PC Post

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Personal Computer User Groups

User
Helping
User

**Official Newsletter of the
Modesto PC User Group.
Modesto, California**

28 YEARS OF USER HELPING USER

January 2011, Volume 29.1

Inside this Issue

The group meets at 6:30 p.m. at Denny's Restaurant, 1525 McHenry Ave., for its Random Access Special Interest Group featuring questions and problems members are facing. At 7:30, following dinner, the presentation will start.

BOD Meeting - November 3, 7pm Ridgeway's

January 27, 2011

The primary purpose of the January General Meeting will be to discuss and make some basic decisions on the future of the MPCUG club. Will also have a Q & A session before the program.

VP/Program: (Vice President).
Chair a committee to provide for programs at general meetings, arrange for speakers and demonstrations.
1. We need a VP/Program.
2. Having good programs will encourage members to come to our meetings.
3. What percent of members don't drive at night?

Back-UP your Data

What is the best Back-Up? In the Cloud or an external USB drive? If you don't do one or the other, you may be in trouble.

Ray Nichols: If you have anything you would be willing to donate to our club for the drawings we have, they will be gratefully accepted. Be sure to wear your name badge for the drawing.

Please bring your used magazines, books, videos, DVD's, and cassettes for distribution to Veterans in our area.

In the Cloud

Allows users to backup and retrieve information online. A general term used to describe Internet services. These include social networking services like Facebook and Twitter, online backup services, and applications that run within a Web browser.

The "cloud" is metaphor for the Internet and represents the global interconnectedness of online services. Therefore, anyone with an Internet connection can access the cloud and share data with other

Will Google Take Over the World?

My predictions for the year 2011 is that this year Google will get one giant step closer to taking over the world! Well, perhaps, that is a little too strong a statement, but none the less, the rate at which Google is spreading their products and the scope of their reach is almost incomprehensible. I believe that in 2011 Google will become entrenched in even more areas.

The first such area is the operating system area. Those of you who watch the mobile phone market know that the Google Android operating system is now the fastest growing OS in mobile phone history. Google has already introduced their Chrome web browser, which is garnering high usage and praise as one of the fastest and safest web browsers.

This year Google is poised to introduce their Chrome operating system, which is now in Beta testing. Google has just sent out tablet PCs with the Chrome OS to hundreds of testers. The idea behind the Chrome operating system is to create an OS that works almost completely online. Your tablet PC or small computer will be basically only used to access your online applications and information.

Google is targeting this system to businesses first. The infrastructure is already in place. Gmail is the email program. Google also has many other apps including Google Docs, an online Word substitute, Google Calendar, the iGoogle home page, and many, many more. There are even applications to track financial data, to perform asset management, to increase productivity, and to control sales and marketing. For businesses this will mean lower hardware and software costs as well as lower IT costs. Google will do this with added security and increased productivity. In a world where businesses are looking to save money, moving to the Google world will be very attractive. Once businesses are convinced to move to Google, it won't be long before home users recognize the same benefits.

Google has already reached into the area of health with Google Health, a free online system that lets you organize, track, and monitor, your health information. It lets you manage your health history online and track and monitor personal health and wellness goals.

Google owns YouTube, so it has already made its mark in the video world. Google is also laying fiber optic cable for Internet use through a project called Google Fiber. Google has said

that it plans to build a trial fiber network that can move data up to 100 times faster than existing technologies. Trial projects will take place in over 1,000 American communities. If you travel by air this holiday season, you will be able to find free Wi-Fi courtesy of Google in many of the country's airports. Google already has a program called Google Educators in place to help teachers.

These are just a few of Google's major endeavors. As I said, Google has an unbelievable reach, which is going to touch every aspect of our lives. While some might find the spread of Google something to be feared, right now they are creating breakthroughs in many different areas that are making all of our lives better. This will be interesting year to watch Google.

Are we really wireless & paperless?
By Bob Dooley, President BPCA (Broward Personal Computer Assoc.), FL
January 2011 issue, C:\BPCA News
bobflfl (at) juno.com

Are you as confused as I am? I mean, about the way the world is turning, sometimes? We read and heard about the "paperless" society and now everything is "wireless" - we are in a "wireless" society. That 's it! Paperless and wireless. Everything!

