PC Post

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

30 YEARS OF USER HELPING USER

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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 – January 2, 7pm at Ridgeway's

Is the Desktop PC Going to Be Dead in the Near Future and Replaced by Mobile Devices? Maybe Not?

Terry Fix will do a presentation on the revitalization of the "old desktop PC" with the new "All in One Touchscreen Desktop PC!" The presentation will show how the tech companies are pushing out as fast as they can for the Holiday Season a multitude of All in Ones for the consumer.

Led by HP back in June--Dell, Acer, Lenovo, Sony, Asus, and others are are rushing these All in Ones into the market place--emphasizing the Windows 8 great compatibility with the Touchscreen environment!

Will it work? Will it save the desktop PC? Will it be the "ace in the hole" to make Microsoft's gamble on the Touchscreen Windows 8 operating system pay off?

Tips for Upgrading to Windows 8

If you have just upgraded your computer to Windows 8 and are disappointed at the performance, don't blame Microsoft. The problem may be with your computer manufacturer and/or with your upgrade preparation. Here are a few tips to get you on the road to happy computing with Windows 8.

In the past two weeks, I have upgraded three computers from Windows 7 to Windows 8 with a wide variety of results. On the first computer, an older Gateway desktop, the upgrade was seamless and Windows 8 works beautifully.

The second was a very recently purchased Lenovo that was advertised as "Windows 8 ready" and came with the $15 upgrade to Windows 8 offer. You might expect that this upgrade would be the smoothest, but it was the most problematic. The Windows 8 installation went smoothly and things seemed pretty good until I tried to start Internet Explorer, which refused to work at all. Then I found that the Picture folder wouldn't update and the Epson printer wouldn't work.

A little trouble-shooting was definitely in order. As I delved into the problem, what I found was amazing. The Gateway didn't have any Gateway programs running in the background. But the Lenovo had more than twelve programs that were starting along with the computer and running in the background. These ranged from power management programs to programs that were supposed to speed up the computer to programs that seemed to have little use.

I set out to test each of these programs to see if they were interfering with Windows 8. After several hours of trouble-shooting, the answer was an emphatic "yes". There were two Lenovo programs that were interfering. When I disabled these programs, all the Windows 8 functionality returned. Internet Explorer worked, the pictures updated, and the printer worked.

The aggravating thing was that these programs didn't show up as incompatible when I ran the Windows 8 Upgrade Advisor in preparation for the upgrade. This computer was supposed to be "Windows 8 Ready". So what happened? Well, many manufacturers load their computer with "stuff" to make them seem better than the competition. The irony is that most consumers don't even know that those "special" programs are there. I never heard of anyone purchasing a Lenovo because it came with such great extra programs.

While Apple products are immune from this because Apple manufacturers both the hardware and the software, most computer manufacturers do this. Smart phone manufacturers do the same.

It is obvious that all of this "stuff" just complicated the computer and can obviously cause problems. Across the board, manufacturers should stop pre-installing all this junk. Since we now live in a world of apps, if a manufacturer wants to give me some free programs that are worthwhile, they should offer this to me in the form of an app that I can choose to install or ignore.

This is one case where I put the blame fully on the shoulders of the manufacturer. I must say that the Gateway really excelled in this endeavor because it was not infested with all of the proprietary programs that the other computer had.

The bottom line is: don't make the mistake of thinking because you have a new computer that was purchased under the $15 upgrade offer, that it is really "Windows 8 Ready". Before you upgrade, check the manufacturer to see if they have special instructions for getting your computer ready for the update.

While Lenovo's website was pretty useless in this endeavor, I found several other manufacturers had some good instructions.

The next computer that I upgraded was a Toshiba laptop. Toshiba, like Lenovo has a lot of proprietary programs running in the background. Toshiba, however, had excellent upgrade instructions on their website. I was told to upgrade the BIOS before installation and to remove several Toshiba programs. With that preparation, the upgrade went smoothly.

I still believe that computer companies should not put so many extra programs on their computers. I actually can feel Microsoft's pain in having to try to deal with a PC ecosystem where this is allowed. In Windows 8, Microsoft produced a good operating system that works fine when other integrated programs don't interfere. Yet, most home users who have problems upgrading to Windows 8 will blame Microsoft and tell everyone that Windows 8 is a terrible program.

