

BITS AND BYTES

The Newsletter of the Midland Computer Club

August 2007

GENERAL CLUB MEETING 7:00 P.M.
 Meets 4th Wednesday of the month at the
 Midland Community Center
 2001 George St., Midland, MI
<http://mcc.apcug.org/>

This month's date: August 22nd

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: Annual Club Picnic—Bring a dish to share and any questions for discussion.

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The President's Corner



Well, it's time to *rev up* the old Computer Club after taking a month off. The board has been attempting to put together informative meetings and *we would like your input on how we are doing. If you've got some ideas on topics that you would like to see us attempt to put on, please let us know. Also, let us know if you think the meetings are too simple, too technical, to slow, to fast, or whatever you think could be improved.*

What are your thoughts? Let me know.

In the mean time, the August meeting will feature our *annual picnic*. The picnic will be held at 7 p.m. in the Midland Community Center, Room K-111 (the Barstow-Shipp's Center for Active Adults Computer Lab). Bring your dish to share and any new toys that you may have to show off to others at the meeting. The club will provide grilled hot dogs, condiments and soft drinks.

— Howard Lewis

(The above comments are the opinion of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Midland Computer Club.)

What you missed!

June had Bill Tower demonstrating why you would want to use multiple monitors and how you set them up. Bill brought his computer from home along with four monitors. He demonstrated how you could get the Windows desktop to repeat on several monitors or spread it out over all of the monitors. Due to problems with the Internet connection, he was unable to demonstrate some videos that are awesome when spread out over the four monitors. See one of the links in the web site list on page 2 to view these on your system. (But they really are fantastic when spread out over the "big screen" effect of multiple monitors.)

Upcoming Activities

The **August** meeting will have our **annual club picnic**. As usual, the club will provide the hot dogs and soft drinks.

All you have to do is bring a dish to share!

September will have Joe Lykowski demonstrating the use of virtual PCs and how they allow you to try out different operating systems without losing the one that you love.

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Useful, useless and strange (in no particular order) Web Sites:

Some time ago, *Information Security* named the winners of their annual security awards. In talking with these winners, *Information Security* asked them to name their "Favorite Geek Site." The following sites are their favorites:

<http://www.panoramas.dk/archive.html/> – If you want to see some stunning panoramic views of the world, try visiting this site. (They are even more stunning when used with four monitors or more.) Try going to some of the pictures from the Matterhorn which offers some excellent views from the Roof of Europe! You will need QuickTime to view these samples.

<http://www.chaoscope.org/> – Not only can you take beautiful pictures with a camera, you can also generate them using mathematics. Programs to generate fractal images have been around since the creation of computers, but this site has some really great images in it's Gallery.

<http://www.thinks.com/> – If you have some time to fill, this site offers many different types of puzzles. They range all the way from word puzzles to Sudoku. This site offers a fun diversion from your hectic life. You will need Java to run some of the puzzles.

<http://fakesteveballmer.blogspot.com/> – For the off-beat, this spoof site takes on Steve Ballmer, CEO of Microsoft. There is great humor and great fun in pouncing on our "favorite" guy.

Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be
7 p.m., September 11, 2007,
at Chapel Lane Presbyterian
Church, 5501 Jefferson Ave.,
Midland.

Membership Enrollment form

NAME _____ PHONE _____
 ADDRESS _____ CITY _____
 ZIP _____ EMAIL ADDRESS _____

Membership dues FAMILY (\$20) STUDENT (\$15) NEW Member ____ renewal ____

Please fill out the above form and mail it along with payment of check or money order to :

MIDLAND COMPUTER CLUB Attn: membership chairman
 P.O. box 132
 Midland, MI 48640-0132

you may also pay for membership at a regular club meeting

Improve Computing Pleasure with Free Widgets for Windows and Mac

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont TX; radio and TV show host
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WEBSITES

<http://widgets.yahoo.com>

<http://widgets.yahoo.com/gallery>

Many of us are extremely busy, and often lack the time to search the internet for items of frequent interest. Many of us have dull and boring desktops displayed on our monitors, often using the default images of our computer or software maker. Fortunately for us, there is a free service offered by Yahoo!, called "widgets".

