141, bill.walsh(at)cox.net
APCUG Liaison:..... Gabe Goldberg, gabe@gabegold.com

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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

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Dues are collected on an Annual basis and includes:
downloadable links for WAC's monthly newsletter,
The Cursor, in PDF format

Individual/Corporate/Family Dues: \$25.00
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Graphics/Animation Genealogy Video Finance

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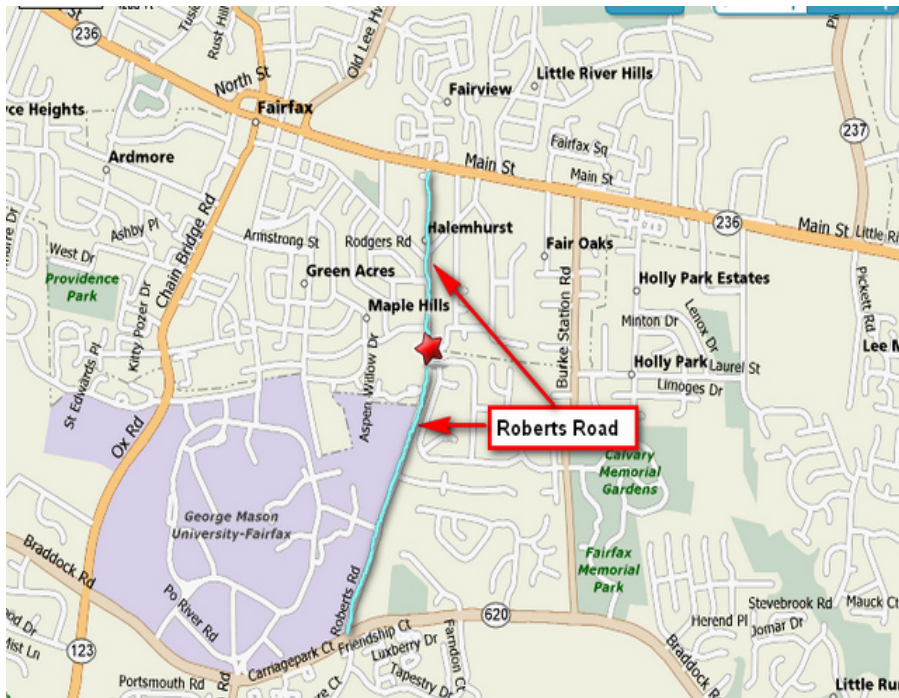
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LiberKey - Hundreds of Free Programs Run From a Flash Drive

by Ira Wilsker, APCUG

WEBSITES:

<http://www.liberkey.com>

<http://www.liberkey.com/en/suites/liberkey-ultimate.html>

<http://www.liberkey.com/en/catalog/browse.html>

I had previously written about the USB flash drive that I always carry with me as it is attached to my car key-chain. That 2 GB flash drive contains my frequently updated, malware scanners (Malwarebytes, SUPERAnti-spyware, and others), as well as my emergency contact and medical information. I have also used it many times when I had the need to save or transport files. Now, I may be copying all of those files to a new, much smaller size but higher capacity 8 GB flash drive, as I now have a lot more files to carry with me. That is because I recently found out about a new free flash drive utility LiberKey (www.liberkey.com) that is a freeware competitor to U3 and other flash drive utilities that acts as a graphical front end and manager for portable utilities.

Not being sure how much space I would eventually need on a USB flash drive to install all of my present files and the LiberKey files, I decided to use a newly purchased, small sized, 8 GB flash drive. Now that the price of flash drives has come down significantly over the past year, many local and online sellers are offering larger capacity, name brand flash drives at reasonable prices; I paid under \$15 for this 8 GB drive (recently on sale again for \$11), as well as purchased several 16 GB drives for less than \$25. That is quite a plunge in price as I paid over \$40 for a 256 MB USB flash drive just a few years ago. With prices like these, more people will be carrying flash drives with them on a regular basis, and LiberKey would be a wise choice to enable the use of programs on the flash drive, rather than just using the drive for pure storage.

I started this process by downloading the LiberKey installer, a 3.82 MB executable, and installing it to the root of the flash drive. This utility provides the front end, or graphical user interface (GUI), and other functions that enables the LiberKey to function. The GUI can display a menu of the installed applications sorted by type either in a tabular format or as large icons, the choice being selected by clicking on the tiny icon in the top right corner of the menu window. Once the front end has been installed on the flash drive, the user can either download manually any or all of the 302 free portable programs currently

