The Cursor

Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group

Presidential Bits
by Geof Goodrum
President, Washington Area Computer User Group

Despite threatening weather and only a few people when the April 16th meeting started, I was relieved that we had a full house (40 people) by the time the meeting was in full swing. Our guests deserved no less. Gabe Goldberg presented his Learn 30 session about Favorite Utility Programs, which created a lot of interest and requests for more information. Unfortunately, time limitations prevented Gabe from going into detail about each program and web site he mentioned, but we have his list with web site links hosted on WAC's recent meetings page at http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html.

Our main presenter at the April meeting was Gene Barlow of User Group Relations (UGR, http://www.ugr.com/), who gave his presentation "Organizing Your Hard Drive & The Best Backup Plan to Protect Your System from Failure" live via the Internet from St. George, Utah. Gene pointed out the advantages of creating drive partitions to separate operating system files and application software from your data, particularly important advice with the large hard drives available today. Gene used Skype to let us watch his PC's screen while he created new partitions easily with Acronis Disk Director 11 Home software, even on hard drives that already contained files. Gene then discussed hard disk backup strategies, recommending use of an external backup hard drive at least as big as the drive you need to back up. Although many external drives come with backup software, that software is generally limited in capabilities, and may only backup files. Simple file backups make rebuilding a hard disk from scratch a complex and time consuming chore. Gene demonstrated Acronis True Image Home 2011, which can create backup "images" of disk partitions that are much easier to restore if a drive fails. Individual files are also easy to restore from a partition image. Gene used Skype two-way video conferencing (see photo) to have a face to face question and answer session after each presentation. Although copies of the Acronis software were available to purchase from UGR at a user group member discount during the meeting, it is not too late to take advantage of the

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Lloyd's Web Sites for May 2011

by Lloyd Johnson
Columnist, Washington Area Computer User Group

Visit www.wacug.org for past issues of Web Sites with hyperlinks.

1. Home Energy Saver — www.homeenergysaver.lbl.gov

2. Humor Galore. Laugh-Out-Loud Sites — http://shadow.ieor.berkeley.edu/humor and www.comedy-zone.net

3. Tech Support Guy — www.helponthe.net

4. Turner Classic Movies — www.turnerclassicmovies.com

5. How do you tie a Bow Tie? — www.monkeysee.com

6. Ever wonder if you should drive to D.C.? — www.parkitdc.com

7. U.S. Gazetteer — www.hometownlocator.com. This site provides profiles for 166,000 U.S. cities, towns, neighborhoods and subdivisions as well as maps, data and directions for 1.7 million physical, cultural and historical features.

8. Similar to mapquest — http://maps.yahoo.com

9. U.S. ZIP Code Lookup — http://zip4.usps.com/zip4/welcome.jsp. Look up postal abbreviations, search for ZIP codes, and browse other information about the U.S. Postal Service.

10. CIA: World Leaders — https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/world-leaders-1/index.html. CIA publishes and updates the online directory of Chiefs of State and Cabinet Members of Foreign Governments regularly. The directory is intended to be used primarily as a reference aid.
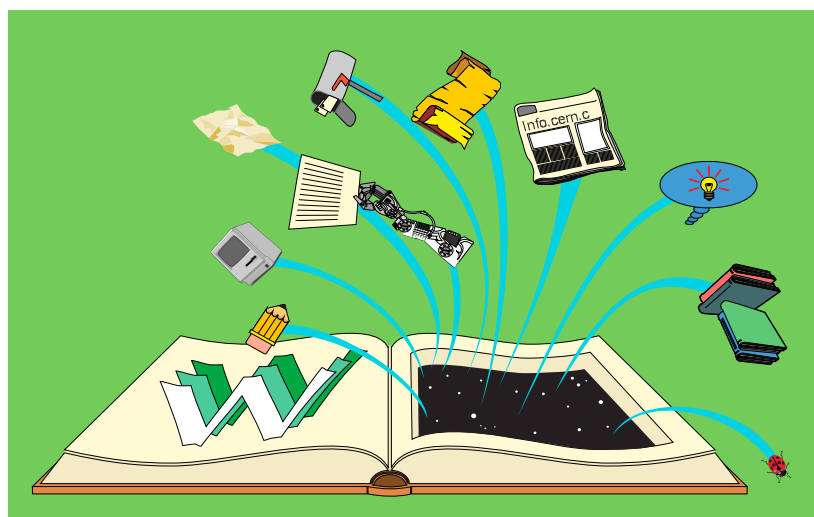
NCTCUG

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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discount. The order form is available for a limited time on the WAC recent meetings page linked above. A tip from Gene – you probably want a licensed copy of Acronis True Image Home 2011 for each computer that you want to backup, but you may only need a single licensed copy of Acronis Disk Director 11 Home, which you can install on a PC when you need to manage disk partitions, then uninstall it until you need it again, perhaps on another PC. Thanks to Neal Grotenstein for handling the software purchases during the meeting!

And speaking of Skype, our meeting on May 14th will feature a Learn 30 session hosted by Paul Howard and Bill Walsh about this useful free software to enable free PC to PC videoconferencing and PC screen sharing as featured at the April meeting. For the main presentation, Gabe Goldberg will make a return appearance to provide a more detailed look at the variety of add-ons and customization options for both the Mozilla Firefox web browser and the Mozilla Thunderbird e-mail client, a topic he was not able to cover in depth during the April meeting. See Gabe's write-up, below, for more information.

See you there!

Enhancing Firefox and Thunderbird
by Gabe Goldberg
Washington Area Computer User Group

As is true of most good software, the free Firefox web browser and Thunderbird email clients work well installed with their default options. And they're respectively very capable supported alternatives to other browser/email choices.

