

# PC Post



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

**28 YEARS OF USER HELPING USER**

**FEBRUARY 2011, VOLUME 29.2**

## Inside this Issue

An App - What is it & What it does	2
The Seventh Son of Windows	3
Drop it in the Box: Dropbox, what it is, how it works	4
IRS Affiliates Again Offer Free Online Filing	7
Computer Humor	10
PC Cooling	11
What a nasty virus can do to your computer	12
Words of the Month	15
From Ray Nichols	15
Smart Computing Tips & Fun Facts	15
Officers, etc.	17

**February 24, 2011**

## Best Ways to Back Up Your Data

It's a given, a hard drive can go bad anytime.

In the Cloud or an external USB drive? If you don't do one or the other to back-up, you may be in trouble.

Cloud Storage: Cloud Storage does not require end-user knowledge of the physical location.

Your data may be stored in the USA or South Africa.

You may use Word, Excel and PowerPoint and have five years of data from each program on your hard drive. And don't forget about the five years of family pictures on that drive.

Or genealogy information, your tax records, etc. etc. etc.

*Automation is a technological process that does all the work while you just sit there. When you were younger, this was called "Mother" and she says back-up!. — Author Unknown*

*Backups? We don't need to backup our hard drives. The Government has a copy of them. — Author Unknown*

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



[www.compukiss.com](http://www.compukiss.com)  
[sandy@compukiss.com](mailto:sandy@compukiss.com)

## An App – What is it & What it does

An app can be found on the iPhone and the iPad as well as many other smart phones and tablet PCs. In fact, Apple's introduction of the idea of apps in 2008 is what made smart phones and tablet PCs so popular. Up until that time, we were all used to full-blown programs like those that run on a computer. Most of these programs contain millions of lines of code, have numerous functions, and have menus that open up to reveal a multitude of choices.

In contrast, an app is a little mini program that has one basic function. It is an expression in simplicity. A good app does only one thing and it does it very quickly and easily. There are no nested menus and there are very few choices to make. One similarity between a full-blown program and an app is that both can be started by an icon that you choose by using a mouse or by pressing your finger on the screen.

One of the best things about apps are that they are easy to use. The true beauty of the apps, however lies in their variety. There are hundreds of thousands of apps, but you don't have to use them all. You can choose only the ones you want. A computer program may be able to handle 100 different functions. Even if you only want to use one of those functions, you still have to install the entire program. Apps are different. You only install the ones you need.



However, like computer programs, apps are specific to an operating system. For example, a program that is created for the Mac will not run on a PC. An app that was created for the iPhone will not work on an Android phone. Each operating system has their own App Store or Marketplace where you can download apps. Many apps are free. Many are under \$2.

Right now there is a large selection of apps for the Apple iPhone and iPad at the iTunes App Store. BlackBerry, Google (Android), Microsoft, Nokia, and Samsung all offer apps through their own app storefronts.

If you have never used a smart phone or a tablet PC that uses apps, you will be amazed by the sheer number and variety of apps. Apple has over 300,000 apps in their App Store. Google has more than 200,000 in their marketplace.

Because of the wide variety of apps, it is difficult to talk about them all, but let me give you a quick idea of what an app can do. Using an app, you can express your artist abilities, play the piano, or visit with your Facebook friends. You can turn your phone into a level to get that picture straight, or turn it into a light saber and become a savior of the universe. There are apps to let you play games, find recipes, read news, get stock quotes, follow sports, shop, and compare prices. There are apps that help you relax, time the steeping of your tea, identify any song, tune your guitar, and even match the color of any object to a paint color.

Yes, there is an app that will help you do almost anything. And people are using these apps in numbers that seem almost unimaginable. The Apple app store opened on July 10, 2008 and they have already had over 10,000,000,000 downloads. The wild popularity of apps will entrench that word in the technical dictionaries for many years to come.

## **The Seventh Son of Windows Customizing the Notification Area**

**By Lee Reynolds, Contributing Editor, Boca Raton Computer Society, FL  
February 2011 issue, Boca Bits  
[www.brcs.org](http://www.brcs.org) / [leetutor \(at\) exploringwindows.com](mailto:leetutor@exploringwindows.com)**

### **Introduction**

The "Notification Area" is that area on the right-hand side of the Taskbar where your system clock resides, and probably a large number of other icons. It used to be called, prior to Windows XP, the "system tray." Programs just love to install an icon there, to supposedly speed up access to their features. You doubtless have a lot of not very useful icons there, which can sometimes be removed by selecting an option or preference from the menus of the associated program. And in XP and Vista, you can right click the Taskbar, select Properties from the context menu that scrolls out, click on the Notification Area tab, and then perform various operations in order to "hide inactive icons."