If that is so, then why is my place full of wires and jam-packed with filing cabinets bulging with folders stuffed with paper? Why does my mailbox fill up daily with paper stuff? Paper everywhere. Papers to file and paper to save and paper to burn. A weekly chore is to empty wastebaskets filled with . . . ? You guessed it . . . paper. For my phone service I use a VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) service - and have for years. It eliminated the use of the telephone line from Bell (or whatever name they go by today) but the wires still are in my walls from the poles to my place. And the wires in the walls to distribute by VOIP service to the other rooms is still in use. And, I guess, you can call the cable from Comcast a "wire" as it delivers the Internet used by my VOIP. And, I have two wireless phones, but they must be returned to their wired base-stations for regeneration - regularly. Then there is the wire to my modem and the wire to the router. Then there are wires to deliver power to everything in the place including the modem and the router. Why write this today? Well this month (November) I bought a new "wireless" printer (HP J4680, to be exact). It was to replace my old "all-in-one" (not really, since it had no fax function, but they still called it that and they still do) Epson printer and an even older Panasonic fax machine. It was to join my wireless keyboard and wireless mouse and my wireless Internet server. Starting at the beginning, the first part of installation is to plug in the power cord (translated "wire") and then connect the USB cable (translated "wire"). Once the new device is recognized by the computer the USB cable can be disconnected leaving only one wire attached - the power cord.

It should be noted that the wireless keyboard and mouse, while not connected to the computer, nevertheless require a "wire" - the USB station to pick up their signals. Even with all this wireless stuff, behind my computer there is a tangled mess of wires. Most computers are the same way, such that a recent NY Times Crossword Puzzle had the word "tangle" as the answer to the clue "Cords behind a computer, often." And, of course, why did I need a "printer?" Who could possibly need a printer in a "paperless" society? I mean, it really won't print on anything else! Photo paper is still paper and envelopes are paper. It won't handle any other kind of media such as cardboard, glass or metal. And, the printer machine companies rate their machines on the "PPM" - pages per minute - how fast can they spew out the documents.

Having written all of this, am I angry, sad, disappointed, even unhappy. No, not in the least. My new machine is really great and producing many paper pages. Being wireless means that without touching a single thing I can use it fully from either of my two desk PC's or my laptop (no matter which room in my place I use the laptop).

So, why the article? To bring attention to the fact that we are not really either a "paperless" nor a "wireless" society and maybe never be - at least it will most likely be a very long while.

Who wishes electric currents whizzing wireless-ly through the air and who doesn't wish to have some ascertainment of transactions and statements and communications?

Should You Try Linux? (Well, it depends on…)
By Dick Maybach
n2nd (at) charter.net

There are many good reasons why you should.

➤ It's fast. Every time I use Windows I can feel myself growing older as it creeps through booting up, shutting down, and starting a new program. My wife had an old laptop with XP that had become unusably slow under XP. She replaced the operating system with Linux, and it's now back to its original speed.

➤ It's free. Not only is Linux free, but so are the great majority of its applications. Such things as office suites, desktop publishing, Web page design, photo, audio, and video editors, computer aided design, and games (to name a few) are there for you to try out and use. Many of these can import and use Windows documents, such as from MS Word, PowerPoint, and Excel.

➤ It's more secure. While no software is absolutely secure, Linux is far ahead of Windows. This is partly by design and partly because PCs running Windows are far more common than are those running Linux. Malware designers tend to target the most common configuration. Linux users must keep their systems up-to-date (a one click process) and must use the built-in firewall, but they very seldom worry about computer viruses.

➤ It's more fun. Linux users are continually trying new programs. They are free, so why not try to find which you like best. Linux is also much more customizable; you can

make your desktop look like Windows, like a Mac, or like something only you could love. Finally, because it's open, you are free to poke around its guts to figure out what is really going on under the hood.

Good reasons for caution
There are also good reasons why you might not want to.

➤   Linux is not Windows. It doesn't run most Windows applications. (There are ways around this, but they are more trouble than most Linux novices will find comfortable.) Worse, some Windows applications have no Linux counterparts. For example, although it may change, today you can't watch movies on-line from Netflix in Linux, and there is no Linux program equivalent to TurboTax.
➤   Some hardware doesn't work with Linux. Again, there are ways around this, but they require some experience with Linux. The most common offenders are printers, scanners, and anything made by Apple. This isn't a problem if you are buying a new machine; you just buy only the devices you know are Linux compatible.
➤   Most PCs come with Windows and not Linux installed. You will have to install a new operating system, which is something most PC users have never done. Despite what you may have heard, installing Linux isn't difficult (in fact, it's much easier than installing Windows), but it does require some care.

Let's suppose you've decided to look into Linux. How should you start? First, find a Linux user who is willing to help, not because Linux is so difficult, but because it's new to you. He or she will probably recommend the toe-in-the-water approach. Many versions of Linux are available as a live CD, which lets you run Linux without writing anything to your hard disk. Shut down, remove the CD-ROM, and your machine boots Windows and has no idea it had been running Linux.

