BITS AND BYTES

The Newsletter of the Midland Computer Club

April 2008

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: April 23rd

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: Larry Piper will
demonstrate how to set up your own personal
website
PROGRAM COORDINATORS
Contact :
Larry Piper   larryP56@chartermi.net

Co-Chairman-Joe Lykowski joseph@lylowski.com

What you missed!

In **March**, Joe Lykowski gave a very informative
presentation on some of the various system tools
which can give you help in determining what's
wrong with your computer. The tool kit included
various tools to remove spyware, viruses and clut-
ter, along with tools to check your memory and
hard drive. Other tools will also help speed up
your system.

Upcoming Activities

In **April**, Larry Piper will demonstrate how to set
up your own personal website using the space that
you may have available through your ISP. Al-
though the focus will be primarily on the use of
Charter, the basic ideas and concepts will work
with any ISP that provide the necessary tools for a
member to create a web site.

The **May** meeting will have Terry Brown
discussing genealogy research on the web.

The President's Corner

With not much for me to complain
about, I thought that it was time again for
me to request input from the club mem-
bers on topics they would like to see pre-
sented at club meetings. With a relatively
stable attendance, I can only assume that
people have been satisfied with the direc-
tion that the board has gone, but we need
to continually seek your input so we make sure that the pro-
grams that we present are pertinent, educational and informa-
tive to all of you. So please give me your feedback. The feed-
back can be via discussion at the meetings or e-mail, which-
ever works best for you. Thank you for your input.
                                    — Howard Lewis
*(The above comments are the opinion of the author and do not
necessarily reflect the views of the Midland Computer Club.)*

Shortcuts

By Mike Moore, Editor, Bowling Green Area Microcomputer
User Group, Kentucky
www.bgamug.org
ml.moore@insightbb.com

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publica-
tion by APCUG member groups.

**Why do some icons on your desktop have a little white arrow
embedded in the picture?**
These are shortcuts (sometimes called links). They are small files
that represent and "point to" the real thing. When you double -left-
click on a shortcut icon, Windows reads the location of the file to
open from within the shortcut file, then opens the target
file. Shortcuts are, in the lingo of computer programmers, sym-
bolic links to actual files. They don't contain any of the file's in-
formation—they just point to it. In real terms: if Peoria, Illinois
was a file, then its shortcut would be the map telling you how to
get there.

Why do we use shortcuts? Why not just put the real, actual file
on your desktop? There are several reasons. First, since a shortcut

2008 MCC OFFICERS

POSITION   **EMAIL:**

President   Howard Lewis   lewis3ha@chartermi.net
Vice Pres.   Bill Tower   stressed@tir.com
Treasurer   Bob Miller   barloshelties@sbcglobal.net
Membership   Gary Ensing   gensing@juno.com
Editor   Jan Ensing   btiger6@juno.com

http://mcc.apcug.org/

Special Interest Groups:

CLUB PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Chairman   Larry Piper   larryP56@chartermi.net
Co-Chairman   Joe Lykowski   joseph@lylowski.com

BOARD MEMBER

Mary Branson   molly688@chartermi.net
Robert Hughes   MIDItunez@yahoo.com

INTERNET SIG

Terry Brown   t_bbrown@yahoo.com

PUBLICITY

Kathy Bohl   kbohl30265@aol.com

Board Meeting

There will be no board meeting in May. The next board meeting will be 7 p.m., June 10, 2008, at Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church, 5501 Jefferson Ave., Midland.

Moving on to Vista – Part 5

by Neil Stahfest, Librarian, Tacoma Area PC User Group, Washington
www.tapcug.org
ncstahfest(at)msn.com

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As most PC users know, after you've used your computer for a while the data on your hard drive starts to get fragmented. This affects your computer's performance and causes programs to run more slowly. With Windows XP, as well as all previous versions, you had three ways to defragment you hard drive. You could do it manually (click Start --> All Programs --> Accessories --> System Tools --> Disk Defragmenter). You could do it manually (click Start --> All Programs --> Accessories --> System Tools --> Disk Cleanup). Or you could create a scheduled task to do it for you automatically (click Start --> All Programs --> Accessories --> System Tools --> Scheduled Task and the click on "Add Scheduled Task" and follow the wizard instructions).

