

PC Post



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July 28, 2011

Microsoft SkyDrive

Microsoft is giving you 25 GB of free space in the Clouds. They call this SkyDrive, it's part of Microsoft's free Live services.



Are you confused about this cloud stuff? The president is trying to understand how to use SkyDrive. At this meeting, we will look at what Microsoft is doing with SkyDrive.

SkyDrive is a file storage and sharing service that allows users to upload files to the cloud, and then access them from a web browser.

You need a Hotmail account to use SkyDrive & Mesh
Part one: Will introduce you to the bases of SkyDrive
Part two: We will move data, pictures to the SkyDrive and look at Mesh.

Also, at 7:30 pm, the webmaster Jim, will talk about your hard drive and S.M.A.R.T Self-Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Technology

The purpose of S.M.A.R.T. is to warn a user of impending drive failure while there is still time to take action, such as copying the data to a replacement device.

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 - August 3, 7pm at Ridgeway's

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Save Money on Telephone Calls

Many of us remember when we all paid a monthly fee to the telephone company for our landline and paid exorbitant rates for long distance service. If you had friends or relatives living far away, those monthly bills could really add up. You may even remember that when a call from afar would come in, the person who answered the phone would promptly announce that the call was "long distance" and the recipient of the call would rush over to the phone so the connection time would be kept as short as possible.

Thankfully, all of that is in the past. Technology has brought us many ways to keep in touch with friends, family, and business associates around the world quite inexpensively.

There are actually two different technologies that have greatly impacted our telephone-type communications. First is the emergence of cell phones. Today most of us are using cell phones for everyday communications. Since cell phones work on "minutes" rather than distance, you can basically call anywhere in the US more economically than you can with the old "long distance" service that the telephone companies provide. Each cell phone company offers somewhat unique features, but all are money-savers. For instance, some carriers allow you to call anyone else on that carrier at no charge. Some have special evening and weekend rates. Some allow you to list up to ten telephone numbers that you can call at any time with no charge.

Cell phone charges are generally much more expensive when you want to call overseas, but there is a great technological solution for that too. It is the second technology that has greatly impacted telephone-type communications. It is called VoIP, which stands for Voice Over Internet Protocol. VoIP uses the Internet to make telephone calls. Most of the major telephone and cable companies now offer some sort of "Internet" calling packages. Other companies like Vonage and Net2Phone have made a splash in this industry.

VoIP allows you to use your broadband Internet connection to make phone calls. VoIP service through a major carrier often offers additional features that you not generally offered through a regular telephone service plan. With a VoIP plan from a telephone or cable company you can often get voicemail, call forwarding, caller ID, and 3-way conference calling at no extra cost. Some VoIP providers also offer online account management, online voice mail, detailed call logging, and call-forwarding.

You can also use VoIP with any "telephone-type" company involved. You simply use your computer to make calls. Skype is one of the most popular services of this type. And the price is right. Making Skype calls from computer to computer is totally free. If you hook up two computers that have webcams, you can make video calls where you can see and talk with someone at the same time. You can also call from your computer to landlines and mobile numbers in the US and Canada for \$2.99 a month. If you don't want to be tied to the



computer, you can purchase a Skype telephone that uses your computer to call, while you talk on a traditional-type telephone handset. You can also access Skype from many mobile phones. This lets you to place calls without adding to your minutes. There are many Skype competitors like GoogleTalk, Yahoo Messenger, and iCall.

There are also other unique VoIP solutions. You may have seen magicJack advertised on late night TV. It is a small device that plugs into the USB port on your computer. With magicJack you get your own telephone number. You can make calls right from the computer screen or you can attach a regular telephone to the device and use it to make free phone calls in the US and Canada. I have a set of wireless phones attached to the magicJack that allows me to make and receive calls anywhere in the house. If a friend or relative also has a magicJack, you can make free calls to them even if they are one the other side of the world.



magicJack costs about \$40 for the device and first year of service and \$20 a year for service after that. It's pretty useful and inexpensive.

By the way, if you have a land-line telephone number that you want to keep, you can move it (port it) over to a mobile phone. magicJack says that starting this August you will also be able to use your old telephone number with the magicJack, as well. So you don't even have to give up your old number to use the new technologies.

