

# BITS AND BYTES

The Newsletter of the Midland Computer Club

April 2009

## 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 22nd**

## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: Open Source Software Demo by Larry Piper

### PROGRAM COORDINATORS

#### Contact : Co-Chairpersons

Larry Piper [larryP56@chartermi.net](mailto:larryP56@chartermi.net)

Joe Lykowski [joseph@lykowski.com](mailto:joseph@lykowski.com)

### The President's Corner

I'd like to use my space this month requesting a little input from the club members. For one, I would like to ask for your input on ideas for club meeting presentations. I think the quality and timeliness of our topics has been quite good, but sometimes, we feel like we are making decisions on what **we think** (the board) you would like to hear when in reality we would like to present the things that **you** would like to hear. So if you have any ideas for future topics, please let one of us on the board know. Also, I would like to know what you would like to see in the way of prizes for raffles at the meetings. We currently are not getting very many things from the vendors at this time. This is understandable with so many of the vendors finding things very tight right now. So if you have any ideas for raffles, please let me know. Thanks for any input you may be able to provide.

— Howard Lewis



*(The above comments are the opinion of the author and do not*

### What you missed!

**March** had Howard Lewis giving a presentation on his experiences with the beta version of Microsoft Windows 7. The presentation gave a demonstration of some of the new changes to expect with the next version of Windows. At this time, Windows 7 appears to be very stable and will not be a traumatic change for users of Windows Vista. At this time, Microsoft is keeping to it's announced release date of January 2010, however, due to the stability of the product, that may move up to the fourth quarter of 2009.

### Upcoming Activities

Larry Piper will be doing a presentation in **April** on Open Source Software. Many of us are currently using some version of Firefox, which *is* open source software. This will be an opportunity to learn more about some of the open source alternatives to the big bucks applications.

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

<http://fantasticcontraption.com/>

Here's a fun game where you create various designs to put a ball in a box. The initial stages are fairly easy, but the later ones can be quite challenging. It's a thinking physics game.

<http://www.organicgardening.com/>

It's that time of year to think about spring things and there is nothing more spring than planting a garden. This site offers plenty of info on gardening, organic gardening in particular. With the economy in the shape it's in, you might want to think about planting a garden this year.

<http://www.disastercenter.com/crime/uscrime.htm>

This site documents the crime statistics for the U.S. since 1960.

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## 2009 MCC OFFICERS

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<http://michigantrafficcrashfacts.org/>

Here we have information on traffic accidents in Michigan. It can be rather eye opening.

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

If you want to read some free books, this site has many. They include many different formats including the Kindle, HTML and RTF.

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**We will be back in our regular meeting room beginning this month.**

**Bring your questions with you. Others may be having the same issues and be able to recommend solutions.**

**The board is seeking ways to satisfy all the members' needs and interests.**

**Remember to contact via e-mail any board member with ideas at any time. We're not just a "once-a-month" contact.**

## Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be 7 p.m., May 12th, 2009, 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

## Adding Another User

If you share your computer with another person (or persons), it makes sense to give each of them their own login to the computer. If you create a new user, their files are stored in a different location from yours, which makes it easier to keep track of your own things and keeps yours more private. To add users to your computer:

### In Windows Vista:

1. Open **Control Panel** (*Start/Control Panel*).
2. Click on *User Accounts and Family Safety*.
3. Click on *Add or remove user accounts* and then select *Create a new account*.
4. Next give the account a name in **New account name field** (perhaps person's name).  
It is highly recommended to leave the account type as **Standard user** as they can still run most applications, but cannot affect the security of the operating system.
5. Click *Create Account*

### In Windows XP

1. Open **Control Panel** (*Start/Control Panel*).
2. Click on *Create a new account*.
3. Give the account a name (perhaps the person's name) and click *Next*.
4. Specify an *account type*.
5. It is highly recommended to change the account type to **Limited** so as to reduce the likelihood of affecting the security of the operating system.
6. Click on *Create Account*.