But like most complex tools, a bit of learning and tweaking greatly improves their productivity and ease of use. This presentation tours both applications' flexible configuration options and describes extensive libraries of add-ins for both that extend and enhance performance, user interface, function, and capabilities.

On May 14th, learn how to make these essential programs look and behave the way you want them to, and discover enhanced features you'll love.

Call for Volunteers (Again!)
by Geof Goodrum
President, Washington Area Computer User Group

Thanks to Jorn Dakin, Bob Rott, and Melvin Goldfarb for volunteering to help with newsletter labeling and distribution, and Lloyd Johnson for layout and editing! However, WAC still needs your help with newsletter articles, layout, and editing. I would like to see duties shared in a round-robin fashion so no one is unduly burdened each month, and skills are shared so we have backup for every position. Without additional editors, in particular, the Board will have to consider other options.

Articles: WAC needs your articles for ***The Cursor***. If you have good or bad experiences with new software or computer hardware, tips or tricks learned from experience, or just observations on current computer topics, please write them up and submit them by e-mail to editor(at)wacug.org. Even a few paragraphs will do. WAC has a Writer's Guide at http://www.wacug.org/cursorguide.txt. We would also like to share your articles with other user groups, just as WAC benefits from the excellent material shared by our partner groups in APCUG.

Layout and Editing: WAC needs additional volunteer Editors to perform layout and editing of articles on a recurring basis. While desktop publishing (DTP) experience is preferred, it is not required as we can provide hands-on assistance to get beginners up to speed. I have prepared a newsletter template for the free, Open Source Scribus DTP software, which runs on Linux, Mac, and MS Windows systems. The Editor submits the newsletter PDF file online to an Office Depot store for printing, as well as a copy by e-mail to the WAC webmaster for posting on the WAC web site for online delivery. The Editor also submits printing receipts to the Treasurer for reimbursement.

Please send e-mail to me at president(at)wacug.org if you are interested in helping out. WAC is a volunteer organization, and we depend upon YOUR support!
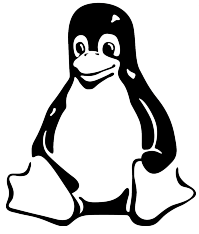
Linux News
by Geof Goodrum
Washington Area Computer User Group

Farewell and Thanks to Pamela Jones

Pamela Jones, creator and blogger of the very popular Groklaw web site (http://www.groklaw.net/), announced that she will stop posting new articles as of the site's anniversary, May 16th. Pamela, through Groklaw, is best known for covering, in great detail, facets of SCO, Inc.'s lawsuit with IBM, Inc. over alleged inclusion of proprietary Unix™ code in the Linux® kernel, Microsoft's involvement, and related challenges to SCO's rights to Unix, in general.

Along the way, Groklaw also covered other legal issues related to Open Source software, such as software patents, antitrust trials involving Microsoft, the GNU General Public License, and provided plenty of analysis to help legal laypersons understand what it was all about.

Groklaw will continue to host this extensive database, including legal exhibits, depositions, and trial timelines. Pamela promised to complete some of the unfinished exhibits, but indicated that the Open Source community has now matured and includes heavyweights such as Google (itself now fending off patent threats and lawsuits related to its use of Open Source software), so the need for Groklaw to rally the community is no longer as important as it was.

Pamela certainly ranks as a true champion for the Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) community.

For the complete announcement, visit http://www.groklaw.net/article.php?story=201104091 61444432.

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(at)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 April 1 – 27, 2011.

Bayanihan Linux 5.4
CentOS 5.6
CTKArch 0.7
DEFT Linux 6.1
Epidemic GNU/Linux 3.2
Incognito Live System 0.7
Linux Mint 201104 "Xfce"
Parsix GNU/Linux 3.6r2
Parted Magic 6.0
Puppy Linux 5.2.5
Scientific Linux 4.9
StressLinux 0.7.105
SystemRescueCd 2.1.0
Zenwalk Linux 7.0 "Core"

Linux Software of the Month: May 2011

The software described below can be downloaded at the links provided or copied onto a USB flash drive at the WAC meeting. However, please check the online package management tool included with your GNU/Linux distribution first, as installation is often just a click away.

Bitfighter – v15a. http://bitfighter.org/. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable packages for Fedora, Mandriva, openSuSE, Debian and Ubuntu by the Bitfighter Development Team.

Bitfighter is a free multi-player 2-D space combat game with Robotron-like controls. It's a team-based strategy game featuring retro vector graphics and customizable ships. It's fast, fun, and frenetic. Building the Bitfighter client from source code depends on Freeglut and the Lua development libraries. However, Freeglut is not needed to build a Bitfighter dedicated server (without client portions). Bitfighter source code must be compiled with the gcc/g++ compiler, available with most GNU/Linux distributions.

Firefox – v4.0. http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/new/. Free Mozilla Public License source code and executable installation package by The Mozilla Foundation. Firefox is a standards-compliant web browser that supports add-ons to customize functionality, personas to customize the appearance, and plugins to support new data formats. This version features a redesigned user interface, synchronization of browsing history, passwords, and bookmarks between mobile and desktop versions, major performance enhancements, and an improved Javascript engine to make web applications faster.

Koha – v3.4.0. http://koha-community.org/. Free GNU General Public License Perl and SQL code by the Koha community. Koha is an enterprise-class library automation system (ILS) built using library standards and protocols. It is designed to manage physical collections of items (books, CDs, videos, reference, etc.). It provides cataloging, searching, member/patron management, an acquisitions system, and circulation (issues, returns, and reserves).This is a major feature release that contains major changes to the underlying architecture (adoption of Template::Toolkit for templating) and performance enhancements (removal of item data from biblio records).