Whether you use a cell phone or a VoIP solution, you should realize that VoIP call may not be perfect. Cell phones sometimes drop calls and have areas where you can't get service. Services like magicJack and Skype are dependent on your broadband Internet connection. So if your connection speed is good, the call will be excellent, but if your Internet slows down, you may get a poorer call quality. Yet, both of these solutions will save you money and you may find, like me that occasional slight inconvenience is worth the cost savings. I gave up both my business and personal land line almost two years ago. I now rely on my cell phones, Skype, and magicJack. I am saving a bundle and enjoying every minute.

The Cloud

By Berry F. Phillips, Member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City
July 2011 issue, eMonitor
[www.ccokc.org / bfpdata](http://www.ccokc.org/bfpdata) (at) 1access.net

"Cross my palm with silver" is the common opening line of a fortune teller before looking into her crystal ball to foretell the future. Perhaps at looking into the future of computing we should consult the "clouds" not a crystal ball! "Beam me up, Scotty!"

Your computer in the future may contain almost no software or data. It could be nothing more than a display terminal for processes occurring on a network of computers far away called "The Cloud." A common explanatory analogy is that of public utilities such as electricity, gas,

and water. Just as centralized and standardized utilities free users from the difficulties of generating electricity or pumping water, cloud computing frees users from certain hardware and software installation and maintenance tasks through the use of simpler hardware that accesses a vast network of computer resources (processors, hard drives, etc.) The sharing of resources reduces the cost to individuals.

Today, many of us connect to web-based email such as Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo, a company owned e-mail, or even an e-mail client program such as Outlook, Evolution, Mozilla Thunderbird or Entourage that connects to a cloud email server. Utilizing desktop applications to connect to your email is considered a cloud application.

The key characteristic of cloud computing is that computing is "in the cloud." The processing (and the related data) is not in a specific, known or static place(s). This is in contrast to a model in which the processing takes place in one or more specific servers that are known. All the other concepts mentioned are supplementary or complementary to the concept. In the 1960s John McCarthy said, "computation someday will be organized as a public utility." Almost all the modern-day characteristics of cloud computing were thoroughly explored in Douglas Parhill's 1966 book, "The Challenge Of the Computer Utility."

What are some of the key benefits to cloud computing? Agility improves with the users' ability to rapidly and inexpensively re-provision technological infrastructure resources.

Application Programming Interface (API) accessibility to software that enables machines to interact with cloud software in the same way the user interface facilitates interaction between humans and computers.

Cost is claimed to be greatly reduced and in a public cloud delivery model capital expenditure is converted to operational expenditure. Device and location independence enable users to access systems using web browser regardless of the location they are using (e.g., PC, mobile phone).

As infrastructure is off-site (typically provided by a third-party) and accessed via the Internet, users can connect from anywhere. This is why many IT professionals believe the future of computing is mobile cloud-based. There may be one day when desktop and laptop computers will be as archaic as dinosaurs. Multi-tenancy enables sharing of resources and costs across a large pool of users.

Reliability is improved if multiple redundant sites are used, which makes well designed cloud computing suitable for business continuity and disaster recovery. Scalability is improved on a self-service bases near real-time.

Performance is monitored and consistent, using web services as the system interface.

Security could improve due to centralization of data.

Maintenance for cloud computing applications is easier because



they do not need to be installed on each user's computer. They are easier to support and to improve as the changes reach the client instantly.

There are different clouds like public clouds, community clouds, hybrid clouds, combined clouds and private clouds which have specific applications. The operation and development of these clouds are called cloud engineering. Cloud storage is a model of networked computer data storage where data is stored on multiple servers which are usually hosted by third parties, rather than hosted on dedicated servers.

I downloaded two cloud-based freeware anti-virus programs on my system to see how they worked. One was Panda and the other was Immunit; I loaded both of them so they ran on my system by themselves. They had one thing in common as they used little resources, and there were few if any updates. Of course, that is to be expected since all the virus databases are updated in the cloud. I found both programs worked very well. Panda will not run with any other anti-virus system on; however Immunit works very well with another anti-virus system operating. As a general rule, users are cautioned to use only one anti-virus system to avoid conflicts. I think in the future we will see more cloud-based applications. There are several companies now providing cloud-based storage for a fee. Looking ahead, mobile devices using cloud computing may indeed be the computing of the future.