Widgets, also known as "gadgets" by some web services, are small programs that display a wide variety of information on the otherwise wasted space on our desktops. This information is automatically updated on a frequent basis, providing the user with current data without loading another program or browsing to a website, as widgets are displayed on the desktop on a full time basis.

Widgets is the name for the products distributed by Yahoo!, and gadgets are distributed by other web service providers. While similar in appearance and function, widgets and gadgets are generally not interchangeable, and in order to conserve system resources, users should choose gadgets or widgets, but not both.

Yahoo!'s widgets can be found at widgets.yahoo.com. Upon opening that page, the user is greeted with a button to download the widget engine, which includes about a dozen popular widgets, including a picture frame (displays digital photos on desktop), weather display, notepad, daily planner, maps, stock ticker, and others. The opacity of widgets can be controlled to make them nearly opaque, hiding the desktop behind the widget, to almost totally transparent, fully displaying the desktop. Widgets can be dragged and dropped anywhere on the screen. I have a lot of icons on my desktop, and my widgets cover several of the icons, but this is not a problem as I drag the widget out of the way whenever I want to access those previously covered icons.

The widget engine works on Windows XP with service pack 2, Windows 2000 with service pack 4, Vista, or Macs with OS X 10.3.9 or higher. An internet connection is necessary in order to update the widgets, and 512 megabytes (minimum) ram is recommended for improved performance.

Among the default widgets included with the widget engine, I personally have the stock ticker and weather widgets loaded and running, and also have a TV widget which displays the shows for the next few hours on the channels of my choice.

The stock ticker widget is very easy to use, and is automatically updated every few minutes. The default listings are for popular quotes, such as the Dow Jones Industrial Averages, NASDAQ, Yahoo!, and similar issues. It is very simple to modify the listing to show any desired quotes and indices, and the number of issues displayed is only limited by the space available on the desktop.

The weather widget is customizable for any city or zip code, and graphically displays the weather for five days, current conditions, temperature, and moon phases. By moving the cursor over the weather widget (sometimes it also requires a mouse click), a balloon opens which displays the humidity, baro-



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metric pressure, wind chill or heat index, wind direction and speed, and the time of most recent update.

The widget I seem to refer to the most is the TV widget called “TV Tracker”, which can be downloaded from the Widget Gallery. Once downloaded and installed, a city and zip code is selected, which displays the on-air, cable, and satellite options and carriers locally available. Selecting the appropriate carrier displays a two hour grid of what is on television. Different genres, such as sports and movies are highlighted in different colors for easy viewing. Clicking on a highlighted title will “fetch” the description and details of the movie or sports event, displaying it in a sub-widget adjacent to the primary widget. I will be honest and say that there are several cable channels available to me that I simply never watch, and TV Tracker easily allows for the display of only selected channels, making the display that much easier to follow.

The widget gallery, widgets.yahoo.com/gallery, currently lists 4242 Windows widgets available for download, and 3977 widgets for Mac, in a variety of categories. As I type this, Yahoo! is featuring Motor

Trend Magazine’s “Gas Alert Savings” widget which displays a localized list of the lowest priced gas stations in the area, and is available for both Windows and Mac. Widgets can be searched by name, type, or date. The widget categories listed in the gallery are latest (4242 widgets), updates (2158 widgets), fun & games (575 widgets), date & time (470), news feeds (952), system utilities (354), sight and sound (554), geek stuff (120), cam viewers (273), widget tools (63), app (application) enhancers (109), search tools (352), and various (miscellaneous, 416). Each category may contain hundreds of different widgets, all of which are available for free download.

WIDGET SPOTLIGHT

Gas Alert Savings
Motor Trend

Gas prices are rising, but you don't need to feel the pain. The Gas Alert Savings (GAS) Widget from Automotive.com will help you find the lowest gas prices in your area.