OpenVAS – v4. http://www.openvas.org/. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable packages for Fedora, Mandriva, openSuSE, Debian and Ubuntu by the OpenVAS Project. The Open Vulnerability Assessment System (OpenVAS) is a framework of several services and tools offering a comprehensive and powerful solution to scan for and manage security vulnerabilities within your network and within applications on your computers. The

actual security scanner is accompanied with a daily updated feed of Network Vulnerability Tests (NVTs), over 20,000 in total (as of January 2011).

Kernel Source - v2.6.38. http://www.kernel.org/. Free GNU General Public License source code for all platforms by the Linux community.

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Android 3.0 for Tablets

by Cal Esneault
President of CCCC (Cajun Clickers Computer Club) and leader of many Open Source Workshops & SIGs
March 2011 issue, Cajun Clickers Computer News
*www.clickers.org / http://cccclinuxsig.pbwiki.com*
ccnewsletter (at) cox.net

Android® is an operating system for mobile devices based on the Linux kernel. In 2005 Google bought the company that developed it, and then released this operating system (OS) as open source to members in the Open Handset Alliance. It has become extremely popular with many phone makers and service providers as an alternative to the Apple iPhone® smartphones. Improved Android OS versions are frequently issued: 1.6 (Donut), 2.0 (Eclair), 2.2 (Froyo), and 2.3 (Gingerbread). Smartphones are really cell phones combined with a small personal computer. With processors of speeds around 1 GHz and 2 – 16 GB of onboard storage, smartphones can access the Internet, take digital photographs, provide GPS information, and much more.

Smartphones have gained enormous popularity due to mobility with excellent graphics. To keep power consumption low for longer battery life, manufacturers have used newer technologies – RISC chips (reduced instruction set), small displays, use of "sleep" mode, etc. After using these smartphones more and more, consumers became ready for larger displays while maintaining form factors and weights below those of desktops. Apple broke into this market last year with the 9.7 inch (diagonal) iPad® tablet. Android OS products have lagged behind since this system was originally optimized for the smaller handset devices. So far, only the 7 inch (diagonal) Samsung Galaxy® tablet with Android 2.2 has been introduced as a serious contender.

The Galaxy intermediate size has been criticized for being a little too small for rapid typing and for having an OS that has limited features from a tablet perspective.

Relative Size of SmartPhones vs. Tablets (inches)
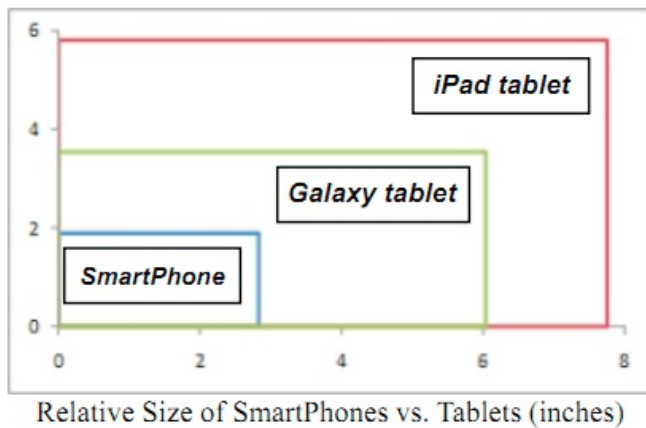
At the January 2011 Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Android 3.0 (Honeycomb) was introduced as a new OS designed with the tablet device in mind.

Several manufacturers also announced at the CES their intention to ship new Android-based tablets in 2011. Motorola introduced its candidate Xoom®, which was given the Best in Show award. Among its features are a 10" display (1280 x 600 pixels), front & rear facing cameras, and ability to play Flash videos. Shipping is planned for later in 1st quarter of 2011.

Motorola
Xoom
Tablet

The proliferation of new mobile computing devices is interesting for the early-adopter and confusing for the general user. Add to this the fact that Google has been developing a Chrome® OS which is targeted for instant-on, internet-centric devices (such as a tablet PC). Typical predictions are that this class of devices will eventually specialize (business, video, rugged with long battery life, etc.) and that only the best will survive the competitive market place. 2011 will certainly be an exciting year in the mobile computing space.

Be sure to review products carefully and ask around before you purchase any device to get the best match between capability and your specific needs. In any event, open source computing is in the game and proceeding with vigor to increase choice.Selecting an

Word Tips: Entire Paragraph

If you are using the mouse, Word provides several quick ways to select an entire paragraph. First, you can simply triple-click anywhere within the paragraph. This is perhaps the fastest and most common method of selecting an entire paragraph.

Second, you can move the mouse pointer to the left of the first character in any line of the paragraph you want to select. The mouse pointer turns into an arrow pointing up and right. Double-click the mouse, and the paragraph is selected.

Finally, if you are using the style area, you can also move the mouse pointer into the style area to the left of the paragraph you want to select. Click once on the left mouse button, and the entire paragraph is selected.

If you like to use the keyboard instead of the mouse, you can select the current paragraph by pressing CTRL+UP ARROW (which moves the insertion point to the beginning of the paragraph) and then pressing CTRL+SHIFT+DOWN ARROW.