My thanks to Wikipedia for most of the information that is contained in this article.

Microsoft Offers Free "Health Vault" for Personal Medical Records

By Ira Wilsker, Member, Golden Triangle PC Club, TX; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio Show Host, Mondays, 6-7pm CT, KLVI.com

WEBSITES:

<http://www.healthvault.com>

<http://health.google.com>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microsoft_HealthVault

For the past few years I have been using two primary methods for recording personal medical information. One method I have been using to keep track of my personal medical information and records is an 8 gig flash drive attached to my car key chain along with a large, red, aluminum, engraved medic alert logo. This flash drive has three redundant files in different formats (Word doc, RTF, and PDF) containing my medical history, medical imagery, prescription list, emergency contact information, a copy of my health insurance card, allergy information, and other relevant important information that may be useful in a medical emergency. The reason for the triple redundancy using the different file formats is that regardless of the type of computer or operating system used by emergency medical personnel or a hospital emergency room, at least one of the formats will be readable when needed.

The other method I have been using for a few years is the much vaunted Google Health (health.google.com), which I had previously written about in this column. I had been very satisfied with this free service offered by Google, where I tracked my vital signs, prescriptions, office visits, medical history, lab results, and other medical information. While Google securely stored my information, I did set it up such that my family could access it in the event of an emergency and share the information with appropriate health care professionals. When recently updating my Google Health information, I was chagrined to find that Google is discontinuing this service. A large red banner on the Google Health website announced "An important update about Google Health", followed by, "Google Health will be discontinued as a service. The product will continue service through January 1, 2012. After this date, you will no longer be able to view, enter or edit data stored in Google Health. You will be able to download the data you stored in Google Health, in a number of useful formats, through January 1, 2013." Since I have been using Google Health, like the idea of secure online access to personal medical health records, and had a lot of information stored there, I felt that it would be necessary to find an alternative resource, and found Microsoft's competing product, Microsoft Health Vault.

Microsoft is promoting its free Health Vault service (www.healthvault.com) as "A trusted place for people to organize, store, and share health information online." Microsoft is also explicitly targeting Google Health users with the statement, "As Google Health retires their service, you can transfer your information to Microsoft Health Vault." Microsoft has pledged to keep the information secure, and not to use the information for the purposes of creating personalized ads or the marketing of services without the explicit permission of the user. For those using smart phones and other mobile devices, a mobile version of Health Vault is accessible, enhancing access to the system. Many of us consider our health history and records as highly personal, and may have totally valid concerns about the security of our online medical records. Microsoft Health Vault says, "It's your Health Vault record. You decide what goes into it, who can see, use, and share your info, and which health tools have access to it."

Some may wonder why secured online medical records are necessary, or even useful. As federal mandates for electronic medical records become more widely implemented, paper records will become somewhat obsolete. If anyone has ever gone to a new doctor or specialist, you are well aware of the often lengthy medical questionnaire that the new patient is required to fill out. While there may be a medical necessity for the physician to have that information, our personal memories are often inadequate and inaccurate when trying to recall complete and detailed information. Recently, in my primary care physician's office, the nurse asked me when I had my most recent tetanus shot and some other vaccines, as I have used some other resources for periodic vaccines, now that flu shots and other vaccines are given in a multitude of convenient and non-traditional locations. I had a flu shot in the college gym, and another immunization at my local supermarket pharmacy! I had dutifully recorded the injections in my Google Health records, and could rapidly produce accurate information using my smart phone to access my records.