### **Windows 7**

#### **DEFAULT**

This situation has improved a lot in Windows 7. By default, there are only four icons that will appear in your Windows 7 taskbar notification area:

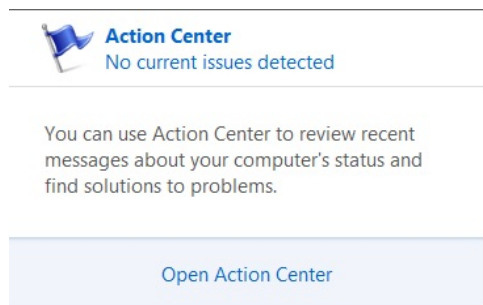
1. The Sound icon (so you can adjust the volume of your speakers or mute them)
2. The Network icon (so you can perform maintenance tasks concerning your network connection.
3. The Battery icon (if you're running Windows 7 on a laptop) to tell you how much charge is remaining to your laptop's battery or whether it's charging if you are running your laptop plugged into a wall outlet.
4. An icon connected with a new Control Panel applet called Action Center.

#### **ADDITIONAL**

If you have any other icons in the Notification Area (such as one for your antivirus program, for example), they will usually be found by clicking the little upward-pointing carat to the left of the Action Center icon, which causes a small popup window to be shown. If you want to see any of those icons in this popup window in your Notification Area instead, you can just drag them down there.

### **Windows 7 Action Center**

The Action Center icon will normally handle all those notification messages coming from the system when some program thinks you need to take an action of some kind.



For example: download important updates from Microsoft Update, or perform a scan with Windows Defender, or download the most recent antivirus data, etc.

In Windows 7 there is now a new Control Panel applet called Notification Area Icons, which takes the place of the corresponding tab of Taskbar Properties in Windows Vista, XP, and previous versions.

When you go to that Control Panel applet, you will be shown a list of each of the Notification Area icons, and for each one you can use the "list box" next to it to choose one of three possible settings:

- Show icon and notifications
- Hide icon and notifications
- Show only notifications

**Drop it in the Box: Dropbox, what it is, how it works**  
 By Jo Graziade, Leader, Word Processing Workshop, Brookdale Computer Users Group, NJ  
 February 2011 issue, Bug Bytes  
<http://bcug.com> / gio520 (at) gmail.com

### What is Dropbox?



Suppose you were able to save work without using a flash drive, a disk (CD or DVD-R or RW), or an external drive, or even email, and move files between your laptop and desktop? For many years, I, like so many of us, had developed methods and procedures to upload, download, and save documents, music and pictures to a storage device, only to have to rely on memory to locate it afterwards. Another irritating problem for me, especially when I was working, was to identify the "latest" version, so that an older file would not overwrite my work

during a "Save As."

Enter Dropbox, a useful application that eliminates lots of work and uncertainty.

Dropbox is a free download that offers protection and convenience and is easy to use. There is basically no learning involved. You should, however, be familiar with Drag & Drop and Move vs. Copy. Why not give Dropbox a try and see whether this is for you.

I first heard of Dropbox during a meeting of my camera club. Some members seemed happy with it; there were no negative comments, leading me to investigate. Having a way to store photography files without worrying about loss or corruption seemed an ideal solution to the problem of travel pictures. I got to test this, when I maxed out the Dropbox folder at around 2

GB during a vacation in Boston. There are two ways to increase your storage capacity – you can purchase the program on a monthly or yearly basis, or you can have friends join the service and be rewarded a few more MB's up to a whopping 8 GB.

### **Get the App**

To acquire Dropbox, you need to go to the website at [www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com). The download is quick and easy. Just run it, and follow the instructions. There are six initial steps:

1. Take the tour
2. Install Dropbox
3. Put files in your Dropbox folder
4. Install Dropbox on other computers
5. Share a folder with friends or colleagues
6. Invite friends to join

It is necessary to install the program on all computers that you will be using. The setup is done on the website, and the instructions are easy.

In my case, this is my laptop and my desktop. As I move around with the laptop, to meetings or anywhere I use it, I'm able to save files as they are created, directly into the Dropbox folder, which sits in the system tray area. By clicking on its icon, Dropbox will provide easy and helpful commands.