Excel Tips: Deleting All Graphics

Excel allows you to easily add graphics to a worksheet. This can be helpful at times, but at other times you may want to delete all the graphics in a worksheet. The easiest way to delete all the graphics is to follow these steps:

1. Press F5 to display the Go To dialog box.

2. Click on the Special button. Excel displays the Go To Special dialog box.
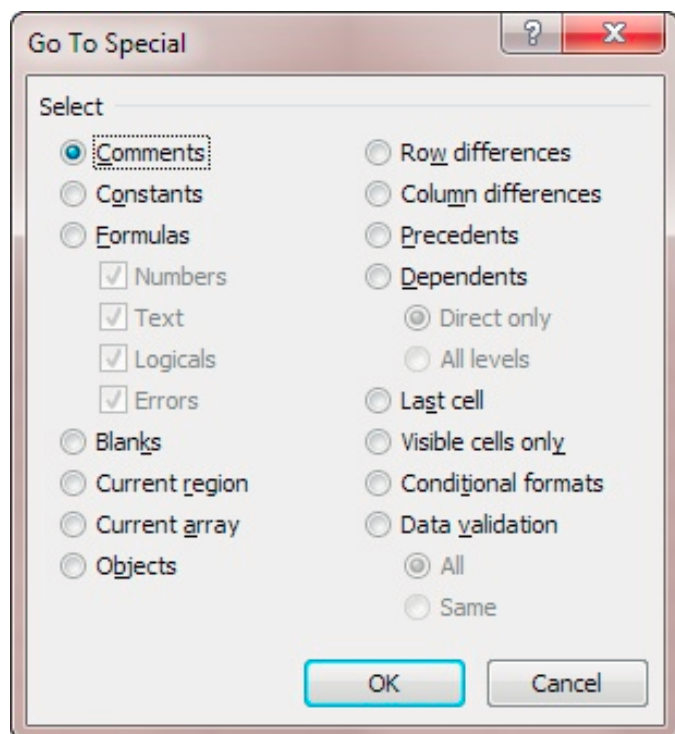
3. Make sure the Objects radio button is selected.

4. Click on OK. All the graphics in your worksheet are selected.

5. Press the DEL key. All the graphics are deleted.

This solution works only if there are no other objects (besides graphics) in your worksheet. If you have other objects that you don't want deleted, then all you need to do is perform steps 1 through 4, and then hold down the CTRL key as you use the mouse to click on each object you don't want deleted. When you are satisfied with the objects selected, finish up by following step 5.

Access 2010 The Missing Manual

by George Harding
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March 2011 issue, TCS eJournal
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The Missing Manual series now totals almost 60 books! The reason the series is so popular is because software/hardware makers don't include the hefty manual they used to, but buyers need more than the Quick Reference Guide that now replaces the manual that used to be. It's published by O'Reilly – Pogue Press.

The book is written by Matthew MacDonald but there is a team behind him that supports a colossal project such as writing a book. All examples have to be tested by actual example. The illustrations in the book, likewise, have to be reproduced.

The book is pretty hefty, consisting of 812 pages, of which 17 are the all-important index and one Appendix. The book is divided into seven parts with 23 chapters, each covering a broad topic.

The Introduction is, in contrast to some, very valuable. It tells what's new in the 2010 version of Access and how to use some of these features. One of the valuable items is the "missing" CD-ROM. You can download it at the web site. It has all the examples used in the book, so you can see how to do any of them.

Access has four main parts: tables, queries, forms and reports. The latter three all depend on tables.

Part One of the book deals with creating tables, accessing the data contained in them, making sure the data is useful and valid, and relationships between tables. This is probably the most important section, because if the table isn't built correctly, the queries, forms and reports may not work properly.

Part Two covers queries, including the basic select type, as well as update, append and update types. Since many forms and reports use queries as the source for information, learning how to create and use them is important. Frankly, though, creating select queries is really easy and the other forms are not often useful.

Part Three deals with creating and printing reports.

Part Four covers forms, including using a special type of form as a user interface. Simple forms, though, are easy to create and are most useful for those who are not very familiar with Access.

That covers the four basic tools in Access, but there's more. Access has built in an extensive programming system and Part Five covers several aspects of it. These include macros and Visual Basic. With these two tools, one can develop a database system that is useful, but whose insides aren't visible to the user.

Part Six, the last one, covers new aspects of Access, namely, multi-user databases, import/export, connecting Access to SQL Server and SharePoint, as well as building a web database.

This is both a top-notch reference book and a helpful learning tool. I highly recommend it.

About: Access 2010 The Missing Manual
Author: Matthew MacDonald
Vendor: O'Reilly-Pogue Press
www.missingmanuals.com
ISBN-10: 1449382371
ISBN-13: 978-1449382377
Price: $39.99, $24.55 @ Amazon

Understanding System Restore
by Vinny La Bash
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March 2011 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor
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Vlabash (at) Comcast.net

Windows 7 has a new and improved version of System Restore that is far superior to the lame utility that came with XP. Setting a restore point was often painfully slow, and it rarely worked as it should have. Windows 7 System Restore easily helps you bring back your computer's system files to an earlier point in time. It's a way to undo system changes to your computer without affecting your personal files, such as e-mail, documents, or photos.

Sometimes, the installation of a program or a driver can cause an unexpected change to your computer or cause Windows to behave unpredictably. Usually,

uninstalling the program or driver corrects the problem. If uninstalling does not fix the problem, you can try restoring your computer's system to an earlier date when everything worked correctly.

System Restore uses a feature called System Protection to regularly create and save restore points on your computer. These restore points contain information about registry settings and other system information that Windows uses. You can also create restore points manually.

System Restore is not intended for backing up personal files, so it cannot help you recover a photograph or video that has been deleted or damaged. You should regularly back up your personal files and important data using a backup program. Windows 7 has an excellent built-in backup utility.

Windows 7 uses the Shadow Copy feature, introduced in Vista. It's vastly superior to the process in XP and earlier versions of Windows. The old way used a simple file filter and copied files around the system which was clumsy compared to the Shadow Copy method. Today, Windows creates a snapshot of your drive which can later be used to restore your system should catastrophe occur.

Additional capabilities of Shadow copy include taking snapshots of files even when currently in use. Microsoft has incorporated this feature into Previous Versions, which allows restoring a previous version of an application. Unfortunately, this power is available only in Windows Professional or Ultimate.