Station Name	Address	Price
Chevron (0.88 miles)	3821 Irvine Blvd, Irvine, CA 92602	\$3.46
Chevron (0.97 miles)	2140 Bryan Ave, Tustin, CA 92782	\$3.46
Shell (0.97 miles)	12131 Jamboree Rd, Tustin, CA 92782	\$3.46
Shell (1.25 miles)	4182 Trabuco Rd, Irvine, CA 92604	\$3.48

WIDGET INFO AUTHOR'S WIDGETS Get Widget

(Hey Authors! Just want the Widget file? [Get it back.](#))

★★★★ 25537 Downloads Version 1.0 - Added May 30, 2007

I have downloaded several other widgets, and selectively load them when I want, and stop them when no longer wanted. In Windows, widgets as a group can be controlled by clicking on the widget icon in the system tray, near the clock. The widget icon is a black background, with two diagonal and interlocked gears. Right clicking on the widget icon displays a comprehensive menu of options which allows the user to control the appearance and function of widgets, load and unload widgets, and otherwise control their behavior.

Some widgets that I selectively use are news feeds which display real time news headlines from hundreds of sources, live weather radar, streaming audio from dozens of radio stations from all over the globe, and many others. Although I have never used it, there is even a pregnancy calculator widget!

Widgets can be a fun adjunct to improve the satisfaction and use of our computers.

Print from Windows Explorer

If you want to print a document, there's really no need to launch the application first. To print the document, simply browse your hard drive for the file that you want to print, right-click on the icon, and then click *Print*. This will automatically send the document to your printer without launching the application.

Shutting Down a Non-Responsive Application

When your system freezes, one of your applications has probably become non-responsive. If the application doesn't want to come back to life, you don't have much choice but to shut down the non-responsive application. To do this, press and hold down *Ctrl+Alt+Del*, which brings up the **Task Manager**. Task Manager will then display the **Application** tab, which will let you close the non-responsive program. If you still can't close out of the problem application, you can press *Ctrl+Alt+Del* once again and Windows should reboot. Sometimes this will solve the problem, and you can get right back to work. You should be patient with each of these steps and allow several minutes for a response from your computer. However, if you are still not able to stop the non-responsive application, you don't have any choice but to turn off your computer. Note that some applications use an **Auto Save** feature that keeps an interim version of the document that you were working in and you might be able to save some of your work by opening that last-saved version. Other programs don't have such a feature, and you will lose whatever changes you made to your document since the last time you performed a saved. With that in mind, it pays to frequently save your documents.

How I Find My "Deleted" Emails

by Tom Thiel, President, Lake-Sumter Computer Society

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Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

Old Emails are one of my most frequent retrievals from my backed-up files.

My current rate of email accumulation is about 20-30 a day. I've forced myself to maintain my accumulated emails in my Inbox and Sent Emails folders to a maximum of not more than 1,000 each. So periodically I just arbitrarily "lope off" the oldest one-half to one month or so of emails. I try to manage some of these by placing them into other folders but that isn't very effective for me.

What this procedure means is that frequently I find myself wishing I still had that old "deleted" email. (The latest one was the Acoustica email sending us Spin it Again software.)

How do I retrieve that email after I've "deleted" it from my Inbox or Sent Items? Here is how I do it with Internet Explorer 6.

Sometime ago I found out where IE stores my emails. What I did then was to move the place where my emails are stored by default to a folder named "Toms emails" in my "My Documents" folder. (How to do this is briefly outlined in the addendum at the end of this article.)

My basic backup procedure is to frequently, at least once a week but usually more frequently, and usually daily with very active folders, copy the contents of my My Documents folder to an external USB connected 300 GB Maxtor drive and to other similar portable USB drives (a 100 GB SimpleTec, and a 40 GB Pocketec hard drive) that are stored away from my computer.

When I do this of course I am backing up the current contents of all my emails at the moment the My Documents backup is performed. (Actually, any true backup procedure will work.)

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This and That

By Elizabeth B. Wright, a member of ccOKC and a frequent contributor to the eMonitor, Computer Club of Oklahoma City
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How much time are you spending upgrading, both hardware and software? New operating systems, programs that won't run on older systems, changes in the internet, memory hog programs and graphic cards? If you are keeping up with the trend toward power, then all of these things probably apply to your computer life. But are they worth it?

For myself, I have found that so much time and money have been invested in trying to keep up with the times. Keeping up with the Joneses doesn't even apply here. Just trying to stay current on the internet is enough to make most of us upgrade, upgrade, upgrade. But all of this has come with a severe penalty. I find it is taking much too much of my valuable time and that not enough of that time is being spent productively. If there wasn't a deadline for this column, would I even find the time to write it? Some big changes in direction are in order I think.