In addition, I know that once I reach home, altered files will be available and updated on my desktop machine. They can be dragged into their proper locations on the storage drives. This has been extremely useful. Instead of dealing with two documents, a newer version and an older version, there is only one synchronized version.

Another nice aspect is that I don't have to worry about misplacing storage disks or flash drives, which does happen. I also would think that it lessens stress, as there is nothing to lose!

### **On the Website**

There is plenty of information on the Dropbox website. There are videos and explanations of the synching process. Basically, anything that is put into the local folder is also recorded on the Internet. You can also access your files and upload them directly onto the Dropbox server.

It can be compared to using GoogleDocs or Windows Live Mesh. Collaboration, by the way, is possible. I haven't delved into this, because I simply need a way to move data between computers. If you want to learn more, you need to visit the Dropbox website and study this feature.

The Dropbox website has five tabs:

► "Get Started" walks you through several chores before you can earn some extra space. This is simple and easy to understand.

► “Files” is the online list of your current Dropbox inhabitants, their sizes and the dates they were modified. You can sort each column by clicking on its heading. There are buttons here that let you do even more. A basic knowledge of file management is all you need to comprehend this part of the application.

► “Events” is a listing of various edits, deletions, and other information about your files.

► “Sharing” allows you to create a new folder to share, or share an existing folder. By following the prompts, you can identify who you want to share the folder with. In my case, I began typing my husband’s email address, and it was prefilled for me. This would make it easier for multiple shares in a business or committee setting. Perhaps our next Board meeting minutes will appear in a Dropbox folder! I also found that once the shared folder appeared in my local Dropbox folder, I could rename it and manage it locally. A refresh caused the change to appear on the website immediately. I like this type of efficiency. There is no lag time, and information can be relayed quickly between computers.

► Finally, “Help” is all the rest. It seems that the Dropbox website is complete; you can spend much time learning about it. I would suggest that you jump in and try out the program; you can learn by doing as well.

There are a couple of things I would warn you about as a new user. If you simply drag and drop the file back and forth, it copies the file. You may want to right-drag and choose move to ensure you have the latest version of your work or photograph. Also, having a comfort level with storage online to some extent, and not adding things like your Social Security number or banking information, goes without saying. Aside from that, there are no problems I can see with using this reliably.

### **One Last Thing**

I do have one favor to ask you if you do join Dropbox; please use the link! It will enable both of us to get some extra space, a great reward and well deserved!

The link to join on my behalf is <http://db.tt/sHvgWQp>. I promise I will not waste that space!!!!!!

### **System Requirements**

Hardware: At least 512MB of RAM; free space on your computer equal to your Dropbox storage quota.

### **Software**

- Windows: Windows 2003, Windows XP, Windows Vista, and Windows 7 (32 and 64-bit).
- Mac OS X: Tiger (10.4) or later.
- Linux: Ubuntu 7.10+ and Fedora Core 9+.
- Also iPhone iOS 3.1, Android 1.5 and Blackberry 4.5.

Pricing: Up to 2 gigabytes of free storage space; DropBox 50, up to 50GB storage for \$9.99/month or \$99/year; Dropbox 100, up to 100GB storage for 19.95/month or \$199/year.

For more information: <https://www.dropbox.com/plansproducts/desktop>



## IRS Affiliates Again Offer Free Online Filing

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

### WEBSITES:

<http://freefile.irs.gov>

<http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118986,00.html?portlet=6>

<http://www.irs.gov/ita/index.html>

<http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=235215,00.html?portlet=6>

<http://freefile.irs.gov/get-more-information.html> (States that have Free Filing)

It is again that time of year that we are receiving those dreaded W-2 and 1099 forms. This year due to a local holiday in Washington, DC, we actually have until April 18 to file, rather than the traditional April 15 that we have all come to approach with trepidation. The Sunday newspaper sale books, big box stores, and online retailers are rife with deals on tax preparation software, including big discounts, rebates, gift cards, package deals where the tax software is bundled with other software; one big box store is even offering the major tax software titles with a \$15 gift card and up to \$1200 worth of other non-tax software programs at deep discounts, many of which are "free after rebate" (read the details in the store carefully before the purchase!). The TV and newspaper are loaded with advertisements for commercial tax preparation services, and one local tax preparer has some poor soul standing for long hours on the street corner outside of his temporary store front location, wearing a foam Statue of Liberty costume, and carrying a sign touting the tax service.