Windows Vista automatically defragments your hard disk for you. Not only does it defragment you hard disk, but it does it in background mode. This allows you to do other things on your computer while the defragmenting program is being run. The down side

Membership Enrollment form

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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

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

http://www.wetpaint.com/
Wetpaint will allow you to construct your own personal wiki. This is a great way to share your personal knowledge with others.

http://annoyances.org/
Almost everyone has something that annoys them about whatever version of Windows you are using. This site delves into many of the annoyances that we experience on a regular basis and point you toward solutions.

http://youtube.com/watch?v=xmpDSBAh6RY

I think we have all heard horror stories from people who have tried to cancel their AOL accounts. When Vincent Ferrari went to cancel his account, he decided to record the conversation.

http://ie.youtube.com/watch?v=BzjLlqIuVhI

Do you remember to keep your mouth shut when watching the birds overhead?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmNrm9vHBHs

If your computer needs to be repaired, you might find this video interesting. A TV station put three different repair shops to the test to see if they could properly diagnose the problem with a computer that won't boot.

Hulu Offers Free TV and Movies over the Net
By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio and TV Show Host
iwilsker(at)apcug.net

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WEBSITES:
http://www.hulu.com
http://www.hulu.com/browse/alphabetical/tv - TV Shows Alphabetically
http://www.hulu.com/browse/genre/tv - TV shows by Genre
http://www.hulu.com/hd - HD Videos
http://www.hulu.com/browse/network/movies - Movies by Studio
http://www.hulu.com/browse/genre/movies - Movies by Genre
http://www.adobe.com - Adobe Flash Player (Free)

One of my readers recently emailed me about an offer he received via email (probably a spam email) about a $50 program that will allow him to view what was described as satellite TV over the internet, without paying a monthly fee. According to the email, with this program, he could discontinue his cable or satellite service, and watch over 3000 channels on his computer. I researched the product he referenced and found that it was a multilevel marketed program that was, in my opinion, deceptive in that it did not offer real satellite TV, but instead only offered a software utility that could receive the thousands of streaming videos already available for anyone to view for free, and that often required no special software to view. I strongly recommended to the reader that he not purchase the product, and instead just search for streaming video, and to keep his current TV provider.

In researching this service I came upon a recently released and legitimate way to view thousands of TV programs and movies over the internet, for free, and only using any of the common internet browsers. This free service (registration required) is the Hulu service available online at www.hulu.com. Hulu was founded in March of 2007, and is a joint venture owned by NBC Universal, and News Corp, and financed by $100 million of venture capital. As

Tips, Tricks & Techniques

The Vista Sidebar

Through several false starts over nearly ten years, Microsoft appears to have finally had success putting "active" items on the Windows desktop. This has been accomplished with the new Vista Sidebar. Stability problems that plagued previous versions of Windows aren't nearly as apparent as they used to be. Basically, the Sidebar doesn't crash nearly as often as Active Desktop in Windows XP; plus the items offered actually do help.

 The items in the Sidebar are actually termed Gadgets and can interact with you, with Windows, with files and folders, with your network, and with other Gadgets. Vista ships with a handful of moderately interesting Gadgets — a clock (you can put more than one clock on your desktop, each set to a different time zone), an RSS reader, an application launcher, and others. If you want additional information, Microsoft has a site that offers over a thousand other gadgets, all the way from weather to stock tracking to news to system information.

Gadgets start on the Sidebar, but they don't have to stay there. Simply click and drag a Gadget anyplace you like on your desktop.

Doing Dashes

To make your documents look more professional, you should replace all of your "dashes" (-) with an en dash (–) which is slightly wider than the letter "n" or an em dash (—) which is slightly wider than the letter "m." (The en dash is typically used when the dash is followed by a number and the em dash is used when the dash is followed by more words.)

There are three ways you can add an en dash to your document: 1 – You can use *Insert*/*Symbol*/*Special Characters* and select en dash; 2 – You can simply type two dashes and continue typing your document (Word will convert the two dashes into an en dash); or 3 – You can simply press *Ctrl+Num –* (that is hold down the Control key on your keyboard and press the minus key on the numeric keypad on your keyboard).

There are only two ways to insert an em dash: 1 – Again use the *Insert*/*Symbol*/*Special Characters* and select the em dash; or 2 – Press the *Alt+Ctrl+Num –* key combination.