Set up your boot order
To do this, set up your PC to boot from a CD-ROM, insert a Linux live CD, and turn on the power. You will most likely have to select between trying Linux (right!) and installing Linux (wrong!). CD-ROMs are much slower than hard disks, but you can see exactly how Linux works with your hardware. Keep in mind that unless you copy your results to a read/write device, anything you do in the live session will be lost when you log off.

The next level of commitment is to install Linux in a dual-boot configuration. Here each time you boot, you choose either Linux or Windows. For instance, you might choose Windows to watch a Netflix movie, work on your taxes, or sync your iPhone and choose Linux to surf the Web, retouch you photos, or update your Web page. Again, the installation will be much easier with the help of a Linux-savvy friend. Just be sure to back up your files before you begin. Another good approach is to replace Windows with Linux on an old computer.

Linux is a rather large clan of operating systems, the most common of which are Ubuntu, Red Hat Fedora, and SUSE. However, I recommend that you first try Linux Mint, which is a variant of Ubuntu. Its appearance closely resembles Windows', and you will probably be comfortable almost immediately. It shares Ubuntu's compatibility with hardware, which minimizes the chances of problems during and after installation.

There are hundreds of other versions of Linux, and each one has its niche, for example to recover files from damaged disks, to be fast on old and slow hardware, to accommodate children, to run on netbooks and smart phones, and one even lets you use an old PC as a TiVo type video controller.

Give Linux a try. You will probably like it, and if you don't, at least you will have better reason to use Windows other than being ignorant of everything else.

Technology - 2010 Year in Review
By Ira Wilsker, Member, Golden Triangle PC Club, TX; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio Show Host, Mondays, 6-7pm CT, KLVI.com iwilsker (at) sbcglobal.com

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As usual, the state of computing technology has been very dynamic, and what was state of the art in much of 2010 will be archaic by this time in 2011. This week I am going to do a quick review of what I wrote about in 2010, and what has changed since my original column.

In my column dated January 1, 2010 I wrote about "What You Need for that New Christmas Computer." While most of the recommendations made in that column hold true, today I would revise a few of those recommendations. While some things did not dramatically change, such as the need for a good surge suppressor with a UL1449 rating (not just a simple power strip), or a good protective case for that new laptop or notebook computer, some things did change, such as the necessity for comprehensive security software. In that January 2010 column I wrote about some free antivirus software from AVG, AVAST, Panda's then new CloudAntivirus, and the free version of Zone Alarm firewall. I also suggested that users consider Microsoft's free "Security Essentials" as a combination antivirus and antispyware product. Since that column a year ago, all five of these popular products have come out with new versions of their software, generally increasing speed, performance, and protection. While all of those products are still available as free versions, all but the Microsoft Security Essentials are also available as paid commercial versions with additional benefits and enhancements.

If I were to write that same column today, I would make a different security recommendation, as the threat landscape has changed dramatically over the past year. Computer viruses, while still present and posing serious threats, are not the primary security threat as they had been in the past; now the most common threats are Trojans, spyware, keyloggers, hijackers, and other such non-virus threats. At this time last year, there were about 10 million known malware threats, but as I type this, one of the leading cyber security services now lists almost 19 million malware threats, about double the number this time last year. An analysis of those threats indicates that while thousands of new viruses and variants have appeared in 2010, millions of other new threats have evolved, mostly in the realm of spyware, keyloggers, and hijackers. Much of the newer malware in circulation is intended to steal the user's identity such as user names, passwords, banking information, credit card numbers, and other sensitive personal information that has significant financial value to a criminal. To a lesser extent, but still very common today, is malware that hijacks and turns your computer into a

zombie, sending out countless spam emails, or even engaging in cyber terrorism where your computer, along with thousands of other computers, simultaneously attack a specific server on remote command, crippling it or shutting it down. Also in the past year, another type of security threat has become endemic, and that is extortion ware, a type of rogue software that high jacks your computer and by way of a popup, (falsely) informs you that your computer is infected with hundreds of viruses and other types of malware, and that you must pay the scammer to register your rogue software to remove the malware. If you consent, you are sending your credit card information to a cyber criminal, probably in Russia. Since the security threat has changed, so has the need for more comprehensive security software than the simple antivirus software that had been adequate in the past.