Depending on our individual circumstances, we have a lot of options that we can utilize in order to complete this annual event. Many of us still choose to use the traditional pencil and paper method to fill in the blanks on what we hope is the correct tax form. Others have decided to use one of the many independent or franchised tax services that spring up in retail stores or in vacant store fronts every spring, like mushrooms on my lawn after a heavy rain. Some choose to use the expertise of CPA's to prepare their taxes, while millions of others purchase commercial tax software to prepare their income taxes. Once again there is a free alternative available to millions of people to prepare their federal income taxes, and that is the FreeFile service offered by the 16 participating members of the IRS approved "Free File Alliance". For those who still desire to do their own tax calculations, there is also one additional IRS approved provider who offers simple online forms that can be filled in by the user, calculated by the user, and then e-filed, all for free.

Want a  
Free & Easy  
way to do your  
taxes?

Visitors to the IRS FreeFile website at [freefile.irs.gov](http://freefile.irs.gov) will find the process easy to navigate and use. According to the IRS, everyone, regardless of income and circumstances, is eligible to use at least some of the free online services. At the FreeFile website, the user



follows three simple steps to prepare, calculate, and files his taxes. First, the IRS suggests that the user gathers last year's tax forms, as well as this year's (2010) W-2, 1099, and other tax statements. The IRS then requests that the user calculates his "AGI" or "Adjusted Gross Income" to determine which of the free services he is eligible for. Wikipedia defines AGI as the gross income " ... less allowances for personal exemptions and itemized deductions. Adjusted gross income is gross income less certain specific items." The reason for this preliminary determination is to determine the individual's eligibility for any or all of the 16 free online tax services. Individuals or families with an AGI of less than \$58,000 may be eligible for the free online tax services, while those with an AGI of more than \$58,000 can still use the free online forms to calculate their own taxes, and then use the free e-file service. According to the IRS, about 70% of all taxpayers are eligible for the free full-service online filing by having an AGI of less than \$58,000

The second step is to either select a FreeFile provider (if eligible), or to use the free online forms. A wizard is available to help the user select a free provider, or the user can select from the list provided by the IRS. The wizard asks a few questions to determine the proper provider, these questions being your age, your AGI, your state of residence, eligibility for an earned Income Credit (if known), and if you or your spouse earned pay from the military. Answering these few questions will present the

### Welcome to H&R Block Free Edition

#### Returning User

Username

Password

[Unable to access your account?](#)

Remember my username on this computer

[Go To My Account](#)

#### New User

[Create My Account](#) [Start Without an Account](#)

eligible user with a list of IRS approved providers who will offer complete online tax calculations and e-filing services. For the eligible user who desires to manually select his provider of free federal tax services, many of the providers will have familiar names. Some of the best known providers of the free online tax service include H&R Block (Free federal online tax return preparation and e-file if your

**Totally Free Tax Return!** Guaranteed 100% Accurate

- ✓ **FREE to Prepare**
- ✓ **FREE to Print**
- ✓ **FREE to E-File**

Learn More [Free! Start your Federal return](#)

Prepare, Print, & E-File FREE | Maximum Refund Guaranteed | For Complex & Simple Returns | Low-Priced State w/ Free E-File

**TurboTax** Free Edition

[Enable Screen Reader](#) | [Sign-in Help](#)

**New to TurboTax?**

### TurboTax Online Federal Free Edition

File your federal taxes, **FREE** AND get your biggest refund

Here's how it works:

1. Asks simple questions and fills in the right forms for you
2. Helps you get your biggest refund
3. Gets your refund fast with e-file\*\*

adjusted gross income (AGI) is \$58,000 or less and you are age 51 or younger. This federal offer is valid in all states); TurboTax (Free federal online tax return preparation and e-file if your adjusted gross income (AGI) is \$31,000 or less or if you are active military with an AGI of \$58,000 or less or you qualify for the Earned

Income Tax Credit. This federal offer is valid in all states); and TaxAct (Free federal online tax return preparation and e-file if your adjusted gross income (AGI) is \$58,000 or less and you



are age 19 through 55. This federal offer is valid in all states). Other FreeFile providers have specific state residence requirements, military pay, other lower income requirements, or age requirements. All of the free providers use sophisticated tools and strategic online interviews to properly prepare the user's taxes, and perform all of the calculations. As long as the user accurately answers the online questions, and correctly enters the requested information, all 16 of the FreeFile providers will provide accurate results. It should be noted that while all 16 providers will likely do a satisfactory job completing federal tax forms, none of them will complete state tax forms for free; most of them will complete state tax forms for a fee, typically in the \$10 range, but the state fees do vary. The IRS has also compiled a list of the 22 states that have their own free filing services, and this list is available at [freefile.irs.gov/get-more-information.html](http://freefile.irs.gov/get-more-information.html).