Microsoft®
HealthVault™

track & manage

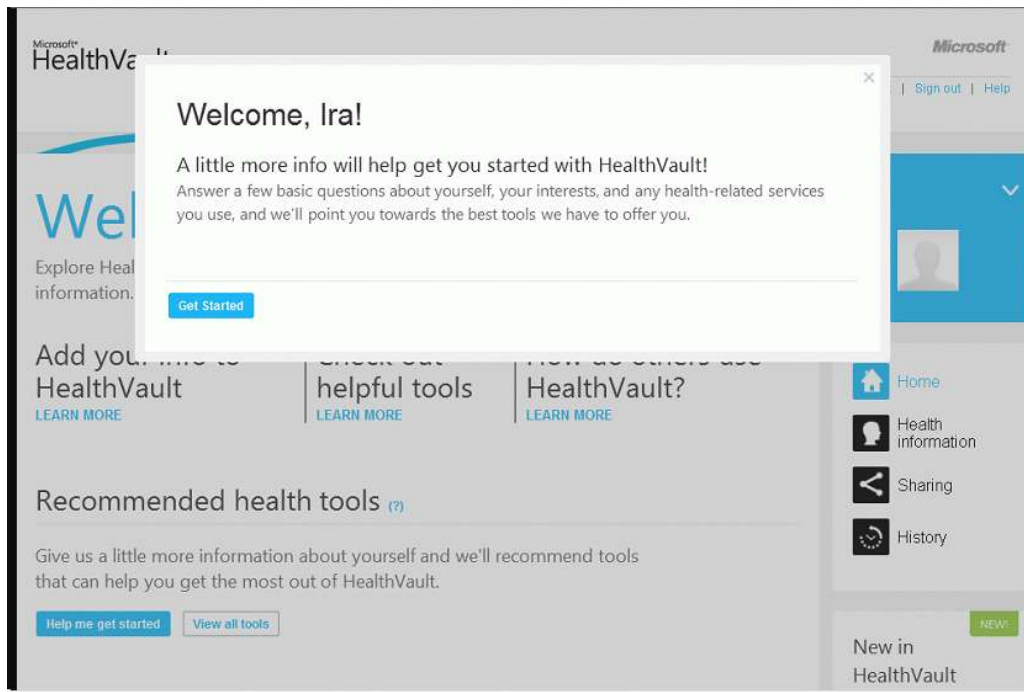
organize

get healthy

tools & devices

Microsoft Health Vault offers a variety of free services to the consumer, as well as commercial services to health care providers. Using Health Vault my prescription information, refills, and changes can be automatically tracked, as several of the major drug store chains (CVS Caremark, CVS Pharmacy, Walgreens) are interconnected with Health Vault. Since many of us may obtain prescriptions from multiple sources, Health Vault can help identify potentially dangerous drug interactions and side effects, as well as make your prescription information available to those of your choice. Health Vault offers a convenient method to share data about chronic conditions, such as blood pressure, blood sugar, weight, and other information with your doctor. It is important to remember that the individual has complete control over who can access the information, and what specific information each can access.

It is easy and free for an individual to open a Health Vault account. If you already have a Windows Live, Hotmail, Xbox or MSN account, you have immediate access to a Health Vault account, as they use the same username and password. Facebook users also have instant access, as Health Vault can be accessed via the users' existing Facebook username and password by clicking on the Facebook icon in Health Vault. For users with none of these existing accounts, creating a new account is a simple process. Once connected, and some personal questions answered, the user is greeted with the main page where a variety of options are displayed. Across the top of the page are five links that lead the user to additional categories of personal information. The "About You" link is where the user can enter and update information on medications (prescription and non-prescription, including vitamins, herbs, supplements, etc.), allergies, and current health conditions. Family medical histories, documents, immunizations, lab test results, blood sugar, blood pressure, weight, emergency contacts, provider listings, and other information can be added or amended through this link. The "Health Tools" link opens a comprehensive listing of health information resources and agencies that participate in the Health Vault service, as well as medical devices that can upload data into the Health Vault. Among the participants in the "Health Tools" are the American Cancer Society, the American Diabetes Association, Aetna, Epilepsy Diary, H1N1 Response Center, American Heart Association, American Stroke Association, iGuard (drug interaction service), Quest Diagnostics (import lab results into Health Vault), Mayo Clinic, CVS, Caremark, Minute Clinic, Walgreens, and dozens of other resources. Medical devices, some of which may be interconnected with Health Vault, include AND (blood pressure machines and other devices), Bayer blood glucose meters, LifeScan (Johnson & Johnson) blood sugar monitoring devices, MicroLife asthma and blood pressure devices, Omron blood pressure devices, and many other devices. The "Family" link can be used to add family members to Health Vault; it is important to note that each family member's information is contained in his own personal record. The "Contact List" can be used to add or edit emergency contacts and health care provider information. "Stories" is where the user can read stories about how others have used Health Vault.