I type this, Hulu is offering advertising supported content from over 50 sources, such as Fox TV, NBC, MGM, Sony Pictures, Warner Brothers, Lionsgate, 20th Century Fox, and other providers. The content available for viewing includes TV shows, full length feature films, and clips. Several full length, prime time shows are available on Hulu the morning after they air, and include such popular shows as The Simpsons, and The Office. There are also dozens of classical TV shows, available as full length episodes, including such favorites as Miami Vice and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. If users are willing to put up with unobtrusive ads, often in the lower right corner of the image, or standard TV type commercials, they can watch for free such full length feature films as Ice Age, Three Amigos!, and many others. Hulu is headquartered in Los Angeles, with research and development being done in China.

Hulu will play on almost all current browsers as they are currently configured, and require no special software or add-ons to utilize the service, and requires a broadband connection to view the videos. Almost all computers already have Adobe's Flash Player installed, but if not, Flash Player is a free download from Adobe at www.adobe.com.

Once registered at hulu.com (free registration), a broad selection of videos becomes available for viewing at will. As I type this, there are about 11,200 full length TV episodes and feature clips available, with more being added daily. Currently available for viewing are almost all of the episodes of The Simpsons, 30 Rock, The Office, Knight Rider, House, Medium, Bionic Woman, American Dad!, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, 24, Prison Break, Heroes, about 160 full length children's cartoons (Woody Woodpecker, Spiderman, Astro Boy, and many others), and other TV shows of all genres. For those partial to Saturday Night Live skits, there are about nearly 500 available, including

Midland Community Center Parking Lot Construction

George Street in front of the Midland Community Center has been permanently closed and construction of the new parking lot begun. During this time of construction, access to the Center will vary depending on the current status of the new construction. Currently to access the Center, please enter the West part of the parking lot from either Haley Street or George Street.
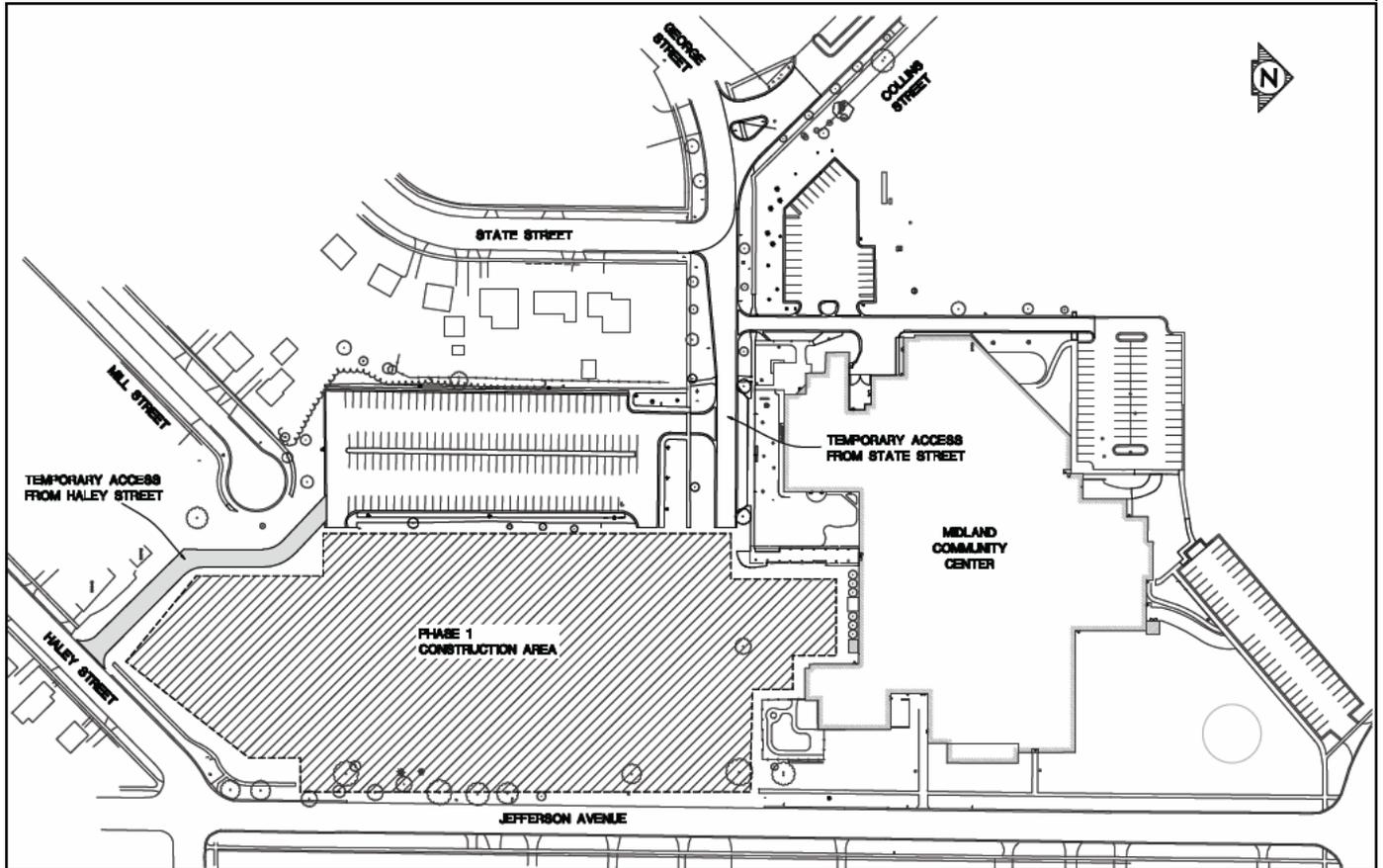
For most people coming to the Center via Jefferson Ave., this will mean turning onto Haley and entering the area via that entrance. There is a light at the corner of Haley and Jefferson. Those coming from Saginaw or Bay City via U.S. 10 will turn left at the light and those coming from most other parts of Midland will turn right onto Haley. For those coming from the downtown area or West of Midland (via M-20), you can currently enter through the George Street entrance. Once the East portion of the lot is completed, you will all enter the new lot via Jefferson Ave. as the Haley and George Street entrances will be closed for the second phase of the parking lto construction. Eventually a second entrance will be constructed off of George/State/Collins Streets. Updated maps will be maintained on the Midland Community Center website (www.mymcc.org) as work progresses. If you have any questions, please either let me know or call the Midland Community Center at 989-832-7937 extension 0.