If you decide to upgrade to Windows 8, be sure to search the website of your computer manufacturer first. Get your computer ready. See if there is a BIOS update available. Update all the software on your computer, and turn off unnecessary programs that may be running in the background. If there are problems after the upgrade, look at the manufacturer's proprietary software as your first line of trouble-shooting.

Another tip that I can give from my upgrade experiences is that if you are upgrading a laptop, plug it in so you won't run out of battery power during the upgrade. Also, allow yourself enough time. You can speed up the process by using a wired connection, rather than wireless, but you can still expect the upgrade process to take at least two hours. Good luck to all of you upgraders out there! And be sure to let me know how it goes.

Streaming Music – An Alternative Method
By Phil Sorrentino, Member, Sarasota PCUG, FL
November 2012 issue, PC Monitor
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With Windows 7, Microsoft has provided a great way to share music on your home network. Each computer (using Windows Media Player), can share the music from every other computer within a Windows7 "homegroup." This is accomplished by allowing "streaming" when the homegroup is set up. If streaming is turned on, then the music from another computer in the homegroup will show up in Windows Media Player as available music to play. If you don't see the other computer's music, you probably did not turn on streaming. If you didn't turn on streaming when you set up your homegroup, you can remedy that by going to the other computer, starting Windows Media Player, clicking "Stream" and choosing "Turn on Media Streaming with Homegroup," and then checking "Music." That should allow you to play the music from the other computer on your computer.

Though this is a great accomplishment, it may not be very useful, especially if both computers are in the same room or at least close by. But if the computers are in different rooms or on a different level in the house, or at the other end of the house, it could be very useful. Just imagine playing music from your music collection, which resides on your main computer in the computer room, on your laptop while sitting at the pool. Or in my particular case, playing the music that resides on my main computer in the computer room, in the living/family room through my very high fidelity stereo system.

Streaming within a homegroup is a great feature for computers running Windows7, but if you have network computers that are not running Windows7, there is still a way to play music on these computers. This method is called "Play to." It allows you to play music in the main computer, but listen to it at another computer, possibly where there is a better set of speakers, or a room where there will be a large number of listeners. (This feature supposedly works with any electronic component that advertises the DLNA (Digital Living Network Alliance) logo, though I have not tried any.) On the computer that is to receive the music, you will have to Open Media Player, Choose Stream, Choose "Allow remote control of my player, and click the confirmation box, "Allow remote control on this network." Then, on the main computer, In Media Player, on the Play tab, click the "Play to" icon. The pop-up menu should list all the PCs in the house that have been prepared for remote operation. Just choose the computer to receive the music and you're set to enjoy the music from your main computer, using the computer in the listening room of choice.

The Alternative Method: The above two methods are built into Windows Media Player and can suffice for most network music streaming, but they are very dependent on these features being part of Windows Media Player, and future versions of Windows Media Player. A more general way to accomplish playing music in a main computer, but listening to it on another computer, is to develop Playlists that can be used on any computer in the network. Playlists developed in this fashion do not restrict you to the use of Windows Media Player, and can be used with many other music players.

There are a handful of file extensions for playlists, such as .m3u, .wpl, .pls, and .b4s. Windows media player can use .m3u and .wpl. It seems to prefer .wpl as its default setup for playlists. The .m3u extension is the most general format and is recognized by many music players, so this is my preferred playlist file extension. (If you use Windows Media Player to create your playlists, make sure you select the .m3u format when the playlist is created.) An m3u file is a plain text file that specifies the location of one or more music files. Each line indicates one specification. The specification can be any one of the following: an absolute local pathname (e.g. C:\My Music\Brooklyn Roads.mp3), a local pathname relative to the m3u file location (e.g. Brooklyn Roads.mp3), a URL (used to access a stream on the Internet). The m3u file can also contain comments prefaced by the "#" character.

So the alternative method consists of creating a set of playlists that can be used on any machine on your network that will play the music from your main computer (where your music collection is stored). For example, let's say we have four computers on your wired and/or wireless home network, named D1, D2, L1, and L2 (D is used here to designate a desktop computer and L is used to designate a laptop, but in reality these will be the names of the computers on the network.) And further let's think of D2 as the main computer, where the music collection is housed and maintained. (Note here that there is only one computer collection to be maintained which makes maintenance and backup simpler.