On the right margin of the main page is an icon for "Sharing". This icon leads to a page where, "You control access to your health information. Use Sharing to decide which people or online health tools can access selected types of information in your Health Vault record." Under the heading "Authorized people" is where the user can, "Let family members or others you trust view or update information in

your Health Vault record." This is where I have my wife and my adult children listed as approved family members, such that they can access my information in an emergency situation. The link to share information with your health care provider allows the user to print selected information from Health Vault, utilize the online tools to prepare for an upcoming office visit or hospitalization, or to connect to the users' physician's electronic medical records if his system is compatible with Health Vault.

There is a commercial side to Health Vault as Microsoft is actively marketing compatible software and utilities to physicians, hospitals, and other healthcare providers. For hospitals and clinics, Microsoft states, "Using Health Vault, patients can share their health history and information with your organization or specific physicians. This serves to improve the patient/provider relationship and can also streamline the admissions and discharge processes." For individual physicians, "Microsoft Health Vault means easier access to a broader range of information from patients that can help you provide better service and more efficient, informed care. You can also share information more easily with your patients, enabling patients to make more informed health decisions every day." Other Microsoft applications are available to medical device manufacturers, and other healthcare companies and organizations in order to seamlessly integrate with Health Vault.

While there are a variety of lesser known companies trying to take up the slack in personal medical record keeping, especially with the upcoming demise of Google Health, Microsoft, with its scale and reputation, may become the primary provider of such services.

Ira Wilsker is the 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.

This and That

By Elizabeth B. Wright, Member, Computer Club of Oklahoma City
July 2011 issue, CCOKC eMonitor
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Remember the play “Six Degrees of Separation?” It was also a movie. The title has become a common catch-phrase, but it doesn’t really get the respect it is due. The theory is that all of us are connected to everyone in the world by only six steps. I know Pete, Pete knows Pierre, Pierre knows a high powered British politician, the HPBP knows a member of the British Royal Family, the Royal is related to and knows the English Monarch. So following this line, there are only four people separating me from knowing British Monarch. Of course my chances of meeting her are non-existent, but that isn’t the point. The lesson here is that so much of what we do is influenced by this factor. Pyramid schemes are doomed to failure because of it. Ideas are lost because of it. Tell one person about your fantastic theory for curing some horrible disease and the next thing you know it has been patented by someone you never heard of. This is also why you keep getting the same junk email from so many different people.

So how can we apply this to our computers? If you are like most of us, we use our computers for the more simple tasks of word processing, connecting to the internet, some bookkeeping (banking software, etc.), graphics – mostly photographs, and other simplified work. But we all run into trouble now and again. A big “for instance.” I booted up my computer this morning to work on this article. And for the first time in my 20 some years of owning a computer it failed to boot the hard drives properly. I could not access much of my data. Nothing to do but shut it down, fortunately it went through the proper procedure for that, and turn it back on. It came back in its normal configuration. Go figure. Hopefully this will never happen again, but only time will tell.

Back to the subject at hand. There are 6° separating us from useful computer skills:

1. Computer hardware
2. Operating system
3. Computer skills
4. Purchasing software
5. Software training
6. Computer competence

#1, Whether you bought a computer completely assembled or built it yourself, the first step requires knowing what is inside the case. You don’t necessarily have to completely understand how it all works, but you should at least be familiar with the names of the parts in order to use some of the helpful information found in the manuals and other books as well as on the internet.

Second step, and possibly the most frustrating, is getting to know the operating system. This is the software that is like the fuel that runs the engine of your car. Without it, you ain’t

goin' no place. In the early years of computers there were no operating systems (often referred to as OS.) And only those people who really, really wanted to learn about computers mastered the necessary skills to do so. Now the two main choices to get us over that hurdle are Microsoft Windows machines and Apple Macs. Both require an OS to make them do our bidding. The more you learn about the OS the easier other tasks will become. Computer clubs and community colleges are places to look for help in this area.

For item #3, learning basic computer skills gets you started, honing those skills keeps you moving forward. This step is somewhat a combination of learning about the OS and learning to use software as in step #5. Some kind of training is usually necessary and can be gotten from the previously mentioned clubs and classes, but also from a REALLY patient friend or relative who will spend endless hours helping you learn this most foreign of foreign languages. Of course you can always slog your way through it on your own, but what fun is that?