The third and final step is e-filing the tax return. All of the listed FreeFile providers will electronically file (e-file) the completed tax return utilizing a secure encrypted system, directly with the IRS. A digital confirmation receipt is generated, and the user can track the progress of his refund, if a refund is due. the user can also print a copy of his completed tax forms for his own records. The user can optionally select to have his refund (if any) direct deposited into his existing bank or credit union account, which will be deposited much faster than waiting for a paper check in the mail. According to the IRS website, users who e-file and have a refund direct deposited can expect the refund to be posted to his account in as little as 10 days. If a balance is due the IRS, the user can select to pay the IRS directly by check or money order, or for a nominal fee to pay the IRS electronically online.

The IRS has set high standards for safety and security which the Free File Alliance participants are committed to abide by. According to the IRS, the user may want to use the FreeFile service (if eligible) because it is "Fast, Safe, and Free". According to the IRS, over 30 million taxpayers have taken advantage of the FreeFile system since its inception. Available 24 hours a day and seven days a week, the FreeFile system is readily accessible, easy to use, and can provide a valuable service to the taxpayer. An entire federal tax return can be prepared and sent to the IRS from the user's computer, without the need to go elsewhere or buy anything. The system is safe and secure, and can be used by those eligible at their convenience, but remembering the April 18 deadline. For those who are eligible, and about 70% of you are indeed eligible, this FreeFile service provided by the IRS and the 16 members of the FreeFile Alliance may be a very worthwhile way to quickly complete this sometimes troubling annual task.

*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 KLVJ News Talk AM560, and writes a weekly technology column for the Examiner newspaper <[www.theexaminer.com](http://www.theexaminer.com)>. Ira is also a police officer who specializes in cybercrime, and has lectured internationally in computer crime and security.*

## Computer Humor



© Bucky Milam 2011

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)

## PC Cooling

By Phil Sorrentino, President, Sarasota PCUG, Florida

February 2011 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor

[www.spcug.org](http://www.spcug.org) / [president \(at\) spcug.org](mailto:president@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-sinks 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 to 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.

© 2010 by Phil Sorrentino

## What a nasty virus can do to your computer

By Merle Nicholson, Secretary, Tampa PCUG, Florida

November 2010 issue, Bits of Blue

[www.tpcug.org](http://www.tpcug.org) / [merle \(at\) merlenicholson.com](mailto:merle@merlenicholson.com)



I recently was asked to remove a virus from a friend/client's notebook. For all intents and purposes, it rendered the computer completely in-operative. The virus was in a virus category of "Rogue antivirus software." There are many of them out there for the unwary to catch, and this one, called "ThinkPoint," even has the Windows flag on it to further fool you into thinking it is legitimate. The only option you can see is "Safe Startup," and that takes you to a virus scanner and a way to purchase the product.

If you close it out, it shows you a blank desktop, no icons, no menus. You can turn the machine off, that's about it. Turn it back on, same situation. I did figure out a way to kill it through the Task Manager's Run command, and then run the desktop. I also found some things written up on the Internet to do something similar, but no help in removing it. I did remove it using some very clever, obscure skills, several virus scanners, then finding and removing twenty or so copies of it. But the computer really didn't work well enough to use. What I found surprised me, and this is what the article is about and what you can do.

Here's a list of what I found. Some things are by deduction and may not be 100% accurate. But I am 100% certain that these problems existed. All of the things fit into a strategy that prevents you from fixing the computer.