Since the simple antivirus software by itself is no longer adequate to provide comprehensive security protection, it is now more appropriate to install a complete security suite rather than just one of the popular antivirus programs. In my December 17, 2010 column I wrote about Agnitum's new free security suite, Outpost Security Suite Free (free.agnitum.com). This

integrated free security suite (paid commercial version also available) has everything that the typical user would need to protect his computer. Outpost Security Suite Free has excellent antivirus protection, antispyware protection, a world class firewall, and other protection modules that can provide reasonable security, and protect the user from most forms of malware. On October 8, 2010, I wrote about Trend Micro's new comprehensive commercial security suite, TrendMicro Titanium Maximum Security. This suite contains extremely comprehensive modes of protection, but is unusual in that it does not significantly degrade performance, and what is most unusual is that there is no "update" button, in that it is continuously updated using the new cloud computing technology. Simply, TrendMicro Titanium Maximum Security is always up to date in terms of malware protection, and there are no signature updates to schedule or manually download, because the protection is transparently and silently kept up to date. If I had a new Christmas computer, and I wanted to use a security suite, I would choose either Outpost Security Suite Free, or the commercial TrendMicro Titanium Maximum Security for my protection from cyber threats.

Much has happened in terms of computing over the past year; faster new processors are still frequently being introduced and put into production, pushing yesterday's new "gee whiz" processors into bargain priced computers, or into the discontinued clearance bargain bin. Hard drives have become larger in capacity, faster, and cheaper. A year ago a terabyte (1T)

hard drive (1024 gigabytes) was uncommon and expensive, but today they are available for as little as $50, with 1.5T and 2T drives becoming readily available, and priced in the $100 range. Newly released video cards are becoming faster and more powerful, with many supporting HD video, and capable of simultaneously running a monitor and an HDTV. This has expanded the demand for streaming media, including on demand HD movies from Netflix, Amazon, and other providers, negating the need to order and return DVD discs via the mail. On a recent trip to visit my daughter's family, I watched videos on my computer streaming from Netflix, connected to her 802.11N wireless router. She watches streaming Netflix videos directly on her HDTV, which is connected to her broadband internet. The distinctions between computers and home entertainment are blurring, as systems become integrated, bring both computing and entertainment together on a big screen TV.
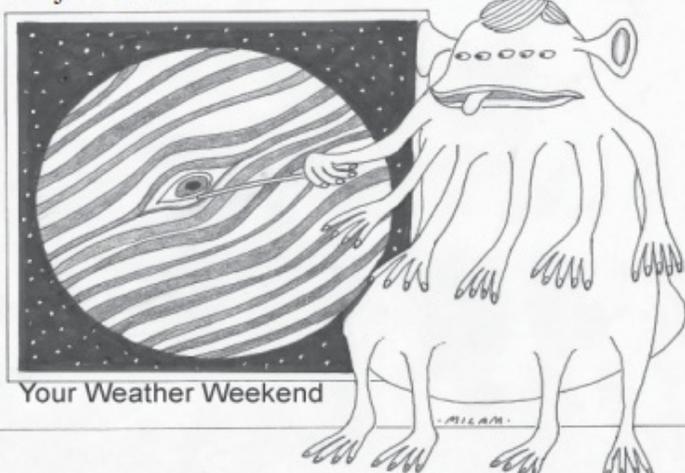
If this is just a microcosm of what has happened to home technology in 2010, I eagerly await what we will see in 2011.

Ira Wilsker is a member of the Golden Triangle PC Club as well as Director of the Management Development Program at Lamar Institute of Technology, in Beaumont, TX. He also hosts a weekly radio talk show on computer topics on KLVI News Talk AM560, and writes a weekly technology column for the Examiner newspaper <www.theexaminer.com>. Ira is also a police officer who specializes in cybercrime, and has lectured internationally in computer crime and security.

Computer Humor

On Jupiter the Weather Channel may be more scary, but just as dull.

Your Weather Weekend

© Bucky Milam 2010

"It looks like there are no asteroid collisions in the forecast and the Red Spot seems to be shrinking due to climate change. However, don't expect to spend any vacations there for at least another 300 years."

Bucky Milam is a master of the fine arts, with an emphasis on the cool and casual. He is the recipient of numerous awards for his painting and graphic design, which has been displayed at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum of Modern Art, the Chicago Art Institute, and the London and Tokyo Museums of Fine Art. A trumpet virtuoso, he performs widely in clubs throughout the region and is a recognized composer of jazz and classical music for brass.

Bucky comes to computing as an accidental tourist. His peculiar perspective is of the visual media and the image they project of our civilization and culture. You can find his musings in each monthly issue of dacs.doc. (Danbury Area Computer Society)

SmartPhone = PDA + Phone

By Phil Sorrentino, President, Sarasota PCUG, Florida
January 2011 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor
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SmartPhones can be seen all around. Notice the phone being used on your favorite TV show; next time, odds are that it'll be a SmartPhone. A year or two ago it was a flip phone (do you remember Jack Bauer on 24 using his?), but no more. Now the phone of choice seems to be the smartphone. Apple, and more recently, Google, have really changed the mobile phone landscape. The iPhone, with its iOS Operating System available only on the iPhone, released in 2009, really started the whole movement. Google, with its Android Operating System (provided for free to hardware phone manufacturers), has come on very strong in the past few months so that iPhones and Android phones now have about the same market share - about 35% each, which only leaves 30% to be shared by Blackberry, Nokia, and Microsoft.