To create new users, you must be logged on as an Administrator.

## Customize Internet Explorer Toolbars

If your toolbars in Internet Explorer are quite cluttered, you can remove any of the buttons that you do not use. To accomplish this:

1. Right-click on the toolbar and click on *Customize Command Bar/Add or Remove Commands*.
  - a. The left panel shows all of the buttons that are available for the toolbar, whereas the right side shows the buttons that are currently installed.
2. To remove a button, simply highlight it on the right side and click on *Remove*.
3. Alternately, you can add commands by highlighting one of the buttons on the left side and clicking on *Add*.

## Add Date And Time To Your PowerPoint Presentation

Sometimes when creating multiple slide presentations, it becomes difficult to determine when the presentation was created. One way to track the date and time when a PowerPoint presentation was created is to add that information to the presentation. When you add this information, it will appear in the footer along the bottom of the slide To add the date and time in PowerPoint 2007:

1. Open your presentation and click on the first slide.
2. On the *Insert* tab, click on *Date & Time* within the **Text** group.
3. In the **Header and Footer** dialog box, select the *Slide* tab and click on the *Date and time* check box.
4. To add the date and time to the current slide only, click *Apply*.
5. To add the date and time to all slides, notes pages, and handouts in your presentation, click *Apply to All*.

## Computer & Internet Tips and Tricks

Written by Gregory West, Editor, Sarnia Computer Users' Group, Canada

From the SCUG Report, February 2009 Issue

[www.scug.ca](http://www.scug.ca)

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As Editor for the Sarnia Computer Users' Group, I do a lot of online research for interesting websites and also free software. I am also fortunate to have people who send me their online gems. Here I share some of these amazing finds with you.

Remember: The programs you are about to see are FREE and legal and for you to download and use. Try out programs, or simply take a sneak peek at what they can do for you; the choice is yours. So, happy clicking and email me with what you think about these programs: [editor@scug.ca](mailto:editor@scug.ca)

### *Gimme Back Those Deleted or Lost Files - File Recovery Program*

Website: [www.recuva.com](http://www.recuva.com)

Runs on Microsoft Windows 98, 2000, 2003, XP and Vista

We have all done it. You have too, come on, admit it. Yes when you accidentally delete a file from your computer, the Recycle Bin, digital camera memory card, USB stick, or even songs from your MP3 player, this program will help you to recover those lost files. It is a good program to have on your computer for those times when you least expect it and you DELETE in error.

### *ATTENTION ALL eBay USERS – A Must Have eBay Desktop*

Website: <http://desktop.ebay.com>

Runs on Windows XP/Vista or MacOS X 10.4/10.5

This desktop application puts you in total control of your eBay bargaining with an eagleeye live gatekeeper of your bid or bidders. Never miss an eBay bargain again.

This is WEB 3.0 at its best. "EBay's slick new app does more than simply recreate the auction site on the desktop -- it makes the whole experience thoroughly interactive and much more engaging" (wired.com).

### *Catch Thieves in the Act, Live and Recorded Video Security System Using Your Webcam*

Website: [www.yawcam.com](http://www.yawcam.com)

Works on Windows 2000/XP/Vista

This security webcam software for windows is simple and easy to use and includes most of the usual security camera features such as: Video streaming, Image snapshots, motion detection, and Online Web Forum for help.

The software program is very easy to work with and after a short time you can set your webcam to catch a thief stealing your stuff. The video or pictures are sent immediately to the Internet (where you designate for safe keeping). The program senses motion in a room. You can have the program set so that it will record a video of the thief in action, or email you a photo, or upload (FTP) the live video to a website.

Real nice to be able to hand over a full video of the thieves in your house. If you are away, say in Florida, you can easily email the Police the video or photo of the live crime scene with full video and photos of the bad guys.