Until Microsoft makes everything we already own completely useless, I find that most of what I need to do with the computer can be done with much older programs. For instance, if I want to be sure someone can open and read a document; I still save it as ASCII text. Oh yes, we have .pdf and other so-called portable text formats, but so what? The most portable is still the above mentioned ASCII. The output is usually in exceedingly small files. There is no formatting possible, but if you are merely transmitting information, what need is there for more than an old-fashioned typewritten letter? Most word processing programs still offer the option of saving the file as a .txt file. Personally, when I want to be sure the file can be accessed by someone else, I type it in Notepad. I've even been known to use really archaic programs, just for kicks.

If you are earning your living with mathematical programs such as accounting, then where do you draw the line on updating? Does your older software do the job, and does your older computer do that job fast enough to ensure that you meet your deadlines so you can get paid for your work? But if your clients upgrade their software and you find that you must submit spreadsheets, etc. to them in a new format, then you are caught in the trap. So far most new programs will read some of the data from older versions of their software, but when will that change? About the same time as the printer manufacturers found out they could make more money selling ink rather than printers, one can only assume that the software companies were probably thinking "why can't we do something like that?"

When it comes to graphics however, don't even think about using older software and computers, unless of course you have all the time in the world to wait for changes to take place when you are enhancing your photos. Once again, if this is your job, you simply can't afford to be slow. But even for hobbyists, speed is really essential to graphic manipulation.

Where is the bottom line on speed versus money? Each of us has to decide on the point at which we achieve the balance of using our computers for productive output without further upgrades. It is just as easy to write this column on my oldest computer, but since working with photos is my hobby; my fastest computer will have to be used. However, from now on, the two machines will be used to do a specific job, rather than keeping everything on just one of them. As for the internet, as long as it can be accessed with something other than the computer dedicated to the photos, then that is the one that will be used.

Hopefully I can keep my useful work separate from the internet, the object being to avoid contamination as much as possible. But I'm not sure how long the older, slower computer will serve my internet connection. If you are limited to one computer, you might look into removable hard drives in order to keep your data safe from the bad guys out there. But that takes us back to the money issue.

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So, when I want one of those old emails that had been arbitrarily “loped” off the tail end, I do the following:

1. Open Outlook Express and set it to Work Offline so that new emails are not loaded in with old ones (only needed if you are continuously on-line). You may set IE to Work Offline as follows: With IE open select File, and then check Work Offline. No new emails can come in under this mode.
 2. Now close OE.
 3. With Windows Explorer I find the folder “Toms emails” in My Documents and rename it to “Toms emails Today”
 4. Then I try to guess what backup might have the particular email I’m looking for from among the various backups I have on the external USB drives.
 5. With Windows Explorer I find the folder “Toms emails” on that external backup copy.
 6. Then I Copy that folder and Paste it into my current My Documents folder.
 7. I now see two email folders in My Documents; “Toms emails” which just was Pasted from the backup copy and the folder “Toms emails Today” which had been renamed earlier.
 8. Next I open IE again.
 9. It asks me “Do you want to work online?”
 10. Be sure to say NO!
 11. I then try to locate the desired email; sometimes I use IE’s Find capability to do this. Hopefully, I have guessed correctly and I find the desired email the first guess.
 12. I open it and then copy it to my Desktop by choosing File and then Save As and Save To Desktop.
 13. Now I close IE and with Windows Explorer find the folder “Toms emails”, the one I just loaded from the backup, and from which I retrieved the desired email, and I delete it.
 14. Next I rename “Toms emails Today” back to “Toms emails”
 15. Then I open IE and say Yes I want to Work Online.
- I find the email that I had copied to my desktop and double-click on it to open in IE. I can then save it back into my current emails and do whatever I wanted to do with it.

And that what I do to find that old “deleted” email! Of course it only works for so long as you maintain those backup copies – in my case about six months.

Addendum: How you may change the default location where your e-mails are stored in Outlook Express.

In OE, first select the Tools menu, and then Options tab. On the pop-up screen, click the Maintenance tab, then click the Store Folder button.

Outlook Express will show you where it is currently keeping your e-mail files.

You may then select Change and a Browse window will appear where you may chose to indicate the new place you wish to store your emails.