The SmartPhone equality, as stated in the title, suggests that the smartphone is equal, in functionality anyway, to a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) and a standard mobile phone. PDAs have been a popular way of allowing one to have many of the computer files, pictures, videos and music, available on the go - remember the Palm Pilot. A phone was another necessity for someone who was always on the go. So for someone who had to be mobile and needed access their computer files, a phone and a PDA became a good combination. I carried a PDA for many years and more recently, a PDA and a flip phone. Now I can carry only one device, a SmartPhone. And, as a welcome side effect, now I only have to make sure one device is charged nightly.

The SmartPhone is made possible by a number of technologies. Among them are: Capacitive touch-screens; 3G (soon to be 4G) wireless telephone networks; Wi-Fi; GPS; Micro-miniature processors, memory and components; Digital Cameras; and phone oriented Operating Systems. Some of these technologies are used in phones - like touch screens, networks, small components, Digital cameras, and operating systems. And some are used in PDAs - like touch screens, Wi-FI, small components, and operating systems. As you can see there is a good bit of overlap, so putting it all together was just a natural. But it took the genius of Apple to put it all together and make it work and make it practical and make it cool. And now with the help of Google it has become more practical and popular.

All of the technology for replacing the mobile phone and the PDA is included in the smartphone, and then some. (I didn't have a good camera in my mobile phone, before.) But, it does take some planning and forethought to make the smartphone do everything. Some of the things to be concerned with are: Contacts, (which are phone numbers, addresses, e-mail addresses, and related notes); Calendar events; E-mail; Memos, (which are lists of important things); Documents; Spreadsheets; Pictures, Videos, Music; and Browsers. Before you can consider using any of these things there has to be an "App" (Application) installed on your smartphone. (I am using a Motorola Droid2 as an example, but most of what I am referring to will be very similar on another Android SmartPhone, and even similar for an Apple iPhone.) There are Apps for all of these tasks. In fact there are over 100,000 Apps for Android phones and over 240,000 Apps for iPhones.

So, the first thing to do is to identify an App to handle each task you want accomplished. Your SmartPhone probably came with a basic collection of Apps. Basic things like Contacts, Pictures, Videos, Music, and Camera will probably be covered by these Apps that were installed at the factory. If not, you can go to the "Market" for Android Apps, or the Apple Store for iPhone Apps, and find one that fits your needs. Many of the Apps at these stores (websites) are free or have a nominal cost, most under $10. Things like Word or PDF Documents, or Excel spreadsheets may have to be handled by an App from one of these stores. Once you get to the App store, you will find a myriad of App titles. You can typically search for "All Apps", or limit your search to only free ones. You can even search for Games that will run on your SmartPhone. When you find an App that you want, you will pay for it (via a credit card account that was previously set up) if it is not free, and then it will be downloaded right onto your SmartPhone. The download is completely controlled from the Market and there is no further action on your part needed. After the App is downloaded and installed, you will receive a message that it is complete. It couldn't be any easier.

Once an App has been downloaded, it can be placed on the home screen. Actually, one of the home screens. The Droid2 has 7 home screens. Multiple home screens make it easy for you to organize your Apps. Apps that you think work together can be collected on a particular home screen. You could have a home screen for entertainment, one for work, one for family, another for sports. Any organization of Apps that makes sense to you would be appropriate.

Once you've organized your home screens and downloaded the Apps needed, I'm sure you'll see that the smartphone is a very useful device for someone on the go. Future articles will concentrate on some of the new ways of interacting with the touch sensitive screen and some of the smartphone's more interesting features, but I think you will now agree that: SmartPhone = PDA + (not so smart) phone.

A Happier, Longer Life? Volunteer!
By Sr. Dorothy Robinson, Editor, Olympia Microcomputer Users Group, WA
December 2010 OMUG News
www.olymug.org / newsletter (at) olymug.org

Although there may be some situations where volunteering would not necessarily get you a longer, happier life (any veteran could fill you in on that), there are now studies showing that people who volunteer at least two hours a week do in fact receive health benefits from volunteering.