The only thing to be maintained on the computers other than the main computer is the folder of playlist files, which can be easily copied when or if the original files change.) So each playlist will be defined by a playlist file, which has the extension .m3u, and should have entries that represent the music choices on the D2 computer. Each playlist file should probably have names that represent the type of music in that playlist, like Oldies.m3u, or SentimentalMusic.m3u, or MoodMusic.m3u, or TheBeatles.m3u. The playlist file will have a series of lines of text, each one representing a music title to play. Each line will be as follows: \\D2\E:MP3MusicCollection\MusicTitle.mp3. Where "D2" represents the main computer name, "E:" represents the disk that the music collection is on, "MP3MusicCollection" represents the folder the music is stored in and should be the "share name" for the shared folder, and MusicTitle.mp3 represents a song to play. (Here is an example: \\Desktop2\MP3MusicOn2E\MusicA\Jefferson Starship - Miracles.mp3. Note here that there is a Music folder, MusicA, within the top level Music folder, MP3MusicOn2E.)

This type of file can automatically be created by Windows Media Player when a playlist is created, or it can be created manually with Notepad. (Not wordpad or word because the playlist file must be a simple text file without any associated formatting. Once a playlist is created it should only be opened and edited within Windows Media Player or with Notepad, again for the same reason.)

With the above defined playlist files copied to any networked computer, you should be able to play the music at that computer; D1, D2, L1, or L2, using the music collection on the main computer, D2. Any computer that is on your network only needs a copy of the playlist files and a music player to use this alternative streaming method to allow you to enjoy, remotely, the fruits of your music collection.

Show Desktop in Windows 7
Do you miss the desktop icon back in Windows 7? While most of them are too complicated to explain here, do we need a show desktop icon when there's already one in the lower right-hand corner of your screen?

If you click it your desktop becomes visible; hold your mouse pointer over it and the open windows on your desktop will fade. It's just like the show desktop icon of the old days.

A quick way to the Task Manager
The quickest and easiest way to get to your Windows Task Manager is simply to right click an empty area of your Task Bar and choose "Start Task Manager".

Fake Name Generator
Here is a cute little site (http://www.fakenamegenerator.com/) that invents a whole lot of make believe information for you. Just specify the gender you want, choose a name set from the drop down list and pick a country. Then click Go. That will generate a random fake name with fake information to go with it.

Don't like the first name that comes up? Then just keep clicking Go or changing the options until you find one you like. There are tons of names in this generator. If you are squeamish about the fake information they provide, especially with identity theft happening more and more frequently, check out the FA0. page to see what they based all of their information on. So if you have needed to use a false identify for fun or protect yourself on a suspect site, check it out.

Missing your Menu Bar in Internet Explorer
Computers are computers, so if you open up your IE and there's no Menu Bar to be found, don't panic. Here's how to get it back. Open Internet Explorer and right-click on a blank area up at the top. The resulting menu should have a bunch of options (favorites, status bar, command bar, etc.). Just make sure "Menu Bar" has a check mark next to it and you're all set!

Slow or Stuttering Youtube
Some people complain about YouTube video playback always stuttering and stopping. I haven't noticed it myself but perhaps I am usually patient in most cases. So if you do have a stuttering and stopping You Tube movie here are a few of the things you can check out.

Could it be Microsoft Security Essentials or Malawarebytes or your virus protector or even your firewall or your cable broadband service? So what can we blame for this problem? Is it one thing or could it be a mixture of things?

If it happens all the time it could be your computer. You may have too many programs running in windows that suck up too much memory. Try closing everything you're not using. You may also have multiple browser pages open simultaneously with stuff going on with each one, that can dramatically slow down everything.

It could be your cable internet. During peak usage periods – like when people first come home from work, more people on the server less bandwidth per user. Also cable can slow down for other reasons also.

It could be Youtube. Their site slows down due to a variety of reasons from time to time. Heavy usage, server troubles, site being attacked by hackers/viruses etc, software updates having snags, server maintenance.