1. The worst thing: The computer will not boot into safe mode. It blue screens every time. I'm speculating that ThinkPoint either corrupted an existing driver or put a new one in that loads and then fails. The way to fix this is to do a system repair or a complete reformat and installation. I did not want to impose that cost on my customer, and she agreed (it's not a primary computer, and it's rather old). So I left it that way.
2. All the system restore points were unusable. Refused to restore to any point.
3. To run most anything, an official-looking popup would ask to confirm the logon user and give a box for an alternative user account that did not work. This is to make sure that everything you try is run under the current user account which has been modified to prevent circumventing the virus. What you want to run is Explorer.exe giving you your desktop, and every effort is made to prevent you from doing this.
4. Most – perhaps all – items in Control panel will not run. It gave a warning that the administrator account has restricted its use. I did manage to get into the power configuration, but it would not accept any change. The computer would go into sleep mode

after about 20 minutes, keeping me from running a full system scan from any antivirus software unless I sat there and wiggled the mouse occasionally for four hours.

5. The Internet articles say that even if you purchase the software to fix a bogus virus, ThinkPoint stays on the computer. The uninstall just errors out.
6. The Internet articles say that it installs other viruses, and I did find a half dozen other viruses, mostly downloaders.
7. It leaves about 20 copies of itself under various random names, and places items in the registry to run each of them. So removing the active virus is just the beginning. I also found a couple of viruses in the System Restore files.
8. It apparently makes changes to the current user account profile that look like group policy changes, even though this was Windows XP Home, which doesn't have group policy capability.
9. Only after all the bad software is cleared from the machine can you then get rid of the modified account by creating a new administrative account, copying all of the user files from the old to the new – except for the profile files, then deleting the old account after locating the email files.

Isn't this scary? It is to me, and I (95%) fixed this one with a lot of work. The idea of having to fix my own machine after something like this gives me nightmares.

What you can do to prevent this: A sizable number of virus infections now are rogue anti-virus'. There's an understandable reason for this. It creates revenue. Old-fashioned viruses are malicious, but have no revenue-producing strategy. In other words, it's now about money. Most all viruses are sent to you via web pages, and most of those are porn sites, either designed that way or hacked from outside. Porn sites are visited so often, they are a very good candidate for this kind of thing. Also, presumably the porn site owners don't have the skill to remove sophisticated hacks. But most any web site is vulnerable. In any case, you must select something on the site – click on it – to give the browser a chance to violate security rules.

The next common way to get a virus is with downloads. And that means just about any download or file transfer. So you have to get any and all files from reputable sites like iTunes or Downloads.com, Amazon etc., which have the resources to check their own content.

But that leaves any and all file-sharing sites absolutely and definitely off the list. So if you're downloading songs for free, you're in trouble. Any file-sharing site's software must be uninstalled from your computer.

And that also goes for any peer-to-peer gaming sites, LimeWire, Kazaa, and any and all IM programs that allow peer-to-peer file exchanges.

And while we're at it, remove – uninstall – anything that says "Toolbar." Right now. Want to know why toolbars are free? Because they're a conduit for pushing advertising to you; and

they're easily exploited. Besides you don't need them. They want you to believe you do, of course! But the browser itself and a couple of favorites will do anything a toolbar will do.

An alternative is giving up gaming and IM and to start purchasing songs. So if you have kids who will just die without peer-to-peer gaming or IM and stealing songs, the answer is to live with it with some intelligent prevention.

First, if at all possible, put the kids (and maybe grandpa) on a Windows 7 machine. If you have some internal networking and file sharing, Windows 7 Pro is better because it will back up to a network drive. But so will Acronis Home, or 2010 or 2011, running under Win 7 Home Premium.

Make sure you have a full system backup, and replace it monthly. Use Windows 7 Backup or Acronis. Believe me, restoring the entire system hard drive is way, way better than any alternative that I can think of. Look at what I had to do with ThinkPoint. Want to try it?

I guess it's obvious, but a strong anti-virus program running on your machine is essential. BUT – this is important – make sure you look at the scheduling part of it and make sure it will automatically download new definitions and also run a full system scan at a time of day that the machine will most likely be turned on. Same for Windows Updates. Make certain that all important updates are installed as soon as they are available.

Password protect your main administrative account (this is the one that comes first with the computer) and bury the password paper in the back yard and leave the location with your attorney. Better yet, Win 7 allows you to create a flash drive that will unlock the computer. Hide it under some rubber fake dog poop someplace.

THEN: Create a non-administrative account for yourself – a regular non-privileged account, and a separate one – or one for each kid. A regular account cannot install software. But most importantly, SOFTWARE that is run under this account can't install software. Ah HA!

Then one more step. Set the screensavers to require a sign-in on wake-up, and ALWAYS log off when you leave the computer. That's especially essential when leaving the administrative account.