### Windows Live Family Safety

Website Download: [get.live.com](http://get.live.com)

Website Information: <http://tinyurl.com/24k8fo>

We are all worried about young children using the Internet these days. This program puts you in control of your

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computer and Internet browsing experience. You are in charge of your children's online Internet surfing habits. You can also monitor Windows Live Messenger contacts and block who they talk to online. As well, you can also block Internet websites too. This is a must have for any family with a computer connected to the Internet.

NOTE: "Windows Live Family Safety is a Web service that's free to people who use Microsoft Windows XP. If you use Windows Vista—the operating system installed on many new computers—you can use the built-in family safety tools." (Microsoft.com)

*Connect to your Home Computer While Away with Logmein*  
Website: [www.logmein.com](http://www.logmein.com)

While away from home, wouldn't it be nice to access files and programs from your home computer. Now you can. You can easily connect to your PC with a software program called logmein. This program is also used by large corporations to connect to offsite PCs. This program will also allow a friend to fix your computer even though they are thousands of miles from your PC. It is easy to set up and easy to operate. Give it a test drive... You will love it.

NOTE: This article first appeared in First Monday magazine, Sarnia, Ontario Canada. A Huron Printing Publication [www.huronweb.net/first\\_monday.php](http://www.huronweb.net/first_monday.php)

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### **Computer Speed, RAM and Virtual Memory**

Written by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D., a member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., FL  
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One of the more frequent questions raised is: "will adding more physical memory (RAM), speed up my computer"? The answer is a qualified "maybe". The first thing you need to be aware of are the built-in bottlenecks that can slow down your computer. Programs and data move through your computer at different speeds in different locations. The central processor (CPU) is usually the fastest data handler in the system. The hard drive is the slowest and everything else, including the RAM, is intermediate in data handling speed. The speed of processing data in RAM is measured in billionths of a second, or nanoseconds, and the speed of accessing data on the hard disk is measured in thousandths of a second, or milliseconds. So, ideally, you want all the processing to go from RAM to the CPU and back to RAM. Unfortunately, that's not always possible even if your system has the maximum amount of RAM installed.

Every computer running Windows, from several generations back, uses "virtual memory" in addition to RAM. The definition of "virtual memory" is based on redefining the address space to "trick" programs into thinking they are using large blocks of contiguous memory. Virtual memory is a space on the hard drive, frequently called a "swap file" or "page file". This is a block that is mapped for temporary storage of programs, data, and operating system essentials. This technique gives an application program the impression that it has contiguous working memory (address space), while in fact it may be physically fragmented.

*Virtual memory* was designed at a time when RAM was much more expensive than space on a hard drive. Even though RAM is now much less expensive, the latest versions of Windows (XP & Vista) still depend on virtual memory. In fact, much of the operating system kernel ends up in virtual memory. This kernel memory also controls the allocation of data to virtual memory. Consequently, it is not really possible to eliminate virtual memory when you are running Windows XP or Vista. If you do disable virtual memory, Windows becomes unstable.

In a 32 bit computer running Windows, the maximum memory that can be accessed by the CPU is 4 gigabytes (2<sup>32</sup>). It can not access addresses beyond 4 gigabytes (GB). (A gigabyte is a billion bytes.) Not every computer can accept 4 GB of RAM. Some older computers are limited to 512 megabytes (MB) and still run Windows XP quite successfully. How-

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ever, if you have a newer computer whose motherboard can accept 4 GB of RAM, you may not be able to fully access all of that RAM. In some cases, RAM is shared with the graphics system. This is usually referred to as an "integrated graphics card". In such a case, up to 1 GB of your RAM may be used by the graphics leaving only 3 GB for the rest of the system. Then Windows takes 2 GB of space leaving only 1 GB for user space (programs and data). Even if some of this is placed in Virtual memory, the CPU still has only 4 GB of addresses. If you have a graphics card with its own memory, Windows will allocate 2 GB to kernel memory and 2 GB to user memory. Since some of the kernel memory will be in virtual memory, your total memory will be a combination of physical memory (RAM) and virtual memory (hard drive), but the total will not exceed 4 GB in a 32 bit computer. Remember, the 4 GB limit applies to the number of addresses that can be accessed by the CPU. Those addresses can be on the graphics card, the hard drive or in physical memory (RAM).