Regardless on the possible cause, one solution might be is to click on the video to play, then immediately hit pause. Why? Because hitting play starts the process of buffering (loading). What you are describing can occur when the video plays faster than your internet and computer can buffer it - essentially the player is trying to read something that hasn't loaded yet, and stops until more is downloaded, and the process gets repeated. By pausing the video right after hitting play, and leaving it for a little bit, the buffering can get ahead to a point where the speed of playing can't overcome it.

So if see the red bar filling across the bottom of the video - that's the buffering progress, give it a little time before you start playing.

For more drastic action, Go with Windows 7 (Vista is part of the problem), upgrade the RAM in your machine, disable any services running in the background and upgrade to a fast video card.

I could go in about power supplies and other hints, but the main one is what we mentioned at the beginning: Pause the download and let the buffer load in enough video to preclude the speed of the video from catching up to the buffering point.

Chasing the Frog
Are you a movie buff? Do you ever wonder how much truth there is in a movie that is based on a true story? At Chasing the Frog (http://www.chasingthefrog.com/index.html) that is exactly what you can find out! This site is devoted to revealing just how true to the actual story the movies are.

On the main page you'll find featured movies like "Soul Surfer" and "Not Without my Daughter". But if you want to check out more go to the right of the page where you will find the True Story Archives, an alphabetical listing of the movies they have investigated. Some of their investigations are truly in depth analysis. This site is

certainly one to check out, and you might even want to bookmark it so that you can explore future investigations as new movies are released.

Is your computer a 32 or 64 bit operating system?
For Windows XP and Vista: Hold the Windows Key, and then press the Pause Key, which is located two keys to the right of the Print Screen key. This window shows all of the basic info about your computer like how much RAM you have and what-not, but it also can tell you what OS you're running. In XP If it doesn't specifically say Windows XP x64 Edition, then you're running a 32 bit operating system. But with Vista there is a specific field that says "System Type", which has your OS type listed after it and will actually tell you 32 bit or 64 bit. No Means No

Yes/No to All
When working in Windows that involved multiple files, you might have noticed that there's an option for "Yes to All", but no button for "No to All"? What can we do?

Well, the good news is that if you find yourself in this situation, all you need to do to get "No to All" is hold the Shift key when you click "No". Voila!

Maps, Maps and More Maps
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October 2012 issue, The ICON Newsletter
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Patti Hobbs, from the Ozark Genealogical Society, recently demonstrated Google Maps as an aide to locating and pinpointing places our ancestors lived. It is another helpful tool to unraveling our past.

For more help in locating our ancestors, or if you just like maps, try The David Rumsey Map Collection. This collection contains more than 150,000 maps. The collection focuses on rare 18th and 19th century maps of North and South America, although it also has maps of the World, Asia, Africa, Europe, and Oceania. The collection includes atlases, wall maps, globes, school geographies, pocket maps, books of exploration, maritime charts, and a variety of cartographic materials including pocket, wall, children's, and manuscript maps. Items range in date from about 1700 to 1950s.

There are now over 33,000 items online, with new additions added regularly. The site is free and open to the public. Here viewers have access not only to high resolution images of maps that are extensively cataloged, but also to a variety of tools that allow to users to compare, analyze, and view items in new and experimental ways.

The website is http://www.davidrumsey.com/about

Free, Supplemental Malware Scanning in the Cloud
Ira Wilsker
iwilsker (at) sbcglobal.net

WEBSITES:
http://pandacloudcleaner.pandasecurity.com
http://www.comodo.com/home/internet-security/cloud-scanner.php
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zero-day_attack

It never ceases to amaze me how many computers continue to get infected by malware, despite being protected by reputable security software. While the major free and paid security products generally offer excellent protection from malware, none are absolutely invulnerable to the latest threats, which may allow an otherwise well protected computer to be compromised by the latest creations of cyber crooks.

I frequently hear something like, "The salesperson at <big box store> told me that this <name brand security package> was the best on the market, and that it offered absolute protection from all threats." For the word "salesperson" above, other users have substituted "husband", "the boy next door", "that lady on the radio", "the geek at work" or some similar real or self-described security expert who recommended some particular security product. While generally well-intended, and often based on positive personal experience, it should be noted that in heavy penetration testing using the latest varieties of malware, virtually all of the major security products can be and are often penetrated by malware.