#4, Purchasing software depends on what you want the computer to do for you. Most home/small office users buy programs for personal finances, word processing, spreadsheets and graphics. People who need to make the computer pay for itself and also support them buy, in addition to those, the more sophisticated software for databases and intense graphical work. And there are also "Gamers," but they are different from most of us.

#5, Software Training is a bit less daunting than computer skill training in that much of it consists of following certain steps to accomplish a given task. But of course, it isn't really easy. You must be willing to set aside preconceived notions of how things ought to work and live with how the programmers mandated them to work. But there are classes, books, online training, computer clubs and friends to help out in this step too.

The final step, Computer Competence, is the goal line in our 6^o hypothesis. There are four steps between your purchase of the hardware and competence/confidence in using it. If you don't get the cart before the horse in those four steps you will be much happier in your computer world.

The Registry: What's it all about

By Phil Sorrentino, President, Sarasota PCUG, Florida

July 2011 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor

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The Windows Registry is a place in your computer that maintains information relating to all of the essential components of your System: the Operating System (OS), Applications (Apps), Users, and Hardware. It is a database that defines your System and how it operates. (A "database" being an organized collection of data for one or more uses, typically provided in digital form.) Entries in the Registry change whenever you make a change to any of these areas. You can think of it as a "scratch pad" that remembers all the details of how your System is setup, and how you like to use it. The Registry can be manually changed using the

Registry Editor, “regedit”, but this should only be undertaken with the utmost of care and caution. Before you attempt to change the Registry make sure you have detailed directions from a well-known, trusted source. Mistakes made to the Registry, at worst, could make your computer un-useable, requiring you to start all over with a fresh installation of the OS.

Most mistakes may only create a problem with a certain part of the computer’s operation. In these cases, restoring the Registry can fix the mistake. So, make sure that before you attempt to change the Registry, you “backup” the Registry. This can be done by creating a Restore Point, or Exporting the Registry to a safe place on your hard drive. If you determine a mistake was made, you then could go back to the Restore Point before you made the changes to the Registry, or you could Import the old Registry from the “a priori” saved Registry. Again, don’t do this unless you have very good direction and you are very convinced that you have to make the changes.

So what does The Registry look like? And how is it organized? The Registry is organized in a hierarchical fashion, just like folders on our computers. Think about “Documents”. It typically contains Pictures, Music, Video, etc., and if you look into any of these, you will further find folders that are there to organize that particular type of file, pictures, music, or videos. Similarly, the Registry has basically five* high level items; in the registry they are called “Keys”, but you can still think of them as folders. (You may also see these keys referred to as “hives”.)

The names will look strange to most of us, with the possible exception of those that may have developed software code sometime in the past.

These five are:

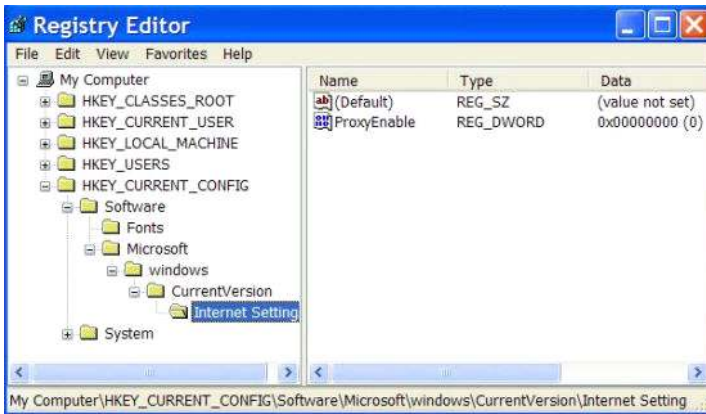
HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT,
 HKEY_USERS,
 HKEY_CURRENT_USER,
 HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE, and
 HKEY_CURRENT_CONFIG.

See, I told you they would look strange. Each of these “keys” contains a specific type of information shown in the following table.