Howard

6

such contemporary issues as presidential politics. TV wrestling fans would appreciate the over 300 matches available for viewing, while NBA fans can view over 140 clips from professional basketball games. A collection of recent (2008) full length college football games, including many of the bowl games are available for viewing, including the 2007 and 2008 Sugar Bowl, Cotton Bowl, Fiesta Bowl, and others, enough to satiate any college football fans, and keep them glued to the computer screen for days on end. Soap opera addicts will appreciate the well over 100 clips from Days of Our Lives. In total, Hulu lists 25 different TV genres for every taste, making something available for everyone. The large assortment of TV shows (and movies as well) can be displayed by clicking on "Type" (TV or Movie), and then "Genre"; this will display only those selections that meet both criteria. Simply clicking on the image of the selection will play that selection. All of the TV shows can be displayed in one window alphabetically at www.hulu.com/browse/alphabetical/tv, and can be run by clicking on their titles. All of the TV shows can also be displayed in one window, sorted by genre at www.hulu.com/browse/genre/tv.

Hulu is not just about TV, but also full length feature films, clips, and trailers. As I type this, there are 760 movies available, of which 80 are full length feature films, the remainder being shorts, clips and trailers. According to Hulu, the most popular full length films viewed by members are Ice Age, Master and Commander: The far Side of the World, The Girl Next Door, The Jerk, Usual Suspects, Planet of the Apes, Weekend at Bernie's, Dragon – The Bruce Lee Story, Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea, Three Amigos!, All Dogs Go to Heaven, and dozens more. Movies are divided into 10 genres, including action and adventure, animation, comedy, crime and mystery, documentary and biography, drama, family and kids, horror and thriller, music, and sci-fi and fantasy. Movies can be selected by genre, or by studio. Opening www.hulu.com/browse/network/movies will display movies alphabetically by studio, with full length features being clearly indicated. Each of the movies shown is hyperlinked (click on the title) directly to the movie. Similarly, all of the movies can be sorted by genre, and displayed in one window at www.hulu.com/browse/genre/movies.

Hulu is about to roll out "HD" (High Definition) videos, and currently has 20 HD movie trailers available to demonstrate the service at www.hulu.com/hd. Since HD video caries more data then conventional video, the system requirements are higher to view HD. In order to view the HD videos, the computer must have a minimum of Flash Player 9.0.115.0 (a free download from Adobe, available for most operating systems), a 2.5Mbs or faster broadband connection (many of the basic broadband services are incapable of operating at this speed, and a premium or upgraded broadband may be required to view HD), a fast processor (3Ghz minimum for Windows or Linux, or a 1.83Ghz Intel Core Duo for Mac). Almost all modern computers of recent manufacturer meet the minimum RAM and video requirements to view HD videos.