While almost all major security products implement a variety of techniques to protect against unknown malware, so called "zero day" attacks have been especially successful in penetrating most security utilities. Most of us have security software that is frequently updated with the latest collections of the digital signatures that have been detected and analyzed by the security companies; these frequent updates, which we may often see taking place, give us a sense of security that our protective software is busily at work protecting us from all of the evils that can threaten our computing safety. While we may be incrementally more secure with each of the frequent updates, we are typically vulnerable to the very latest threats prowling the net for victims.
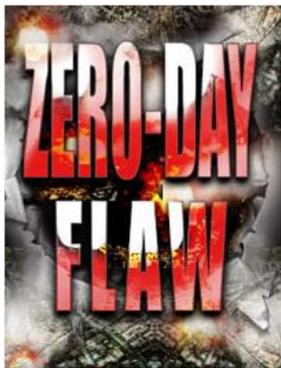
A traditional analogy about security software updates is to our daily newspaper; today's newspaper in the driveway is actually yesterday's news; likewise today's security update may include malware discovered yesterday, but will not likely include new malware that just started circulating. These security updates are more often "reactive" and generally not "proactive". Some of the published tests of the updates of the major security software indicate that it may often take hours, if not days, for newly detected malware to be analyzed and countered, before the updates are pushed to the user. An update just received may be for threats discovered several hours ago, leaving us little or no protection for new threats that appeared since the previous threats were detected. With thousands of new cyber threats appearing daily, sometimes at a rate of over a thousand per hour, the security companies are often overwhelmed with the sheer volume of new threats encountered. A silent "truth" of the

security industry is that each of the new threats is evaluated as to the degree of threat, and those that are evaluated a "low" may not be analyzed further and thus not incorporated into the next data update. A related issue is the speed in which malware can spread around the globe; some of the most malicious malware can spread globally in just a matter of minutes, implying that a recent security update, released prior to the endemic spread of a malicious new form of malware, will offer no protection from that new malware, leaving us open and vulnerable.

Another type of threat that we are often vulnerable to is the "zero day" threat. According to Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zero-day_attack), "A zero-day (or zero-hour or day zero) attack or threat is an attack that exploits a previously unknown vulnerability in a computer application, meaning that the attack occurs on "day zero" of awareness of the vulnerability.... Zero-day attacks occur during the vulnerability window that exists in the time between when a vulnerability is first exploited and when software developers start to develop and publish a counter to that threat." Since these threats are spread prior to detection and the implementation of protective measures, they may easily infect and compromise otherwise well protected computers. Many of the recent zero day threats are also designed and written to target known weaknesses in specific brands of security software, thus rendering them helpless in stopping these attacks.

When malware infects an otherwise protected computer, it often neutralizes the installed security software, opening the computer to a coordinated follow-on attack. It is well documented that some of the better malware authors make enormous profits selling access to the computers that they have compromised, allowing identity thieves and other cyber crooks roaming access (for a fee) of the purloined machine. The victim is typically unaware, as their trusted security software gives no indication of the attack (it is often effectively dead, in terms of protection), but to the user, still appears to be alive and well, even looking like it is still completing its periodic updates. If the user performs either a scheduled or manual security scan using the unknowingly deactivated security software, the malware infection will not be detected. This is precisely why it is often vital to perform frequent security scans with unrelated third party security software.

I have written frequently about the assortment of updated portable security software that I carry on a USB flash drive on my car keychain, and of several third-party security products that I typically install on every computer that I work on. In recent months a new breed of third party security scanner and malware removal utilities have started to become popular. These new security products, which are generally free to use, are using cloud based technologies to perform fast and effective security scans. Being cloud based (on powerful internet servers) allows this new breed of security scanners to include in their threat databases a much larger number of potential threats than the databases typically included on PC based security systems. The threat data in the cloud is continuously updated, minimizing the threat gaps common in the PC based systems. Two of the free, cloud based scanners that I recently experimented with and found effective were Comodo Cloud Scanner and Panda Cloud Cleaner.