KEY	Contains Information Relating To:
HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT	Computer’s User Interface
HKEY_USERS	Each User’s Account
HKEY_CURRENT_USER	The user that is currently logged in to Windows
HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE	Hardware and Software found on this particular computer
HKEY_CURRENT_CONFIG	The machine’s current configuration

(*There are actually other High Level Keys in the Registry, but they are not accessible with Regedit, and hence cannot be easily changed. These keys are more dynamic and contain information relating to the computer's runtime operations.)

Regedit works very much like Windows Explorer (which has been called the keys to the kingdom, many times by yours truly). Select an object in the left pane and its contents is shown in the right pane. An example of an open Registry is shown below:



Notice the hierarchical arrangement of the folders in the HKEY_CURRENT_CONFIG. "Software" followed by "Microsoft" followed by "windows" followed by "CurrentVersion" and finally "Internet Settings" which is selected and the contents of which are shown in the right pane. As with folders this implies that "Internet Settings" is contained within "CurrentVersion" which is contained within "windows", which is contained within "Microsoft" which is contained within "Software" which is contained within the HKEY_CURRENT_CONFIG registry key.

Selecting the lowest level key in the left pane displays the contents in the right pane. The contents are individual items that control some operation within the computer. Each item has a Name and a Data Type and a Data Value. Data Types can take on only certain Data Values, only those values determined by the Data Type. These again are details that, I think, will only look familiar to someone who has been involved in programming in the past. However, it is good to see these so that if you try to change the registry you will better understand the directions being given. Here are a few of the Data Types and a brief description of their Data Values.

Name	Data Type	Data Description
Binary Value	REG_BINARY	Raw Binary Data
DWord Value	REG_DWORD	Integer that is 32 bits long
String Value	REG_SZ	Fixed Length Text String
QWord	REG_QWORD	Integer that is 64 bits long

So, I guess by now I've lost most of the readers, but if you do want to use Regedit, the above information will be useful because the directions to change the registry look very cryptic, even after becoming familiar with the above information. A typical set of directions to change the

Registry may look like the following. (This change to the Registry was made to fix a networking problem.)

Click Start, select Run, type **regedit**, and press Enter. Navigate your way to the following Registry key:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Services\Netbt\Parameters

Key: DhcpNodeType

Value Type: REG_DWORD - Number

Valid Range: 1,2,4,8 (B -node, P-node, M-node, H-node)

Default: 1 or 8 based on the server configuration

Change value to 0.

There are times when a change to the Registry is just what the doctor ordered, but try never to get into the situation where it is necessary. A more prudent plan is to create an Image of your System when it is operating properly and go back to that whenever you get into trouble from a virus attack or a hardware failure. The Registry might be a nice place to visit (and appreciate) but you don't really want to spend very much time there.

Computer Humor



"I'm too tired to listen to a story tonight, dad. Just attach it as a word document, and I'll read it when I check my email."

Should you worry about image retention on an LCD monitor?

By Linda Gonse, Editor/Webmaster, ORCOPUG (Organce County PCUG), CA
July 2011 issue, Nibbles 'n Bits
www.orcopug.org / editor (at) orcopug.org

I just bought a brand new HP ZR22w LCD flat screen monitor. My understanding always has been that burn-in (also called image retention or image persistence) does not occur on LCD screens. But, an HP help file that came with my monitor dispelled that notion.



"Image retention occurs when the monitor is left ON while displaying the same image for an extended period of time, leaving a 'shadow' of this image on the screen."

I researched the burn-in problem further and About.com, <http://bit.ly/k05clD>, said "Image retention can be corrected in most cases and is easily prevented." That statement was a relief!

The article went on to list methods that could be used to prevent image retention/persistence.

1. "Set the screen to turn off after a few minutes of screen idle time under the Power functions in Windows. Turning the monitor display off will prevent an image from being displayed on the screen for extended periods of time. Of course, this could be annoying to some people as the screen may go off more than they wish."
2. "Use a screen saver that either rotates, has moving graphic images or is blank. This also prevents an image for being displayed in screen for too long."
3. "Rotate any background images on the desktop. Background images are one of the most common causes for image persistence. By switching backgrounds every day or few days, it should reduce the change of persistence."
4. "Turn off the monitor when the system is not in use. This will prevent any problems where the screen saver or power function fails to turn off the screen and result in an image sitting on the screen for long times."