According to an article by Adam Voiland at http://health.usnews.com a 2007 report which drew on the results of 30 studies said volunteering can indeed be good for your health. Voiland says the report indicates that "people who volunteer enjoy longer lives, higher functional ability, and lower rates of depression and heart disease."

Volunteering keeps a person active and interested, as well as helping stay connected with other people.

Voiland quoted Steven Post, director of a research group at Case Western Reserve University that focuses on the "scientific study of altruism, compassion, and service," as saying, "The helping impulse is very fundamental. When it is locked off we do not flourish."

If we look around, there are friends, neighbors, and family who could use a helping hand now and then. There are also nonprofit organizations whose mission is to help people. You may be belong to one. In fact, if you're reading this newsletter, chances are you belong to The Olympia Microcomputer Users Group *(Modesto PCUG)*.

Any group needs leadership, and OMUG *(MPCUG)* is no exception. All our officers and key members are volunteers, and if you talk to any of them, my guess is that you'll find they enjoy taking an active part in our computer users group, keeping it alive to fulfill its mission.

The MPCUG provides an opportunity for users of "IBM compatible" computers to meet and share information, expertise and ideas on the subject of computers in relation to our everyday use. But most importantly, the MPCUG exists for the sole purpose of users helping each other, thus our motto, "User Helping User."

Think about why you joined OMUG *(MPCUG)*, and why you keep renewing your membership each year. Maybe you have computer expertise to offer and you enjoy helping others. Maybe you don't know a lot about computers and are looking for help. Whatever your reason, computer expertise, or lack of it, is irrelevant to participating in leadership of our group. People with many different lives, leisure and work experiences have served as OMUG *(MPCUG)* officers. You can, too.

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From Judy: Many user groups are having problems with declining membership, officer burn-out, lack of vendors to give presentations, etc. Are groups disbanding because of these problems? Yes. Is there hope for us as a community of people who still want to learn more about what's out there? I believe there is. Do we still have a purpose? I believe we do.

I'm president of a small group in the Santa Clarita Valley (by Magic Mountain) and we have branched out to learning about more than Windows, etc. Many UG leaders think we should have technology in our name instead of computer or PC since there is now so much more to learn about and technology would be a more descriptive name for a group. SmartPhones, the Cloud, new operating systems, new programs, different web browsers, digital / video cameras, etc. etc. etc. We've had the webmaster from our City give a presentation on how to use the website to accomplish many tasks, find up-to-date info about the SCV and more. The City's head of disaster preparedness gave us a very informative presentation last September

- disaster preparedness month (other clubs have had the Red Cross or fire department). In addition to giving us information that will help us during a disaster, did this apply to us as computer users? Yes, since they use them to keep people informed about what's happening during a disaster (or your phone via text message, e-mails, etc.). The online editor of our local newspaper makes a presentation almost every year, letting us know about the updates to the online newspaper (it's also print) since he last talked with us; he always gives us scoops on upcoming updates. One of our best programs last year was by a member of the astronomy club – fascinating what he does with his telescope, computer & printer (all at remote locations). We have members tell us about their favorite programs, websites, etc. We have Skype presentations (I'm always talking with vendors about doing this since most of them don't want to travel anymore). Smart Computing has a nifty Presentation in a Box and sends everything they would have normally brought with them to a presentation. Staples, Office Depot, Best Buy – they are making presentations to UGs. Many groups have had someone from their library make a presentation, even a couple, since there is now so much new in our libraries that relates to technology. Online banking is another topic. Does one of your schools have a robotics club? The kids love to show what the robots they have created can do. In our area, the electric company is upgrading to smart meters – several groups have had a presentation so their members can have up-to-date info about the changeover. A panel of 2-3 members talking about how they do preventive maintenance on their computer or just the plain 'ole Q&A session. Those are always so helpful to members because many get the same problems. Tips, tricks, short-cuts to make using our computers faster, easier, etc. – what a better place to get that info than a UG meeting.

Many groups have 2-3 people who take care of booking guest speakers for their meetings. That way one person doesn't need to do everything. One group in Claremont meets every Tuesday and they have 4 people on the program committee – they each take a meeting and the meeting subjects are always diverse.

I spend a lot of time reading other UG's newsletters and am always getting new idea; we have a group in the LA area (SCRUGS - Southern California Regional UG Summit) started by Steve Bass over 15 years ago and we meet quarterly to share ideas -- I still learn lots of new 'stuff' at each meeting from the other groups and I always learn something new at my club's meetings.

You've Got Them, Why Not Use Them?
By Vinny La Bash, Regular Contributing Columnist, Sarasota PCUG, FL
January 2011 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor
www.spcug.org / vlabash (at) comcast.net

People configure their desktops in different ways for an all encompassing assortment of reasons. Most use the Windows defaults which are quite reasonable, but operate from a false assumption that "factory specifications" are enough. Windows has lots of useful features not included in the default settings which could have great benefits, but if one doesn't know the features are there, one can never enjoy these prospective benefits.