Comodo Cloud Scanner (www.comodo.com/home/internet-security/cloud-scanner.php) was extremely fast, in that it seemed to scan my hard drive faster than any of the other scanners that I have used. In addition to effectively scanning and removing viruses, worms, trojans, and other malware, Comodo Cloud Scanner can also detect junk files, suspicious items in the registry, and hidden processes that may be running on your computer, a possible indicator of an active malware infection. This utility can also detect and alert the user of privacy issues and threats, and can identify traces of private information on the hard drive that may possibly be waiting for retrieval by a cyber crook. Combining the power and features of two of Comodo's popular desktop utilities, Comodo Internet Security and Comodo System Utilities, this Cloud Scanner connects to Comodo's servers to run the scan, rather than consuming the processing power of the PC, allowing it to run much faster. Since the cloud servers are continuously updated with the latest threats in real-time, the security scan is performed with the latest available threat library, greatly increasing the chance of detecting threats missed by the installed security software. Comodo Cloud Scanner will run on all 32bit and 64bit builds of Windows XP, Vista, Windows 7, Server 2003 and Server 2008. As with all of the other on-demand scanning utilities, this is not a substitute for a full time security suite, but instead an adjunct utility to verify protection, and to detect any malware that may have penetrated the installed security software.

The other free online cloud scanner that I experimented with was Panda Cloud Cleaner (pandacloudcleaner.pandasecurity.com). According to its webpage, "Panda Cloud Cleaner is an advanced disinfector based on Collective Intelligence (scanning in-the-cloud) that detects malware that traditional security solutions cannot detect." Once downloaded and installed, this utility has a very clean interface that requires no complicated configurations; simply clicking on the large "SCAN" button will start the process. As are most other cloud scanners, Panda Cloud Cleaner is very fast, as the actual scanning is done online on Panda's cloud servers, rather than by the computer itself. Since the data files on the cloud servers are continuously updated, the latest digital signatures are always used during a scan. In addition to scanning all types of files for malware, Panda also scans the registry for any additional indications of malware infection. Upon completion of the comprehensive cloud scan, Panda will present the user with a list of findings and threats which can be immediately neutralized. As with most of the other cloud

scanners, Panda Cloud Cleaner is explicitly designed to coexist with the other security software installed on the computer, and will not interfere with it.

Both of these cloud based scanners do a very credible job performing a security scan which can detect any malware that may have penetrated the installed primary security software. If a major malware infection is found by these cloud based utilities, it will likely be necessary to reinstall the original security software that was on the computer, as it had likely been compromised. Both Panda and Comodo cloud utilities can be installed and run alongside the existing security software without interference. Neither product offers continuous protection (there are other cloud based products that perform that task), and are strictly on demand scanners, only active when manually run by the user. These products are not a substitute for full time protective security software. In practice, both are very fast scanners, primarily influenced by the size of the hard drive being scanned, and the speed of the internet connection. The actual files on the hard drive are not uploaded to the cloud for analysis, only a digital signature of those files is sent, thus personal data is not sent to the cloud by these utilities. While both utilities offer excellent malware detection and removal, the Comodo Cloud Scanner product also performs other necessary maintenance tasks in addition to malware scanning.

It would be a wise "good practice" to install either (or both) of these free utilities and periodically verify the integrity of the computer's security system by detecting any malware which may have penetrated the protective screen. If a material problem or threat is found, the user can then take appropriate corrective action.

Computer Humor

Word provides good tools for correcting mechanical errors in documents, but sometimes I find I want to improve the writing quality of the document, which I do in the revising stage. Here are a couple of tools that I use to clarify meaning and eliminate redundancy. These tools are available in many versions of Word, although my descriptions here are based on Word 2010.

Thesaurus

When I can't think of a word which says precisely what I mean, I turn to Word's Thesaurus. It is located on the Review tab in the Proofing group on the Word 2007/ 2010 ribbon. I prefer to open it by highlighting the word I want to improve, then using the keyboard shortcut, Shift+F7 (Hold Shift while pressing F7). This opens the Thesaurus in the Research pane as a sidebar of the document window, and shows my word's synonyms arranged by context.