The bottom line is not to be too worried about image burn-in, but keep it in mind when using your LCD monitor and you can easily prevent it from happening.

If somehow it does happen, see <http://bit.ly/k05clD> for instructions on how to correct existing image retention on LCD monitors.

Finally, the HP text helpfully revealed another problem not known to all LCD monitor users, "the fluorescent lights inside the display have a limited lifetime and will gradually degrade." This is reason enough not to leave a monitor on 24/7, even with a screensaver enabled. Use the timed Energy/Power setting to automatically turn the monitor off when your system is idle for a while.

Testing Memory

By Vinny LaBash, Regular Columnist, Sarasota PCUG, Florida
July 2011 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor
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From a strictly technical perspective, memory is any form of electronic storage. You probably know the computer you use every day has memory. Other everyday devices also use similar types of electronic memory. Your TV, car radio, washing machine, wrist watch, and cell phone are a few examples. Physical memory is both a necessary and useful component of modern computers. If your computer's CPU were compelled to access the hard drive for every piece of data it wanted, its speed would be glacial. Memory is so useful that when something happens to affect it we notice it immediately. It's a little like atmospheric oxygen, unobtrusive and invisible. Take it away and we know instantly that something has gone horribly wrong.

Memory failures can be among the most difficult hardware problems to diagnose because so many other things can act like memory malfunctions. If your system was put together with a motherboard populated with less than first-class components like low quality liquid fueled capacitors, they might swell and burst even under normal usage. Lockups, USB ports which refuse to work for no apparent reason, blue screens of death, and error messages pointing to memory failures are among some of the breakdowns that can occur. Video pauses and application crashes are additional symptoms that can afflict your PC, and their cause may not have anything to do with a memory crash.

Excess heat can cause the CPU to malfunction in ways that generate error messages flatly stating that memory is the culprit. The CPU will inexplicably drop pages from memory after the CPU just asked for those pages. The CPU gets confused and produces an error message accusing the memory chips of causing a "Fatal Exception". If that's not misleading enough, messages stating that certain memory pages were never received can appear on the screen.

Strange behavior alone is not proof of a memory problem, but don't be hasty to dismiss the possibility. Memory problems do cause lockups and blue screens of death for no apparent reason. How can one differentiate between a memory crash and something doing a plausible imitation?

Sometimes the BIOS can help. Your BIOS should tell you how much memory you have installed. Many memory failures show up in the BIOS as a loss of installed memory. A high-quality motherboard will have a BIOS that will report the amount of memory in each slot. With some careful sleuthing you can easily calculate how much memory should be in each slot, and use that information to find the memory module that's causing the problem.

There is a free advanced memory test available based on the original Memtest86. Download it from www.memtest86.org. This is probably the best memory testing tool you could hope to find, free or otherwise, but with all things that seem too good to be true, there are trade-offs. Some of your computer's memory must be accessed by the utility while the tool is running and that range of memory can't be tested. Another downside is that the tool requires you to shut down the computer and run the test from a boot disk. Don't let that stop you from using Memtest86. Use it according to directions and you will resolve problems that would otherwise be beyond the capabilities of ordinary mortals.

Memory failures can prevent the system from starting up completely. Your machine may attempt to help you by issuing a series of diagnostic beeps on attempted startup. There is no standard for diagnostic beeps so they vary with each manufacturer. You will have to access the manufacturer's web site to translate the series of beeps to meaningful information. It's essential to read the documentation for the motherboard and the BIOS. Some machines don't beep at all; with others a single beep indicates a memory refresh failure.

In a surprising number of cases a memory module has merely worked its way loose over time and is no longer seated properly in its slot. It takes only a few minutes to reseat the memory. If that doesn't help, remove one of the memory modules and turn the machine back on. If the problem persists, replace the module, remove a different module, and repeat until the system starts again. The module most recently removed is the guilty party. You may not be able to use this method if your machine insists that the modules be installed in pairs.

Lastly, don't over-clock your PC without proper ventilation or a reliable method to keep your vital components cool.

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

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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.

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Need help hooking up that new PC, or installing DSL-Cable? Call Jim Goodman, \$60.00 for as long as it takes. 579-0122
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