Let's start by opening the Control Panel and clicking on Programs. In the Programs and Features section click the Turn Windows Features on or off. A dialog box appears which will enable you to turn features on or off. (See illustration).

There's probably much more here than you want, so let's examine several features that you are more likely to use rather than the ones which require professional technical knowledge to be useful.

The Indexing Service got a bad reputation in Vista because it was annoyingly slow. There is no doubt that Vista was a resource hog so any service or utility that had additional requirements tended to bog down the system even further. Microsoft resolved the problem in Windows 7 by turning the Indexing Service off by default. That's too bad because the utility can actually be very helpful in locating files and other content through flexible inquiries. Try it, you just may like it.

Internet Information Services (IIS) and Internet Information Services Hostable Web Core: You will not be held accountable if you don't know what these tools do or if you choose to ignore them. IIS is mostly regarded as a major component of a server while the Hostable Web Core performs fewer functions and needs fewer resources. If you write web based applications or wish to experiment hosting a web site on your desktop, these tools may be essential.

Microsoft Message Queue Server: This utility has been around for years and most application developers have come to ignore it because it's not new. If you send and receive messages on a regular basis with people who are in remote locations on the planet, and have "iffy" connections, you now have a tool to build a message queue, store a message within it, and send it when the connection to the recipient is up and running. You can also create a similar structure for receiving messages. Using this tool effectively requires basic programming skills.

Simple Network Management Protocol (SNMP): Everyone who uses a computer on a regular basis should be concerned about unauthorized access to personal information or attempts to trick people into revealing information which should remain private. If you have a home network, wireless or not, SNMP gives you better control over devices on the network. You can configure hardware, troubleshoot more effectively, and in many cases even track down attempts to crack into your network. This tool requires a working knowledge of how a network operates.

Telnet Client: This is a great diagnostic tool if your email client is acting strangely and normal diagnostics can not resolve the problem. Turn it on when you need it, and turn it off when you're not using it as there are security issues with it.

These tools are not for everyone, especially those with little computing experience, but your level of knowledge shouldn't remain at the novice stage. Challenge yourself and you won't be like the guy who thinks he has twenty years of experience when in reality all he has is one year of experience twenty times.

Claude's Bytes. . . January 2011
By Claude Delphia, Editor Emeritus, Modesto PC User Group

It's been quite a while since I last wrote for the PC Post. It's not that I didn't want to, but I got to the point to where I had so many things to do on my computer that writing a column was more time than I could devote to it.

I have kept up with MPCUG and talked to President Jim Goodman and other board members to check on what's happening. In my humble opinion it's time for the formal organization called MPCUG to wind down over this year, but that's just my opinion. Your board members will decide this in the coming months. Perhaps people can continue to meet and discuss their computer problems without a formal organization. Why not?

So here's what's been going on in my computer life.

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I've been working hard on history related projects for the Patterson Township Historical Society which I helped found over 40 years ago. My how time flies.

Much of my work involved working with computer related projects such as scanning thousands of photos and preserving hundreds of documents. It has been a labor of love.

During the process I learned to live with Vista on a daily basis. I knew that I would eventually need to move to Vista or the newer Win 7. Eventually the Vista computer had to go back to the museum and I was left with working with a slow XP system. Switching back was an experience I wouldn't want to do again. But things took a turn for the worst, which is almost predictable with computers.

My XP computer was one I built with Jim Goodman's help over six years ago. It led a relatively long life, but boy was it slow and since it was a 32 bit computer, there were newer programs it wouldn't run. But it was still workable and I began to work on converting it to Win 7 starting with a brand new hard drive. Unfortunately the Win 7 I bought required that XP be installed on the hard drive so that it was an upgrade. I installed Win 7 but I really didn't like the way it was acting.

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I quickly learned that when the computer was starting up, I could have it load XP on the old hard drive which was serving as the second drive. I highly recommend this as a way to still use your old hard drive with all it's programs. So I ended up using XP rather than working on the Windows 7 problem. I worked this way for about six weeks and then it happened.

On December 19th , most of Patterson experienced a power outage and my computer was on.

Well not for long. The power spike killed it dead and I was in shock. I'd never had a computer die that way in my PC years of computing starting with the first IBM-PC in December of 1981. To say the least, I was in shock. I did have an older laptop which I started to use while trying to decide what I was going to do. I even investigated an older computer to see if I could get it up and running as it would be better than the laptop.