For example, when I select the word, "press," and press Shift+F7, the US English Thesaurus opens and reveals eight context categories: media, crowd, surge, pressure, pursue, iron, push, and pursue (legal), each with a list of 6-8 synonyms below it. Almost always, I can find a word among those listed that fits my need.
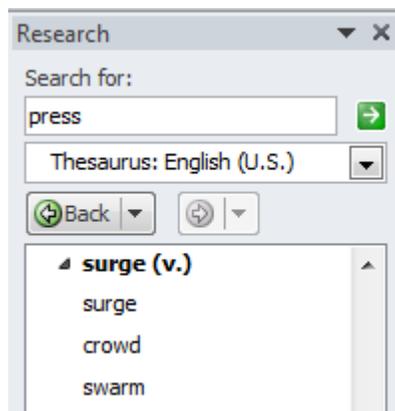

If the English Thesaurus doesn't satisfy my search, I can click the arrow next to Thesaurus and choose another of several reference books, such as dictionaries, translators, and Thesauruses for other languages. I can also add new reference books to my research choices by clicking "Research options" at the bottom of the Research pane and putting checkmarks next to those I want available. These include specialized books, such as the Foreign Word Spelling Look-up, Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary, and Thomson Gale Company Profiles.

Find and Replace

Another bad habit writers have is redundancy; we tend to repeat words or restate ideas. My favorite tools for fixing this problem are Word's Find and Replace commands, located on the Home tab in the Editing group. Click Find (the binoculars icon) to open the Navigation pane or use the shortcut Ctrl+F (hold the Ctrl key and press the F key). Because I use this tool so often, I have pinned the Find tool to the Quick Access toolbar above the ribbon. Any command I use often is on that toolbar.

The Navigation pane offers a quick way to find out how many times I've used the same word in a piece I'm writing. For instance, I just searched this article for the word, "word", and was blinded by all the yellow highlighted "words" in the document. Besides locating and highlighting each instance, the Navigation pane also displays the sentence portion surrounding it. I realized that I needed to reword (oops, I mean rephrase) some sentences to eliminate those annoying repetitions.
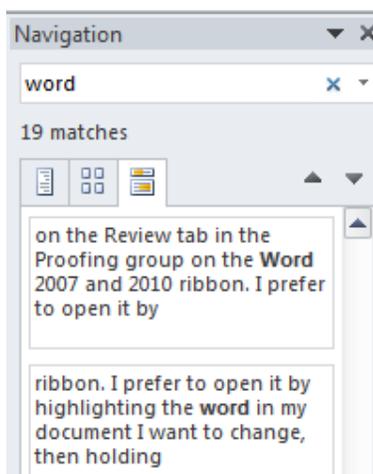
Searching using the Navigation pane is a simple way to find repeated words, but it has limitations. What about the situation where "Word" is capitalized because I'm referring to the computer program? I may not want to include these in my search. Here's where I need to open the "Advanced Search" so I can set some parameters. To do this, I can click the arrow next to Find on the Home tab or the arrow next to the search box on the Navigation pane and select Advanced Search. What opens is the traditional Find and Replace dialogue box, which offers some interesting filters for searching. Here I can set some rules for my search by clicking "More." I put a checkmark next to "Match case" so that my lower case "word" search would not target upper case "Word." Another helpful filter is, "Find all word forms (English)," which would have highlighted "words" and "worded," along with "word," in my earlier search.

The Replace tool is a natural complement to Find, although in my writing I rarely use it. It has its own icon on the Home tab and its own tab behind Find in the Find and Replace dialogue box. What it does is let me find all the instances of a word, and then replace all of them with another word. If my goal is to vary my word choices, replacing all instances of a repeated word with another isn't something I want to do. However, if I had a long document with, for example, a misspelled unusual proper name like Abernathy, and I had spelled it Abernethy, then using Replace makes sense.

Newer versions of these tools allow us to find and replace graphical elements, tables, punctuation, formatting features, and font properties, such as changing all instances of a word in text to bold or italicized. These two tools not only save time, but can actually improve the quality of writing. That's not a bad thing in this age of texting. FWIW IMHO

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PC Post

Editor Emeritus: William "Doc" Holloway – 1920-1996
Editor Emeritus: Claude Delphia
President Emeritus: Bud Bondietti – 1950 - 2008

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