Can't Play Online Videos -- Here's What To Do

By Sandy Berger, CompuKISS

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Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

Recently I was installing some software at a local business when one of the workers approached me with a

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problem. She could not play a video on her computer even though co-workers could play it on their computers. The same problem appeared a few days later when I was troubleshooting some computer equipment for a local church and the Pastor could not view a news video on his computer. Since this seems to be happening all over my town, I thought it would make a good topic for a column. So here's the scoop.

Generally, each video you find on the Web will play only using the software that it was formatted for. If you try to play a video and you don't have the proper software, you won't be able to view the video. The area where the video would normally appear will be blank, usually showing either a gray or black square. However, on or near the blank video screen you will see a link that will lead you to the website where you can download the necessary software.

Many of the online news services are now using software called Flash for their videos. To view a Flash video, you need software by Adobe called Flash Player. Just click on the link to get to the proper place on the Adobe website to download the software. If there is no link available, you can access the download by clicking on the "Get Adobe FlashPlayer" button on the front page of the Adobe website at www.adobe.com. It's a free program and it will provide additional functionality to your computer, so don't hesitate to download it.

To get the player, click on the *Download* or *Download Now* button. You may have to scroll down the page to see the button, and you may have to agree to their policy. In most cases, the software will download and install automatically. (If it does not install automatically there will be step-by-step instructions for installation.)

One thing that the website may not tell you is that you may have to restart your computer for the new video software to be fully integrated with the computer. So if the software seems to have downloaded and installed, but you still don't see the video, close all the open windows and programs, and restart the computer.

While many online videos use the Flash software that I just talked about, others may use Windows Media Player, Real Media, or a program called QuickTime. If you are using a Windows computer, you will have Windows Media Player already installed. It comes with the Windows operating system.

The Real Player is a free program that can be found at www.real.com. The QuickTime Player is a free program from Apple that can be downloaded at www.quicktime.com. Even though it is an Apple program, it runs on Windows computers as well as on Macs. Both of these pieces of software are downloaded in a manner similar to that of the FlashPlayer.

Be aware that both RealPlayer and QuickTime will offer you an advanced version that you can purchase for a fee. Although you may want to purchase these programs in the future, it is perfectly alright to start with the free versions. The additional features in the paid versions will give you the ability to handle advanced video functionality, but everything you need to play online videos is included in the free versions.

You can download these video software programs as the need for them arises. Or if you like you can download all of these programs before you need them so you will be able to play almost all of the videos on the Web. These programs do not interfere with each other and will simply stay on your computer until they are needed.

Now you're all set to watch all the videos on the Web. Enjoy!

Configuring Outlook Express

By Dick Maybach, Columnist, Brookdale Computer User Group (BCUG) Brookdale, NJ
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Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

You can greatly improve your e-mail experience by properly configuring Outlook Express, which is the default Windows e-mail client. Outlook, which is included with MS Office, is a completely different program, but it has a similar user interface for e-mail. The two programs are similar enough that you should have no trouble adapting these procedures to your version. You should modify them as you get more experience with your particular mix of e-mail messages.

By default, Outlook Express has X folders. You should add to these to organize your e-mail messages to make them easier to find in the same way that you organize your file system by using folders there. Set up a separate folder for each major category of e-mail that you send and receive. With Outlook running, click on "File", select "New", and then click on "Folder...". Put the desired name in the "Name:" box and select "Personal Folders" in the "Select where to place the folder:" box. Move the messages in your Inbox to the appropriate folders. While you're at it, delete any you don't need. You will probably find some messages that don't belong in any folder; just leave these in the Inbox. Consider having Outlook Express empty the Deleted Messages folder every time you exit the program.

You will now set up a series of rules that tell Outlook where to place incoming messages, using the following procedure. Click on the Organize icon and then the Rules Wizard menu item. Click on the New... button to create a new rule or the Modify... one to change a rule. Assuming you are creating a new rule, the first screen asks you what kind of rule you want, which is usually "Check messages as they arrive." At the bottom of each screen is a window showing the rule as you've defined it so far. You can click on any underlined terms in the rule to change them. (When you are defining a new rule, you must define these before you can go the next screen.) The second screen lets you specify for which conditions you want to test. In the third screen you set what to do with the message, and the fourth one lets you add any exceptions. Finally, name the rule.