The easiest way to bring up System Restore is to type System in the Start menu search box and select it from the resulting list. Another way is to select the Recovery option from Control Panel, or you can simply type rstrui in the search box.

Whatever method you choose will bring up the System Restore dialog box that gives you some helpful information. Select the Next button to get a list of restore points. Most of the time you will be using the most recent restore point to get your system working again.

Focus your attention on the Description list. This can give you an important indication of what went wrong. Did your problem begin after installing a Critical

Update, a backup operation, or a new freeware program that you couldn't resist?
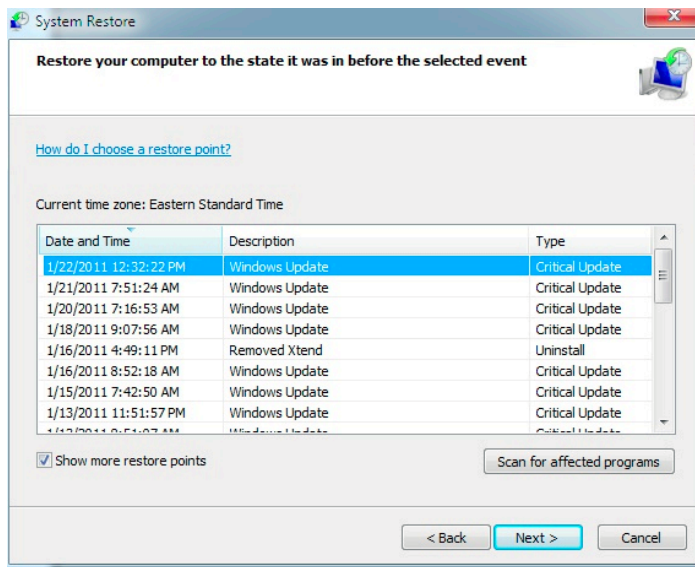
When you apply System Restore the system creates another restore point so you can undo the change if your problem isn't fixed. You can't undo System Restore however, if you use it in safe mode. But you can run System Restore again and select a different restore point.

Restore points are saved until the disk space Windows allocates to the utility is used up. Then the oldest restore points are deleted as new ones are needed. The easiest way to delete all previous restore points is to turn System Restore off, and then turn it back on again. Don't worry about running out of space.

Many computer problems can be traced to sloppy programs written by people who don't know enough about proper programming techniques to get their utilities published by reliable vendors. It's surprising how many problems are generated by faulty uninstall tools. There are many sound freeware offerings out in cyberspace, but don't use them unless they come tested and approved by a trusted source like Smart Computing.

PC Cooling - Keep it Cool!

by Phil Sorrentino
President, Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., FL
February 2011 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor
*www.spcug.org*
president (at) spcug.org

Just like your car, your computer has to be cooled because it generates a lot of heat. Some of the computer's components produce large amounts of heat during operation, and this heat must be removed in order to keep these components within their safe operating temperatures. PC Cooling, then, is the process of removing the heat from the computer's components. Components which produce heat and are susceptible to performance loss and/or damage due to that heat include integrated circuits, such as the Central Processing Unit (CPU), graphics processors, chipsets, and memory. Hard drives also produce heat but typical air flow is usually adequate to keep them within their operating temperature. (Although some of the very fast drives (10,000 rpm), may need additional cooling.)

Most of the heat produced in a computer is generated by the power supply, the CPU and possibly the graphics processor. That's probably where you'll find the additional fans (beyond the normal chassis cooling fans). You might not think such a small electronic chip, the CPU, could generate so much heat, but many modern CPUs need a separate fan mounted on a heat-sink to remove all of the heat generated. Overheated parts generally exhibit a shorter maximum life-span and may give sporadic problems resulting in system freezes or crashes. PC Cooling is mainly done using heat sinks to increase the surface area which dissipates heat, fans to speed up the exchange of air heated by the computer parts for cooler ambient air, and in some cases soft cooling, or the throttling of the speed of some computer parts in order to decrease heat generation.

First a little thermodynamics review. A heat-sink is an object that moves heat from an object that it is trying to cool, to a lesser hot area or object. It absorbs heat from an object, and transfers that heat to another object or the surrounding air. In the computer, a heat-sink, usually made of aluminum, is placed in direct contact with the CPU chip. A thermal grease is used

to help the heat transfer from the CPU chip to the heat-sink. The heat is then typically transferred to the ambient air (the lesser hot area). The heat sink helps cool the CPU by transferring heat from the CPU, at a relatively high temperature, to the ambient air, at a relatively lower temperature. This transfer of heat keeps the CPU from overheating and possibly shutting down. The most common design for a heat-sink is a piece of metal with many fins. The large surface area due to the fins results in the rapid transfer of heat to the surrounding, cooler air. A fan improves the transfer of heat from the heat-sink to the air by moving cooler air between the fins. This is how the combined heat-sink and fan work to cool down the CPU chip.
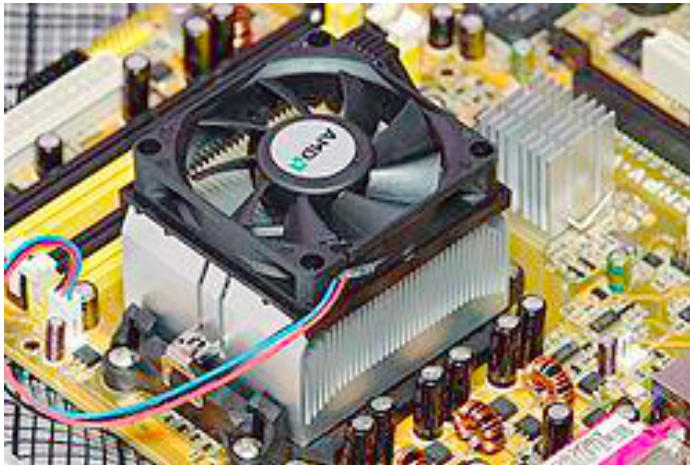
Now all that may seem a bit academic, but the point is that the components inside the PC must be cooled. You know how good you feel when you turn on a fan on a hot day. The heat-sinks and the fans are necessary for your computer to continue operating. So, if your fans stop or your heat-sinks stop being effective, your computer will eventually stop operating. If a fan stops it is usually easily noticed either by seeing it stopped when the computer is on or the lack of air flowing or the lack of the sound of the fan motor. It's the heat-sink's operation that is hard to determine. The best way to discern the operation of the heat-sink is to look at it. (Yes, that means removing the cover.) It should be nice and shiny and new looking, and not covered with dust or animal hair. Dust covering the heat-sink will impede its ability to transfer heat to the air, even if the fan is moving the air over the dust laden heat-sink.