Skills: There are a few things that would be very helpful to learn. The big one is navigating the computer file system using Windows Explorer. Find out how your files are organized, and more importantly, how to change what files you can view. That's in Windows Explorer, Tools, Folder Options, View tab. Second Important Skill – learn to use the Add, Remove Programs. That's "Programs and Features" in Vista and Win 7. When you find an installed program that you are not using (say, anything with the word Apple or toolbar), just uninstall it, and see how it goes.



### Words of the Month Program / Data

**What is a program?** Also known as software. A program is simply something that allows you to work or play on the computer. A game is a program, a word processor is a program, Windows is a program.

Programs are used to create documents and files for the user, or to just have fun. Programs are what actually put your computer to good use. Without a program, your computer is impotent.

**What is data?** Letters, numbers and symbols that are input via keyboard, mouse, etc.; saved and processed by a computer for output as usable information such as a document, spreadsheet, etc..

### From Ray Nichols

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

Please also remember to bring your used magazines, books, videos, DVD's, and cassettes for distribution to Veterans in our area. If you have old household or device batteries, or used CFL (Compact Fluorescent Lamp) bulbs, bring them for legal recycling (it is against the law to dispose of them in the trash). Old Cellphones can be converted to Telephone Calling Cards for overseas Military Personnel. Old eyeglasses will be turned over to the Lions Club for reissuing to needy people



### Smart Computing Tips & Fun Facts

[www.smartcomputing.com](http://www.smartcomputing.com)

### Weather On The Go

Want to know what the weather is like at home, but don't have access to the Internet or The Weather Channel? Simply text the letter w followed by your ZIP code to 466453 (GOOGLE). Text message fees will apply, but for a relatively small amount of money, you'll quickly have the weather forecast on your mobile phone.



**Modesto Find-HG.Info**  
sources for area home & garden  
**home & garden**  
artsandhome.com  
Claude Delphia, publisher

---

**Websites, Photo Editing & Graphics**  
209-402-1936



For Information about our website host and how you can get on board:

Click on this link [info@fire2wire.com](mailto:info@fire2wire.com)

### 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

**Need help hooking up that new PC, or installing DSL-Cable?**

Call Jim Goodman, \$60.00 for as long as it takes.579-0122

[jgood99@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jgood99@sbcglobal.net)

Modesto, Ceres Area

### Cyrano Writing & Editing

When you need help putting it in words, call Cyrano.

(209) 523-4218; 499-5401

*Resumes, letters, applications, articles, newsletters, press releases, theses*

Elizabeth Leedom

## ***Modesto PC User Group Officers***

President	Mike Kumler	531.2262	president@mpcug.net
Program VP	Jim Goodman	579.0122	sig@mpcug.net
Secretary	Terry Fix	524.8062	secretary@mpcug.net
Treasurer	Barbara Cameron	522.1389	treasurer@mpcug.net
Director-at-Large	John Selover		dal@mpcug.net

## **Appointed Positions**

SIG Coordinator	Jim Goodman	579.0122	sig@mpcug.net
Press Relations	Elizabeth Leedom	523.4218	programvp@mpcug.net
Membership	Hank Mudge	529.1936	membership@mpcug.net
Webmaster	Jim Goodman	579.0122	webmaster@mpcug.net
Editor	Judy Taylour	661.252.8852	scvjudy@usa.net

## **PC Post**

Editor Emeritus: William "Doc" Holloway – 1920-1996

Editor Emeritus: Claude Delphia

President Emeritus: Bud Bondiotti – 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***

*The PC Post is published online 12 times per year and is available to all group members as a membership benefit. Annual group membership dues are \$24.00. Opinions expressed in PC Post do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of the members as a group or the Board of Directors. The PC Post encourages group members to submit articles for publication. We would like to have articles which deal with the writer's experience with computer hardware and software or digital photography. An article may deal with any computer-related subject provided it contains no libelous or offensive material. We can't use information copied from other publications without written permission except for quotes. Articles should be submitted in unformatted MS Word or RTF text. Proofread and run your spell checker; watch for special upper and lower case in brand names. If you want to include a graphic, please send it as a jpeg attached to the E-mail submitting your article. Please note in the article where the jpeg should be placed. We reserve the right to edit articles for length or to improve readability. Longer articles may be published in several parts. We will not knowingly promote unlicensed businesses. Letters to the editor are encouraged. All articles and letters to the editor should be submitted to the editor via E-mail as an attached file (Word or rtf). Please include your name, day and evening phone numbers.*