While not a substitute for cable or satellite TV, Hulu can provide countless hours of entertainment for free. Since new content is frequently added, and additional providers are being solicited, Hulu has the potential for becoming a major entertainment resource.

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Zune 8 Review

by Ash Nallawalla, APCUG Director and member of the Melbourne PCUG, Australia
www.melbpc.org.au/
anallawalla(at)apcug.net

Thanks to good friends in the Microsoft Windows group in Redmond, I received a shiny new, red 8 GB Zune during CES. It has a beautifully engraved "www.zuneusergroup.com" (my site) on the back. Here is my assessment.

Packaging

The compact packaging of the 4/8 GB Zune does not contain a software CD like the original Zune. You get a manual, a USB cable and a set of earphones. The box comes in a soft pouch and could be mistaken for a perfume box.

Setting Up

You first set up the Zune software on the PC by going to www.zune.net/setup. You get to choose between the "full Zune experience" and simply downloading the software. I already had the latest software on account of my old Zune 30, so I explored the Zune.net site.

There you set up a Zune account, if you don't have one. This enables you to give your Zune a name and buy music from the Zune Marketplace, an online music store. You can customize your Zune at zuneoriginals.net.

The Zune 8 refuses to work until you have installed the Zune software on the PC and connected the player at least once. When you connect the device to the PC, it proceeds to update the firmware. This was painless.

Software

The Zune software is easy to use and is intuitive. It was able to find all my music, video and images and sync them to the player. I can also sync my podcast subscriptions automatically. Unless it was a coincidence, the software showed both my Zunes in their correct colours - a nice touch.

Controls

The main input on the player is the Zune Pad, a rounded rectangular touch-sensitive button. You change the volume and select options by rubbing your thumb from top to bottom or left to right. The default touch sensitivity was fine for me, unlike the over-sensitive controls of the original Creative Zen, which tended to overshoot the desired selection.

Display

The tiny 4.5 cm (1.8-inch) scratch-resistant, glass-covered screen is watchable for short music videos that have close-ups of performers but it would not be fun to watch a full-length movie on this model. During music playback, the backlight disappears and helps to conserve battery life.

The USB cable acts as the media conduit to and from the PC and also charges the battery. There is a small, recessed set of holes to take a wrist strap, which is not supplied.

FM Radio

The FM radio displays RBDS data, so you can see the name of the radio station and the song being played. You cannot record a radio program, as you can on some Creative units. The tuner picked up all my local stations.

Sound Quality

The sound quality is fine too, just like the original Zune 30. There is a good selection of pre-loaded media. The supplied earphones do a basic job, but as with all players, you need to buy high-quality headphones to get optimum sound. There isn't an equalizer (EQ) control or preset, so you cannot customize the sound to your liking. This option is present on the old Zune 30, so its omission seems to be a deliberate decision. Why hobble sound quality?

Sharing

The latest 2.3 (1145) firmware is common to all models and renames "Community" to "Social". You can share a song by sending it to a nearby Zune (that is turned on and has wireless enabled). The other Zune has to accept it and will get three plays (the three days limitation has been removed).

Other Zune models

There is a new 80 GB model (only black) that works just like the 4/8 GB versions except that it contains a hard drive, not Flash memory and has a larger screen. The 4/8 GB models come in pink, red, green and black.

Conclusion

The Zune 8 is light, easy-to-use, has a good battery life, feature set, and great sound quality. The software is a testimonial to Microsoft as a leading software company. In conclusion, the 8 GB Zune is a fine multimedia player and you will not regret buying it (about $185 online). Well done, Microsoft.

8

of this is that programs will run more slowly while the defragmenting process goes on. On the other hand, because automatic defragmenting runs fairly frequently it should not take too long to complete.

Of course you still have the ability to defragment manually. Right-click on the "Computer" icon on your desktop and select properties. In the window that appears, click on "Performance" (lower left corner), then "Advanced Tools" (upper left corner) and then "Open Disk Defragmenter". Notice that at this point you have the options of scheduling when the defragmenter runs or running it immediately. At this point Vista will defragment ALL hard drives that it finds on your computer. Previous versions of Windows allow you to select which hard drive to defragment. Windows Vista SP1 (when it is released) is supposed to add this capability to Windows Vista.