A visual check of the cleanliness of the heat-sinks every 3 to 6 months is advisable. (Maybe even more often if your computer is in a dusty environment, {like in the corner of a room on a rug}, and/or you have furry pets in the area.) Make sure you unplug the computer before you do this. While you are in there checking, take a can of "dust remover," which is like compressed air, and blow out all of the dust you can see, especially around the CPU heat-sink. Also, make sure all of the inlets and exhaust holes in the case are free from dust and debris so that the normal air flow will not be disturbed. That can of "dust remover" is your best defense against dust buildup both on the heat-sink surfaces, and around the air holes. (Keep a can of dust remover close at hand and give a package of them to your computer owning friends during the holiday season.) Follow the directions on the can. Be especially careful not us hold the can on an angle or upside down, as doing so may force out a flammable freezing liquid. (Note that it is normal to feel the bottom of the can getting cold while the can is blowing air.) If you blow out the dust every 3 to 6 months, your computer should run nice and cool for many years, and you'll be spared some very strange and possibly aggravating problems.

The Cursor provides news, commentary and product information to members of the Washington Area Computer User Group.

E-mail membership inquiries and address changes to membership(at)wacug.org
E-mail article submission and reprint requests to cursor(at)wacug.org

WAC Membership Application / Renewal

Dues are collected on an Annual basis and include download access to WAC's monthly newsletter, *The Cursor*, in PDF format.

Annual Dues: $25.00
Make checks payable to WAC. Please do not send cash by mail.

Remit payment in person at the WAC Membership table on meeting day, or by mail to:

Washington Area Computer User Group
30 Fendall Ave
Alexandria VA 22304-6300

Thank you for joining WAC!

Name:

E-mail:

Phone No.:

Street:

City:

State: Zip Code:

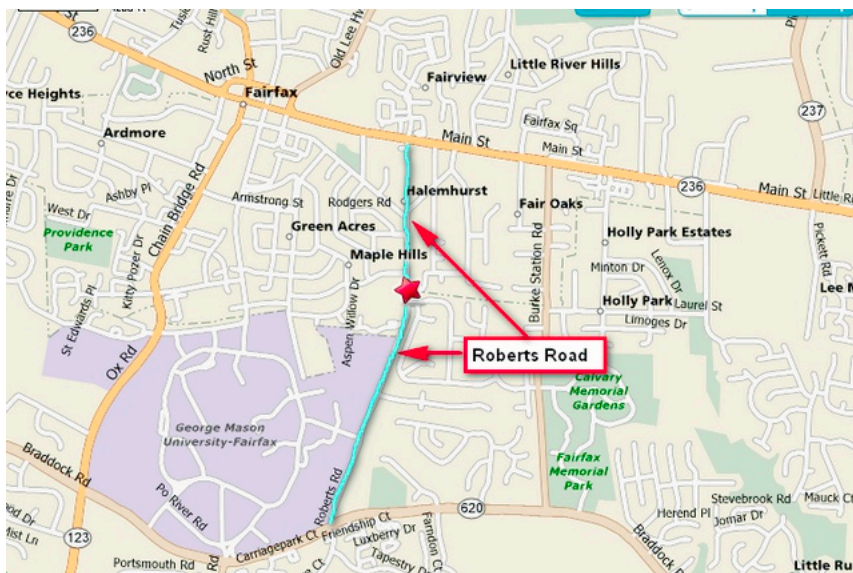| Windows	MacOS	Linux/Unix
Word Processing	Spreadsheet	Database
Photography	Video	Graphics
Genealogy	Finance	Music
Programming	Publishing	Hardware
Other:		

Next WAC Meetings: <u>May 14</u> · Jun 18 · Jul 16 · Aug 20 · Sep 17
Call (703) 370-7649 for the latest meeting information or visit our web site at
http://www.wacug.org/

<u>Meeting Location</u>
Osher Lifelong Learning
Institute (OLLI)
4210 Roberts Road
Fairfax, VA 22032

FREE ADMISSION
BRING A FRIEND!

Service Desks open at
12:30 PM

Meeting starts at
1:00 PM

Browser Wars Intensify With Release of IE9, Firefox 4 - Part 2

by Ira Wilsker

WEBSITES:

http://getfirefox.com
http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/new
http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/central
http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/plugincheck
http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/performance
http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/security

Last time I wrote about the newly released Internet Explorer 9 from Microsoft, and how it has increased speed and security over the older versions of Internet Explorer. Despite the fact that it is included with virtually all builds of Windows sold in the United States and most (but not all) other countries, and many users are unaware or unwilling to download and use an alternative browser, it has seen a significant decrease in market share. While it appeared that Internet Explorer had a near monopoly on the browser market for several years, several feisty competitors have appeared, and been met with varying degrees of success in taking market share from Internet Explorer. One of the former strong competitors, Netscape, lost much of its market share, underwent changes in ownership, and was eventually phased out, leaving its open source code for a successor to develop. From this open source code evolved the number two browser in the world, Firefox.