First, establish the rules to move incoming messages to the desired folder. Make the following choices for the rules screens. Screen 1 – "Check messages as they arrive". Screen 2 – "from people or distribution list". (Select the names from your address book.) Screen 3 – select both "move it to the specified folder" and "stop processing more rules". (Click on specified and select an existing folder or create a new one.) Screen 4 – you probably won't need any exceptions. Screen 5 – give the rule the same name as the folder. Repeat this until you have specified folders for all the people from whom you regularly receive mail.

By default, Outlook indicates junk mail by showing it in gray and adult content in purple. (I love that we use the new-speak term "adult" to describe content that most of us lose interest in by the time we leave adolescence.) To get rid of it, set up the following rule. Screen 1 – "Check messages when they arrive". Screen 2 – "suspected to be junk e-mail or from Junk Senders". (You will see a message asking if this is to be applied to every message you receive; select "Yes".) Screen 3 – "move it to the specified folder", probably "Deleted Items". Screen 4 – no exceptions. Screen 5 – name it "Junk Senders". Repeat this procedure, but for screen 2 select "Containing adult content or from adult content...".

You will probably find that these filters are not very effective. The following step is quite effective in eliminating spam, but it deletes all messages sent to you on a "copy to" (cc) or "blind copy to" (bcc) list. I use bcc routing on the Roundtable and Hardware SIG meeting notices. Unless you have set up a rule to route messages from me to a folder and then to stop processing other rules, Outlook will delete these meeting notices. Repeat again but select "Where my name is not in the To box" in screen 2. Monitor the results of this rule in case you need to add exceptions. Note also that if you don't have your incoming mail sent to folders as above, you will need exemptions for every correspondent that uses cc or bcc routing.

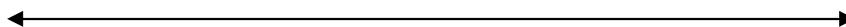
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If you follow my suggestions, you are sending all suspect e-mail to the Deleted Items folder. On my PC, everything in this folder is erased each time I exit Outlook, which means that you should look before you exit, at least for a month or so. By the way, I find that many such messages attempt to access the Internet when you open them. I think that they are just downloading graphics, but I don't want to take a chance that they are doing something sneaky. After I download my e-mail I disconnect so I can abort such actions. (If you have high-speed access you probably can't easily do this.)

Your last step is to order your rules list. The rules moving the desired e-mail to the correct folders should appear at the top of the list. Since they stop checking other rules after they move a message, they will prevent the spam filter rules from throwing out messages from people with whom you regularly correspond. To do this, click on "Rules Wizard..." and use the "Move Up" and "Move Down" buttons to sort the rules. You will have to reorder the rules each time you add a new one.

You will probably find that some spam still gets through. You can add to your junk senders list by right clicking on the message, selecting "Junk e-mail, and clicking on "Add to Junk Senders list". However, many spammers change their e-mail address with each message, making this ineffective. In such cases, see if you can identify the junk in some other way, perhaps by looking for specific words or in one of the fields (address, header, etc.). Keep in mind however, that your goal is not to completely eliminate spam, but to reduce it to a manageable volume. Don't let yourself become obsessed.



Blurbs from Bass By Steve Bass, PC World Columnist and Author
 Stevebass(at)earthlink.net

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication
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<Wonderful: Microsoft's free Virtual PC

I've been using it for three weeks. It's perhaps the best way to play with new utilities, for instance, try out a different anti-virus program, or just fiddle with Windows.

I run another copy of Windows XP within Windows XP. Some people load up Vista in the virtual machine while others play around with Linux.

It takes no super skill set to install or use, and provided you have enough RAM (I'll say about 1GB), the VPC will run happily. I was worried that it would slow down my PC. I have just one VM window running, and even at that, it's open only when I was using it. Overall, with 2GB of RAM on my PC (and 512RAM allocated to the VM when it was running), I didn't experience any sluggishness.

If it doesn't suite you, or it slows down your PC, just uninstall VPC like you would any other application.