LiberKey continue Bonus Page 2

listed on the LiberKey website, or he can download one of the integrated bundles. The three bundles available, all of which contain a wide variety of programs which will automatically be catalogued and indexed by the LiberKey software are the Basic bundle, the Standard bundle, or the Ultimate bundle. The Basic bundle consists of a dozen free programs, which are a 37 MB download, and uses 113 MB of space when installed. The Basic bundle includes an audio player, CD burner, compression utility, photo editor, browser (Firefox portable), several office utilities, a password manager, and a video player. For those who want more than the Basic bundle, LiberKey offers a Standard bundle, which is much larger than the Basic, and includes 89 applications, which is a 176 MB download, and uses 468 MB of flash drive space when all are installed. The Standard bundle has everything the Basic bundle has, as well as dozens of additional applications that can provide much increased functionality, all of which can be run from the USB flash drive. Being one who typically wants everything, I downloaded the Ultimate bundle, a comprehensive collection of 164 free portable utilities. This was a large download of 233 MB, and occupied 619 MB of space on the flash drive. These 164 applications can be used for almost all tasks for which someone would use a computer. With a fast internet connection, and a fast computer, it took about 30 minutes to download the Ultimate bundle and install all of the applications to the flash drive.

While the Ultimate bundle is very comprehensive, the bundle only comprises slightly more than half of the free applications available on the LiberKey website. Some of the additional portable applications that can be downloaded and installed on a flash drive with LiberKey include several of my desktop favorites, including IrfanView, VLC media player, OpenOffice, FoxIt PDF reader, Opera browser, Google's Chrome browser, some educational software, CCleaner, and many others. To download these portable versions, and automatically install them to the flash drive, open LiberKey from the flash drive, and then click on "LiberKey Tools" at the bottom right of the window. Choose "Browse the Applications Catalog", and a browser window will open that is synchronized with the utilities that are already installed on the flash drive while displaying a menu of all of the currently available applications, sorted by genre'. To make this quick and easy for the user, the synchronized web page uses a series of icons to guide the user. A "red +" indicates a category that includes new applications, while a "yellow up-arrow" indicates that within a category, there are updates available for programs already installed on the flash drive. Once a category is open, a "green check"

indicates that an installed program is up-to-date, a "yellow up-arrow" indicates a program that has an available update newer than what is installed on the flash drive, and a "white +" in a red circle indicates a program not currently installed on the flash drive that is available for download and installation.

Upon selecting a new or updated application by clicking on it, a window opens with a detailed description of the program with an install link near the bottom of the window. That opens a "Launch Application" window where "LiberKey Creator" should be selected. This then opens "LiberKey Creator" which will automatically download and install the application to the flash drive, and update the LiberKey interface and directory. Multiple programs can be selected for installation before clicking "Install Selected Applications", which will also display the download and install process, as well as available space on the flash drive. One cute feature of this install utility is that if it displays a "green asterisk", the installer will check for an update before the download and installation. By my choice, between the installer, the Ultimate bundle, and the few dozen additional programs that I selected for LiberKey to download and install, I still have over 5 GB free on my drive.

With over 200 applications now installed on my flash drive, it is inevitable that many of them will frequently have updates available. Rather than having to manually check for updates, clicking on "LiberKey Tools" and then "Check Updates" will do just that, and display if any updates are available for the LiberKeys software or any of the installed software titles; if any are available, one click will automatically download and install the updates. Another button on the update window displays the number of additional applications that are available, and can directly open the LiberKey applications' web page where additional applications can be selected.

Now that I have about 200 applications installed on my new 8 GB flash drive, and I will always have that drive with me, it is unlikely that I will come across a computer where I cannot do whatever I would want to do. I can now open, play, repair, convert, edit, or other wise use or manipulate any type of file with only what is on my flash drive, with no need to install anything on the computer. This is the epitome of convenience in that it would be unnecessary to install any software on any computer that I use, because I have it all. That is an enormous convenience.

In the short time that I have used it, LiberKeys is a most convenient and comprehensive free utility that everyone should use.



Use Your Electrical Wiring for Your Home Network

by Ira Wilsker, APCUG

WEBSITES:

<http://www.homeplug.org>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HomePlug>

<http://standards.ieee.org/announcements/2010/1901.html>

http://www.homeplug.org/certified_products

Several years ago I wrote about a promising new technology that offered the home computer user the ability to create a wired home network without running any cables throughout the house. Since then, many new products were introduced that offered wired home networking without running any wires, but due to performance issues and cost, they never really caught on. As wireless speeds and bandwidth increased, almost all new computers were manufactured with 802.11 compatible wireless capability, increasing in speed and capability through evolutionary change through a variety of standards, including the early “b” standard, to the faster “g” standard, to the current fast “n” standard.

Wireless generally works well as long as the distance to the wireless router is reasonably short, and the path from the transmitter to the computer or other receiver is unobstructed by radio opaque materials. Even in a frame home with sheetrock walls, there are often dead spots where the home wireless network seems weak or unobtainable. Since 802.11 wireless consists of a radio transceiver, with one or more connected components (computers, sound systems, video and TV systems) it is often sensitive to the directional orientation of the components, with some components purposely being highly directional in order to increase the signal strength. There have been published anecdotal reports, some of which have been confirmed through technical testing, that since other household items may be sharing the same frequency spectrum with the wireless network, interference or degraded performance may occur.