Somewhat akin to the old slogan that Avis used in its epic battle with Hertz, "We're number two; we try harder!", Firefox has generally been more innovative then Internet Explorer, generally faster, more feature rich, and more secure than Microsoft's product, with a quicker upgrade path for bug fixes and security enhancements. Being an open source product, meaning that the program code is readily available, thousands of plug-ins and add-ons have been independently created to increase the usability and security of Firefox, allowing for an almost infinite ability to customize the browser and improve the browsing experience of the user.

When I downloaded and installed Firefox 4, it seamlessly imported my bookmarks (favorites), history, passwords, cookies, and other information and settings from my Firefox 3.6.15. For those installing Firefox 4 for the first time, the installation offers the user to non-destructively import favorites, cookies, history, passwords, and other settings and information from Internet Explorer, such that Firefox 4 is instantly ready to be used, without the loss of any significant material from Internet Explorer. Users should be aware that Internet Explorer and Firefox (as well as the other browsers such as Opera, Chrome, and Safari) mutually coexist on the computer and desktop without interfering with each other. Each browser asks to be made the default browser, meaning that it will be opened if a web link is clicked, and my personal choice is to have Firefox as my default browser. In no way does this degrade the functionality of the other browsers, as I sometimes use the others for special purposes, but still use Firefox for almost all of my browsing needs.

The first thing I noticed after opening my newly installed Firefox 4 is that the "screen real estate" or space used by web pages seemed larger, because it was indeed larger. Firefox 4 reduced the numbers of buttons and tools on the page (they are still available if needed), and combined the functions of others into a single button that intelligently knows what function to engage. To access what used to be the menus at the top of the pages, simply click on the "Firefox" button in the top left corner, and a comprehensive menu drops down, reminiscent of the menus available on older versions of Firefox; after use, the menus disappear, leaving a clean appearance. The address bar, now called the "Awesome Bar," and tabs are thinner (less height), also freeing up space on the desktop. Tabs for open pages are now at the top of the screen by default, but can be quickly moved below the Awesome Bar if desired. These changes at the top of the window create a clean appearance, lacking the clutter of older browsers, freeing up space for web pages. If the user wants to restore the classic menu buttons to their archaic positions at the top of the page, and sacrifice some of the newly available real estate, clicking on the "Firefox" button and then Options - Menu Bar will display the menus where they were on the older versions.

I usually have several tabs (web pages) open at any given time, and sometimes it gets confusing and cluttered when switching between tabs. Firefox 4

offers a feature it calls "Panorama." With Panorama, commonly used tabs can be combined in single group, making them each readily identifiable and accessible. I created a Panorama for my most commonly used tabs, including my web based email, Facebook, my news page, and my stock quotes. By going to the Panorama, I can instantly see a thumbnail of each of the pages, and open them as desired. Multiple Panoramas can be created for other groups or clusters of often used tabs. The Panorama button is a small, square icon made up of four smaller rectangles, and this will open the Panoramas. Some users have reported that they did not have a Panorama icon, but it is available and can be permanently displayed by clicking on the down arrow on the right of the tabs, displaying a menu of the open tabs; by clicking on the "Tab Groups," the Panorama screen will open, and the icon for it will now appear on the browser. Panorama is a powerful tool that can be manipulated and used to manage groups and tabs; a little practice is all that is necessary to master the functions of panorama.

Now that users can access Firefox on multiple platforms and devices, including a new Firefox for mobile phones, a "Sync" function allows the user to securely synchronize passwords, tabs, bookmarks, and other information between browsers. Now, if Firefox 4 is used on multiple computers, tablets, smart phones, and other devices, the user can have material from one device instantly available on any other chosen device, all efficiently coordinated or "Synced." Clicking on the "Tabs From Other Computers" will display the open tabs from the other synchronized computers.

I tried this on two simultaneous running computers with Sync engaged on both, and was able to get an open tab on one machine to automatically appear on the other machine. Sync also works across different operating systems; since Firefox 4 will run on Windows, Mac, and other operating systems, Sync will effectively connect all of them To save space and maintain a clean look, buttons have been rearranged, which may take the user a few moments to become familiar with using. The "Home" button will display any stored bookmarks by clicking on the "down arrow," and the "star" icon will create a new bookmark. Frequently used tabs or bookmarks can be "pinned" on the tab bar, somewhat permanently placing them there (they are removable), allowing their easy access whenever Firefox is loaded.

One notable improvement in Firefox 4 over its predecessors and some of its major competitors is speed. Firefox 4 loads faster, and displays pages much faster than in the past. In published performance tests, Firefox 4 loaded and displayed web mail, games, and other pages between three and six times faster than the previous Firefox 3.6. One of the several reasons for this improved performance is an improved Java script engine called JägerMonkey, which is faster and more efficient than earlier engines. Another substantial improvement on speed and performance comes from hardware acceleration, which works with Windows 7, Vista, XP, and Max OS X, and takes better advantage of the hardware in the machine to speed the display of games and videos, and other graphic intensive websites.

Browsing privacy is becoming more important to users for safety and security reasons. Firefox 4 offers a "Private Browsing," which allows the user to surf the net without saving a list of the websites which were visited. Some users prefer to "Clear Recent History" which will delete private data or recent browsing activity, making it difficult for others to see what the user was doing online. Sometimes we visit a website in error, or one that we would prefer to simply forget; the "Forget This Site" feature deletes every trace of having ever visited that website. Many uses are oblivious that websites either by themselves, or in collaboration with other websites, track where the user has been for the purpose of creating marketing profiles for sale to advertisers, or other information about the user; the "Do Not Track" feature informs websites that the user wants to opt-out of any tracking. Fraud of various types is rampant on the internet; the "Content Security Policy" determines which website content is legitimate, and protects the user from many forms of cross-site scripting attacks. In terms of personal privacy, while Firefox 4 is very good at protecting the user's privacy, it should be noted that ISP's and websites typically collect information from the data stream, and a browser cannot definitively control this collection.