You can get around the XP licensing issue (and activation) of two versions of XP on one PC easily. Some people (not, uh, me) call Microsoft for an activation and try to explain to the overseas tech person that yes I have this copy running on a PC, but all I'm trying to do it set it up on the same PC using Microsoft's VM product. Chances are good they won't understand a word you're saying, not be able to find "VM Product" on their tree-based help chart, say screw it in their language, and give you the activation code.

Or you could just rely on XP's 30 day activation deadline. As the deadline approaches, delete the XP virtual machine (it's only a big swap file) and start again with a new installation.

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Get Microsoft's Virtual PC

<http://snipurl.com/virtualpc1>

Read how to install and use VPC

<http://snurl.com/usevpc>

Gotcha! Geek Squad Caught Stealing Porn

In a three-month sting, the Consumerist loaded a PC with porn, set it up with a keylogger, and asked the Geek Squad to install iTunes. The hidden program recorded everything and produced a very revealing video. Watch as the tech pokes around, finds what he wants, and copies files to his flash drive.

<http://snurl.com/geekpornsquid>

Assorted short blurbs

Have you ever heard a Mockingbird outside your window? It's the bird that sings mostly at night and mimics other birds. The Superb Lyrebird goes one better by imitating, with eerie accuracy, everyday sounds, such as chain saws, car alarms, and well, just listen and be amazed. <http://snipurl.com/Lyrebird>

Do you have any idea what's holding up your cursor? I think you'll be quite surprised. Click on the link below to find out. Make sure to move your cursor quickly and double click every so often.

<http://www.1-click.jp/>

The Real Group is very entertaining. They remind me a little of Manhattan Transfer. Listen to them sing the Five Song Basie Medley and don't miss it when the lead singer imitates an instrument. It's at about 3:17 minutes. Click here for info about the group. [Thanks, Gus.]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URpLESNyydE>

If you enjoyed the first video, here's another with them working impromptu. Watch the beginning for the setup and skip past Yesterday until they start doing pseudo-opera at 2:40 minutes.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XcRIBQF2AYc>

Hassle-Free PC: Smart Fixes for Gnarly PC Problems

http://snipurl.com/HF_0707

I'll bet your Start Menu is messy because it's jammed with programs. There's probably a good chance you can't even remember where any of the programs are on the menu. Try popping up Launchy (alt-space), type the first few letters of the program you want, hit Enter, and Launchy launches it.

<http://www.launchy.net/>

They know damn well they're breaking the law. Yet I get at least three automated calls from them a week. I have a plan -- make an appointment to have my carpeting cleaned and then slap a small claims court notice to appear into the hand of the guy arriving at my door. Read more on my blog:

<http://snipurl.com/BestCarpet>

Rate PC World Magazine: Here's the PC World survey page for the current issue. You don't have to be a subscriber; give it a whirl and be eligible for a \$500 Amazon certificate (which accounts why I haven't had a raise in a while).

http://snipurl.com/PCW_Survey

Time Killing Videos

Check out "High Power Job," a video about an occupation that makes me grateful I'm a safe and sound writer.

<http://www.glumbert.com/media/highpower>

The Slinky Humans video held my attention for the full five minutes. (But what in the world it's doing at a Sea World Amusement Park is beyond me.) But it appears they've taken a cue, so to speak, from Mummenschanz.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAPBaXLJvYI>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QO3B6hESM3I>

You know how I like magic, right? Well here's a brilliant bit of it with just the correct amount of misdirection.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voAntzB7EwE>

Two Useful Tools

FileMenu Tools: The context menu of Windows Explorer gets messy. FileMenu Tools gives you a way to customize it.

<http://www.lopesoft.com/en/fmtools/info.html>

ReCase: It's a small issue, but it may bother you: all the filenames in a specific folder are in upper, lower, or mixed case. Here's a tool that will fix it.

<http://bluefive.pair.com/recase.htm>

Free Directory Assistance

There are two new, free directory assistance services you can use on either your cell phone or home landline.

I like Google a little better because it'll dial the number for me. Details:

<http://blogs.pcworld.com/tipsandtweaks/archives/004120.html>

In the other hand, TellMe is faster and easier to use, and definitely has a better voice presence. Unfortunately, what spoils it is that it won't connect me. Details:

<http://www.tellme.com/products/TellmeByVoice>

<http://betafeedback.tellme.com/forum/b-gb/m-1171475327/>

Either way, their both free and useful.