Boy was the laptop slow. So slow that if I had to live with that, I might have decided to forget computing. Well not really, but living life at that speed was not what I had ever envisioned.

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The Monday after Christmas I went to Best Buy in Modesto and with the guidance of a good sales person, I purchased a new computer. All I really needed was the basic computer, no monitor or other extras, so it was relatively inexpensive and was plenty powerful for my needs and up to date to boot.

At this point, I'm still installing software to bring it up to my usage needs. I'm also spending a lot of time looking through backups for the various files I need. That will continue for quite a while. So far I can't find a few key files, but still have hope.

There is a period of Email files that I don't think can be recovered. I'm still investigating getting the hard drive in the dead computer working at which point I will have all the files I need. Getting access to that hard drive which won't work in the new computer, is a bit of an effort, but I have hope that I can access it without too much expense and that it will work.

So 2011 has dawned with a new future of computing, learning to like Windows 7 and MS Office 7 and a few other programs that work differently under Win 7.

I wish all of you a Happy New Year and make sure you have a high quality surge protector. It might have made the difference in losing my computer. At the first indication of a power problem, turn off your computer.

Smart Computing Tips & Fun Facts
www.smartcomputing.com

Use The Arrow Keys
Using a mouse to move elements of a PowerPoint slide around can be an aggravating when your mouse isn't sensitive enough to make slight adjustments. Instead of clicking and dragging an element around a slide, select it and use your keyboard's arrow keys to make very slight changes to its position.

Use A USB Hub
If you have extra peripheral USB devices lying around your desk, consider purchasing a USB hub. Many USB hubs are affordable and save you from having to plug and unplug extra USB

devices. USB hubs are available with four, seven, or more ports. Make sure to check for USB 2.0 capability if you need a speedy transfer. A USB hub is a small device that could increase your work efficiency, won't take up too much room, and is easy to install and use.

Posture
Sitting in the same position for hours at a time can cause neck and back pain, and slouching in your chair can exaggerate the problem. To avoid stress on your back, sit with your upper arms parallel to your spine and then move your chair close to your desk. Additionally, your entire back should be pressed against your chair back to evenly distribute pressure across your back. Finally, get up, stretch, or simply take a quick walk a few times a day to loosen up your muscles.

Turn Off Your PC To Save Energy
You don't work 24 hours a day (hopefully), so there's no need to leave your PC on all day. In addition to shutting your computer down at the workday's end, use standby or hibernate settings if you frequently step away from the computer throughout the day. As a rule, set these modes to kick in after 15 or 20 minutes of inactivity. Set the hard drive to hibernate after 30 minutes of nonuse. If you're using a screen saver, turn it off. Designed to lengthen the life of old CRT displays, screen savers aren't necessary with newer flat-panel LCDs. Some screen savers also draw on the graphics card, monitor, processor, and hard drive to function.

Save Battery Life
If you are looking for more ways to extend the life of your laptop battery, there's one you might not have thought of yet. If you defragment your notebook's hard drive regularly, your hard drive will demand less power since it's not working as hard, which in turn will save battery life.

Mouseless Excel-lence
When working in Microsoft Excel, you can ditch your mouse. You can navigate from cell to cell with the arrow keys, and by holding down SHIFT-arrow keys, you can select large areas of cells. If you want to edit the contents of a cell, select it with the arrow keys and press F2. You'll be able to work with the cell as if you'd double-clicked it with a mouse.

Excel Date & Time Shortcuts
To enter the date or time based on your PC's current clock setting into an Excel spreadsheet cell, you can use keyboard shortcuts and avoid that embarrassing typo. After you click on the cell you want, press CTRL and ; (semicolon) to insert the date or CTRL-SHIFT-; to enter the time.

Dirty Monitor
Eye strain is a very real problem for users who stare at computer monitors all day long. There's little sense in letting something like dust exacerbate the problem. If your monitor is dusty, your eyes must work harder to focus on what looks like fuzzy text. Use an approved brush or cleaning cloth to keep your monitor's screen clean and dust-free.

The Club's Meeting Place

Our general meeting and the Random Access Special Interest Group are held at the Denny's at 1525 McHenry Avenue

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PC Post

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Editor Emeritus: Claude Delphia
President Emeritus: Bud Bondietti – 1950 - 2008

Join The Modesto PC User Group

To join MPCUG (or just get more information about us, go to our Website and fill out the new member form or mail your check to: MPCUG, P.O. Box 5122, Modesto, CA 95352-5122. Membership is just $24 a year and includes 12 issues of the PC Post along with participation in all meetings and events. You will also receive E-mail advising you of extra events or news.

The PC Post and Editorial Policy

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