One claim that has been made about Firefox in the past is that it has often been more secure than Internet Explorer; Firefox 4 continues this tenaciousness by implementing a series of tough security functions at the browser level. One such feature is "Instant Website ID" which displays a color coded icon directly to the left of the web address in the Awesome Bar (address bar), which indicates the degree of valid identity information available about the listed website. If the icon is gray, that indicates that there is no identity information listed for that website, which may be an indication that the particular website is not trustworthy, and personal information and credit card numbers maybe should not be entered on that site. A blue icon indicates that the website has basic identity information available, and that there may be some form of third party "trust" verification, along with some encryption, but the information has not been independently verified by a credible resource. A green icon means that the website being displayed has posted complete information about it, and has validated its authenticity. Firefox 4 also provides integral protection from phishing (forged websites used to obtain information for the purpose of identity theft or other financial crimes), and malware (Trojans and spyware) which may be transmitted from a purloined website, by warning the user to avoid that particular website.

Many of us frequently download and install software and other files from the internet via our browser; this has also become a prominent vector for the transmission of malware. The "Secure Software Installation" feature requires that a secured connection be established prior to the downloading and installation of any software. This feature, along with "AntiVirus Integration," which integrates the user's security software with the browser, scans downloads for malware as they are being downloaded, providing an extra level of protection from viruses and other malware.

Browsers incorporate a variety of plug-ins and other add-ons which provide additional functionality to the browser. Common plug-ins include Java, QuickTime, Flash, Adobe Acrobat, and many others. Firefox 4 offers a "Plug-in Check" to display which plug-ins need to be updated, which may result in improved security and performance. Adjacent to each plug-in is

a button to automate the update process by automatically downloading the latest plug-ins.

Users of Windows 7 who have young children may implement the parental control features integrated into Windows 7; Firefox 4 seamlessly integrates with the Windows 7 parental controls and can block the children from unapproved web access, downloads, and other internet functions.

There are many more new or improved features in Firefox 4, which is explicitly why I use it as my default browser. One minor issue, which Firefox is currently rectifying, is that a few of my third party plug-ins and add-ons from Firefox 3.6.15 were incompatible with Firefox 4 when imported, and thus could not be used. Firefox 4 has a feature which allows the user to report any incompatible plug-ins to the developers who will try to resolve the incompatible items. Most of the few plug-ins I had issues with have been resolved, with only my older version of the RoboForm password manager having some issues with Firefox 4. RoboForm is offering an upgraded version that is optimized for Firefox 4 for a fee ($20), but the blog threads indicate that Firefox may have a fix in the works.

Rhetorically, one may ask why Firefox earned the number two position in the browser market. The answers are many, as discussed above. Firefox 4 is available for free for almost all operating systems and platforms, including portable and mobile devices. Since they can all be securely synchronized if desired, Firefox 4 can be an excellent choice, even if another browser is already installed. The different versions can all be accessed at mozilla.com. Download it and install it, and you will likely enjoy Firefox 4 as much as I enjoy it.

Powermat

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March 2011 issue, TCS eJournal
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You probably carry at least one portable device, a mobile phone. To keep it charged, you need a charger for a home outlet or one for the car. When you travel, either locally or away from home, you must remember to carry one or both of these chargers. It's cumbersome, but that's the price of a mobile device.

Or maybe not! Powermat has a solution for any of your mobile devices, and it doesn't require a charging cord. How do they do this? You charge a Powermat unit, then carry it with you wherever you might be.

Just set your mobile device on one of the panels of the Powermat and your device is charged wirelessly by induction. What does that mean? You don't need to know. It just works.

I received a Powermat for evaluation. It is a small 3" X 3" tri-fold device. It unfolds into three connected panels, two of which are charging panels. The third section is the storage battery that allows the device to be used wirelessly.

You first charge the Powermat with a wall outlet. Then fit your mobile phone or other device with a receiver tailored for your specific type of device. Then simply place the mobile device on the Powermat. You'll hear a beep to indicate that connection is made and that your mobile device is charging. Another beep sounds when your device is removed.

The tri-fold Powermat I received is one of several styles available. Some are smaller, some come with a Power Cube, a unit that connects to your mobile device and is what is placed on the Powermat.

I tried out my wife's Blackberry on the Powermat. The unit comes with a Power Cube which you connect to the Blackberry, then place it on the Powermat to charge. The Power Cube is about one and a half inches square and has a white, smooth surface.

One corner of it has a wire attached with a connector with adaptable heads for almost any receptacle available today.

The wire fits neatly into a groove around the edge of the Power Cube when not in use.

I also received a receiver for my iPhone. A receiver is a shell into which the iPhone fits. It has a compatible plug in its base and a unit on its back similar in function to a Power in function to a Power Cube. Once the iPhone is in the receiver, you need only place it on the Powermat to charge it.

Powermat announced at CES an agreement that will provide wireless charging capabilities in airports, through the installation of Powermat units in terminal seating. Airports are difficult environments in which to obtain recharges. This solution will benefit the many travelers with mobile devices that need charging in an airport. In addition, Powermat will be working with GM to incorporate in their cars, starting with the Chevy Volt, a charging solution for most mobile devices, without the use of wires.

About: Powermat
Vendor: Powermat
www.powermat.com
Price: tri-fold $130, receiver $40