While we are on the topic of computer performance, lets go back to the "Performance Information and Tools" screen (right click on the "Computer" icon, click on "Properties" and click on "Performance" in the lower left corner of the screen). Note that this screen provides you with some general information about the performance of your computer. It numerically scores processor, memory, graphics and hard disk performance. You'll find links on this screen that explain what the numbers mean and how to improve your computer's performance. Many of the suggestions do not require changes to you hardware but recommend changes to the programs that you run or do not run.

On the upper left side of the "Performance Information and Tools" screen you'll find a number of tasks which control how your computer performs. If your PC is a laptop, click on "Adjust power settings". On the new screen, examine the "Power Plan". The decision you make here effects the length of time that your laptop will run between battery charges and its speed. Most laptops come configured to balance performance against battery endurance. There are many options available. If you normally operate your laptop plugged into an external power source, you'll want to change the setting to maximize performance.

Before we leave the "Performance Information and Tools" screen, you should also look at "Adjust visual effects" (in the upper left corner under "Tasks").   When you click on this item you'll see three tabs. We are only going to address the "Visual effects" tab for now. The first button, "Let Windows choose what is best for my computer" is probably selected. This gives you the maximized "eye candy" on your computer but may have a negative effect on performance when resource intensive programs are running (i.e. Video editors). Notice that you have additional choices to "Adjust for best appearance" and "Adjust for best performance" as well as a "Custom" button that lets you choose what features to turn on and off. If your computer performance appears to be sluggish, try selecting "Best performance".

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Converting CD-based Music to Compressed Audio Files

By Mike Moore, Editor, Bowling Green Area Microcomputer User Group, Kentucky
www.bgamug.org
ml.moore(at)insightbb.com
Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

I spent the equivalent of two or three days in January, working a few minutes at a time, converting all of our CDs to MP3 format. I had been dreading this project, thinking that it would take too much time, but it really was not that bad and the results are going to be worth it.

A few years ago I purchased a 400-CD jukebox type CD player. This device does has the capability of displaying a short line containing the album's title, using a standard PC keyboard, but the process is complicated with problems. It's easy to get CDs in the wrong slot and of course, you can only play them in the room where you've physically situated the jukebox unit.

In the past few years, we've been getting away from the album and becoming more focused on individual songs. This lamentable trend has been fueled by the 99 cent price point associated with downloading music by the song. Artists and producers alike have vilified this process, claiming that the artistic sum worth of songs on an album is greater than the tunes taken as individual songs.

9

I can buy into this sadness, to a point. I remember the smell of vinyl LPs, unwrapping the cellophane outer wrap, and the incredible detail the producers went into in packing artistic value into the finished product, right down to the order the songs appear on the album. These days, you just Google the album or artist title and download the Jpeg, that's about it. For a fee, a program called iTunes will do this for you automatically.

So why would a guy spend the time to rip (compress) the tracks of a CD or other ancient audio product to MP3 files? There are a few good reasons to do this.

For one thing, the devices that play music have become decentralized. What I mean by that is if you can imagine your computer as the "record player," then it's not much of a stretch to think of playing music anywhere in the house, car or workplace.

Doing this in the past meant locating the song you want (which may or may not be an easy task), finding the CD (or tape, or LP) it's recorded on, and hoping that it's not damaged.

Then once you've got it, you carry it to where ever you want to hear it. For me, this was often the car, and a car is a great place to scratch or otherwise ruin a CD, and I've also known friends whose entire CD collections have been stolen from vehicles. Physically moving music and other files from player to player is sometimes humorously referred to as "Sneaker Net"

But **once you begin to think of your songs and other media in terms of compressed MP3 files**, they become at once more searchable, more replaceable, and more portable.

Compressed audio files, though the wonder of a shared internet database called Gracenote (formerly CDDB), contain informational tidbits that can searched. On the other hand, ordinary music tracks on a Compact Disc have no information associated with them at all, not even the name of the song. **By converting CD-ROM music to MP3 files**, your database can pull up a playlist for you using information encoded in the MP3 file. Most ripping software (such as C-Dex, available at http://cdexos.sourceforge.net/) will query the CDDB so that you won't have to manually type in the names of the songs or the name of the CD.

Compressed audio files can be stored on any hard drive in the house and can be made available on inexpensive MP3 players, iPods, and Multimedia computers that attach directly to your sound system. There is usually no special hardware to buy - you can just feed the stereo output from your computer's sound card to the audio input on your TV or stereo amplifier.