When 802.11 wireless was in its infancy, an alternative technology was being developed primarily for home use, which would use the existing household wiring to create a wireless network. While lacking the portability of a wireless home network, a wired network offered the potential of greater bandwidth, higher speeds, and greater security. This wired home network did not require the running of any new cable between rooms, but could safely utilize the existing home electrical wiring accessible anywhere in the home that there was a power outlet, without blind spots. By simply plugging a specialized network adapter into an existing power outlet, a wired

network would be accessible anywhere in the home.

Several years ago, at the now defunct COMDEX international computer show, I obtained a sample kit that included all of the components necessary to create a home network using my household electrical wiring. One of the components simply plugged into the wall power outlet and connected via standard network cable directly to my existing router. The other component also plugged directly into any other power outlet in the house, and had a standard network jack, which also connected with a standard network cable to my notebook computer. With great trepidation, I had visions of 110 volts cursing down the network cable, and frying both my router and my notebook computer. After re-reading the literature several times, I was assured that the system was indeed safe to use, and did not present any unusual danger, so I cautiously connected everything, and nothing untoward happened except I had a very fast network connection (14 Mbps) using only these two small boxes plugged into power outlets and a pair of regular network cables. Being one who likes to experiment, I connected one of the four wired ports on my wireless router to the wall device, and then I had both wired and wireless internet throughout the house. While I never used it for connecting TVs in the house, I later read accounts of individuals who did, using newer equipment than mine, and it worked fine with standard TV, but was often inadequate to carry reliable HDTV signals.

Moving the clock forward to today, my original sample kit contains components that have long since been discontinued, and replaced by newer models with much greater speed (500 Mbps), bandwidth, and capacity. In mid-October, 2010, the IEEE Standards Association announced the approval of a new standard for home networks that use existing household electrical wiring, this standard carrying the designation “IEEE 1901™ Broadband over Power Line (BPL) standard” (standards.ieee.org/announcements/2010/1901.html). According to the IEEE, “IEEE 1901 will deliver data rates in excess of 500 Mbps.” In addition to carrying data, the network can carry a variety of entertainment throughout the entire house, including HDTV, whole house audio, “smart homes” power management, and games. This standard is international in scope, and will work with any household voltage, and transmission frequencies of up to 100 Mhz. The new standard is not just for home use, but has identified applications in transportation (trains, busses, ships, aircraft), offices, power transmission and monitoring (smart meters and household appliance interconnectivity), and other creative ways. While the theoretical range of the signal is up to 1500 meters (almost 5000

Household Wiring for Ethernet continues next page

feet), and the wired signal can possibly be picked up outside the house, the standard incorporates sophisticated encryption technology to protect the security of household information.

While it may be great to have broadband internet, audio-visual, and gaming connections on a plane or train, my primary interest for this technology is home networking. A trade association, the Homeplug Powerline Alliance (www.homeplug.org) is actively promoting the technology, and represents dozens of manufacturers of compatible products. Some of the better known makers of these products include Belkin, Cisco, D-Link, Netgear, and Sharp, which implies that the compatible products should become widely available through normal distribution and retail channels (homeplug.org/certified_products). One manufacturer listing that I found interesting was one of the satellite TV companies that is offering “Homeplug” equipment under its brand name that is used to provide satellite TV access throughout the house without the need for additional wiring.

According to the Homeplug Alliance, there are four explicit technologies that are currently being targeted for home use; these are Smart Grid / Smart Energy, HDTV Networking, Whole Home Audio, and Gaming. The Smart Grid / Smart Energy application can interconnect the power meter, household appliances, thermostat, heating and air conditioning system, electric car, and car charging station to the internet, providing better control, management, software updates, monitoring, and other power saving benefits. The HDTV Networking can connect an Ethernet enabled HDTV to the internet, enabling the growing IPTV (Internet Protocol TV) as a signal source. Whole-Home Audio allows high quality internet based digital audio to be received anywhere in the house utilizing the existing household wiring and a suitable Homeplug adapter connected to the audio device. The Gaming application allows the user to have a secure online gaming experience utilizing his existing internet capable gaming system connected to his HDTV, from anywhere in the house, without the limitations of a wireless gaming connection.

This new IEEE 1901 standard promises compatibility and interconnectivity between a growing number of devices and the internet, without the need for a sophisticated new wired or wireless connection, as the entire system utilizes the existing household wiring and connecting devices that simply plug in to an existing household power outlet. Many of the Homeplug devices require no configuration, and are “plug and play”; simply plug the Homeplug adapter into a wall socket, and connect the

desired device to the Homeplug adapter, and the connection is made. It was precisely that simple with my now obsolete first generation device, and it will likely be that easy with the new generation of devices. The ability to easily connect HDTV, game consoles, household appliances, and other devices to the internet creates staggering opportunities and possibilities.