Most of the MP3 player devices out there do not require a lot in the way of software - you generally plug them into a computer, they assign themselves a drive letter, and you can just copy your songs to the devices as if they were another hard drive. **There are even self-contained wireless hard drives** (see: http://www.apple.com/airportexpress) that will broadcast your music wirelessly to any networked computer in the house!

Compressed audio files cannot get scratched like CDs do, and if your iPod or MP3 player is stolen or accidentally formatted (happens all the time!), or even if your entire CD collection is stolen, it's no longer the end of the world. You just re-copy the files back to another device and you're good to go.

Though not exactly small, compressed audio files do **lend themselves much better to e-mail**. A typical MP3 music file is around 3 to 6 megabytes, which is just under the threshold of being too large to send to someone using dial-up internet. If both ends of the connection have high-speed, it's no problem at all, as this amount of data can be transmitted by most DSL and cable internet services in about 10 or 20 seconds. The MP3 compressed format is "lossy" in the sense that some of the music data is lost during compression, compared to the original recording, however I've never been able to tell the difference between a compressed song and a non-compressed track on a CD. The data you lose is not data that manifests as part of the music.

By the way, the songs as recorded on CDs you buy are very large - 50 to 80 megabytes would not be uncommon. For those of you audiophiles who need compression but don't want any data loss, consider using the FLAC mode of compression (See http://flac.sourceforge.net for information). FLAC stands for "Free Lossless Audio Codec"

So, there are a host of reasons why we would want to compress our audio collection, **but what is the downside?** The only problem I can think of is that most automotive and older CD players cannot recognize the MP3 or any computer

generated music format. Some of the newer CD players can, but it's not something that people generally know. So, for example, when I transferred an audio book selection to CD for my wife, she found that the CD player in her car refused to play the media, even though her car is not that old. My car, a Chevy Monte Carlo, played the disk without a problem even though it's an older car than hers. So in this situation you may want to take advantage of software that does the reverse of ripping - it would take MP3 files and lay them down on the CD as if they were ordinary Audio CD tracks. iTunes and many CD-writing utilities such as Nero will do this for you.

Now does anyone wanna buy a used 400-CD jukebox player?

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The New, The Best, and The Worst

March 2008
Collected by Pim Borman, Webmaster, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc
http://swipcug.apcug.org/
Swipcug(at)gmail.com

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

Good, Bad, or Who-Needs-It?

Penryn
   With the introduction of Intel's Penryn Core 2 Duo and Extreme CPUs Moore's Law stays right on track. Thanks to further miniaturization to 45-nanometer elements, the chips have significantly lower power consumption, a feature that will be even more desirable in the five new Penryn-based CPUs for laptops that have now been released. The new Penryn-based systems are not significantly faster than systems with Intel's previous-generation processors, but outstrip those with the currently fastest AMD chip, the 2.2 GHz 9500 quad core Phenom CPU. Intel has introduced a new instruction set for the Penryns, called SSE4, that can greatly speed up applications written to work with it. That may take a while yet. Adobe is updating its next version of Premiere Pro video editing with SSE4 support. (*PC World,* March 2008*)*
    Only two years ago I bought a new desktop screamer using the then-tops AMD Athlon 64 X2 Dual-Core processor. My pride in the new system didn't last long, as usual, as the AMD CPU was left in the dust by new Intel processors. Nevertheless, I doubt that even now my run-of-the-mill programs make use of all the special capabilities of the dual-core CPU. Photo editing with Adobe Photoshop Elements or The Gimp happens instantly, faster than I can think of what to do next. So who needs any more power?
   PC World's 25th anniversary issue (March 2008) quotes from the March 1991 issue:
"These five screamers are amongst the fastest - and the costliest - systems you can buy. We pick the best of the lot and answer the obvious question: Who needs this much power? - *We reviewed four blazing 486 PCs in the March 1991 issue, starting at $8300, and decided that they were simply too fast for most people." F*amous last words!

False Firefox Fix
   Usually I don't pay attention to application software tips, such as keyboard shortcuts for common actions. The most important ones I already know, and the obscure ones are not worth the effort remembering. Therefore I would normally not have paid much attention to an article in the January issue of *PC World* by Lincoln Spector about undocumented Firefox tips. What caught my eye was that, according to the author, Firefox is optimized for dial-up connections, and one of the tips concerned changing its settings for broadband.
    Firefox has dozens of hidden configuration settings that are not readily available to the ordinary user, for obvious good reasons. They are stored in HTML documents that can be accessed by typing *about: config* in the address bar of the browser. The article suggests that you back up the configuration file before you fiddle with it, and shows how to do that.

(Continued from page 10)

Following the instructions, I turned network pipelining and network proxy pipelining on (set their values to "true"), increased the network pipelining "maxrequests" to 15 (up from 4), and entered a value of 0 for a new integer *nglayout.initialpaint.delay*. After restarting Firefox I tried it out. It seemed to perform with alacrity, although I couldn't have sworn that it was faster than before.

Looking for background information on Firefox configuration, I found a June 2006 article on the *PC World* Web site by the ever knowledgeable Scott Spanbauer on the about: command to access hidden information. Specifically he mentions about: cache that gives access to an enormous file listing the URLs accessed in the past. Handy to find some old data or revisit a Web site without logging on.

Anyway, Spanbauer's article provided a link to Mozilla's about:config FAQ site (*http://find.pcworld. com/53066*). I took it from there and found out that the suggested settings to optimize Firefox for broadband were either irrelevant or actually retarding downloads. Turning pipelining on is not always supported by all servers and may therefore cause crashes. The value "maxrequests" has a maximum value of 8; higher values than that default to 8. Setting the delay value too low actually slows down the download; its preferred value is the default 250 milliseconds (about the blink of an eye). So much for helpful tips. I reset the parameters to their original values and left it at that. Don't believe everything you read!
Fatalyzer

Wondering if your dieting and exercising is doing any good? Fret no more! Soon you'll be able to take a fatalyzer test to see how fast you are burning off fat. Based on technology developed by Dow Chemical, and under development by a start-up company Kemeta (http://kemeta.com), a hand-held breathalyzer detects acetone in your breath that results from metabolizing body fat. This is a more accurate measure of how effective your dieting and exercising efforts are, eliminating the influence of fluid and muscle fluctuations (*Chemical and Engineering News*, 1/28/2008, http://snipurl.com/fatalyzer). The results are shown in terms of pounds of body fat lost per week.

It might motivate the dieters stronger if the unit also indicated how much fat was added to their hips by that pizza they just ate. And with the run-away popularity at the recent Toy Expo of digital doggies that can sit up and beg or fart on command, maybe the next product ought to be a doggy robot with a nose capable of detecting drugs, explosives, lost children and misplaced car keys. That should be a bestseller for sure!

All a-Twitter?
"Twitteris a free networking blogging that allows users to send 'updates' (or 'tweets'; text-based posts, up to 140 characters long) to Twitter website, via short message service, instant messaging, a third-party application such as *."*

That's how Wikipedia describes the latest rage in digital jabbering *(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Twitter).* presidential candidates use the service constantly, undoubtedly hoping to reach younger voters. Find out what Barack Obama (*http://twitter.com/BarackObama*) Hillary Clinton (*http://twitter.com/HillaryClinton*) up to. Ron Paul (*http://twitter.com/RonPaul2008)* to be the only Republican who twitters. John McCain is noted by his absence.

As the Twitter site (*http://twitter.com)*puts it,
"Twitter is a service for friends, family, and co–workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing?"
Indeed.

Thanks to *The Economist* (Feb.2, 2008) for enlightening us about this service.

12

does not contain any of the target file's information, it can be deleted without damaging the file it points to. Therefore, placing shortcuts on the desktop (or in any directory) is safer. Accidental deletion of these links will not affect anything other than you may lose track of where your file was!

The other reason is that **you can have many shortcuts and place them anywhere you might need quick access to your file.** For example, when we give away computers, we organize the software links in various folders on the desktop. There's a folder for Educational software and Game software links, and for the software that is both Educational and Fun, we put links to the same program in both the Educational and Game folders. You can rename shortcuts to anything you want, and it won't affect the real name of the file they point to.

Shortcuts are also portable! If I know for sure that a program will be in a certain place on nearly every PC, I can e-mail a link to someone and tell them to place it on their desktop. Double-clicking on it should open that file on my recipient's PC! E-mailing a link is much more of a sure bet than e-mailing an executable file—because most e-mail servers just won't allow executables (files ending in .EXE) to be sent!

How does one create a link? The best way is to find the file you want the link to refer to, then do a single right-click on it. This brings up a context menu where you can create the shortcut. Once the shortcut is created you can move it to any directory or to the desktop.

For creating desktop links, Windows provides a shortcut wizard that allows you to create a shortcut for any file type including a web page or another folder. From anywhere on the desktop, right click and select 'New' and then 'Shortcut' to activate this wizard.