Windows sets up the memory system by dividing memory into pages. The most recently accessed pages are in RAM. Any pages that have not been referenced in a while are written to the file on the hard drive. According to Microsoft the paging file in a 32 bit system can be a maximum of 16 terabytes (one terabyte equals 1000 gigabytes). So the total virtual memory pagefile system can exceed the 4 GB limit by a considerable amount. However, no more than the 4 GB can be actively handled at time. The inactive pages are stored on the hard drive.

Virtual memory not only operates at the speed of the hard disk data access, it also requires special handling before it can be used by the CPU or sent to the video screen. Pages on the hard disk have to be read into RAM to be used. That also means that the space they will take in RAM must be vacated. If there was data there, it must be written to the hard drive, before the new pages can be read into RAM. This paging process must also be managed. Some memory is used just to keep track of which pages are in RAM and which are in virtual memory. This is the role of the Virtual Memory Manager. All of these processes of reading and writing to and from RAM require time. As a result, virtual memory use does slow the computer more than the amount that is just due to the slower speed of disk access.

Before you decide that you need 4 GB of RAM to solve your speed problem, you need to determine how much RAM your computer is designed to accept. Computers in today's market are sold with anywhere from 1- 4 GB of RAM. However, only a few years ago, computers were designed to accept a maximum of 1 GB of RAM or less. So you need to check your owners manual to see what the maximum RAM is for your computer. Then, if you don't know how much is installed in your computer, bring up the the device manager window from the control panel. The first page will tell you how much physical memory you have in your system. You can also see the distribution of physical memory and virtual memory by bringing up the task manager (Ctrl-Alt-Del) and clicking on the Performance tab.

There are several other possible solutions to this problem. One is to look at your hard drive. If you have an older computer with an IDE drive, replacing it with a drive that has a SATA interface will speed up the data handling in virtual memory. Another change would be to purchase a graphics card with 256 – 512 MB of RAM and install it in place of the integrated video. That would release the RAM that was being shared with the video card.

The best, and most expensive, alternative for speeding up your computer is to replace your 32 bit computer with a 64 bit system. The 64 bit computers can access 16 exabytes of RAM (264). That is 16 million GB of RAM. Most of the 64 bit computers in todays market do limit physical RAM to anywhere from 8 to 256 terabytes. Not that we're getting into any really large numbers here, but the amount of RAM in a 64 bit machine is more than adequate to reduce virtual memory to a bare minimum. The catch is that 64 bit machines have other problems, especially with the limited availability of 64 bit software and drivers for peripheral devices. So before you decide to switch to 64 bit computing you need to check out whether or not drivers are available for your peripherals.

Finally, if your hard drive is heavily fragmented, this will also slow down data reading and writing. Simply defragmenting your drive will speed up the drive input and output. It may also improve the computer's boot time. As you can see, there are a number of things to consider if you need to speed up your computer.

Dr. Lewis is a former university and medical school professor of physiology. He has been working with personal computers for over thirty years, developing software and assembling systems.

## Moving on to Vista – Part 14

by Neil Stahfest, Librarian, Tacoma Area PC User Group, Washington

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One of the features that I liked about previous versions of Windows was the \*Search" feature. Just click on the "Start" button", Click on "Search" and enter the file name that you want to find. If you have multiple hard drives, you can specify which ones to search. Its easy and simple.

Vista is different. Vista has a totally new search feature that is in some ways easier to use, fast and very sophisticated. It doesn't just try to match file names. It looks inside files and reads and searches the contents of text files, your Windows Contacts and Calendar as well as any Microsoft Office files (documents, spreadsheets and PowerPoint files). To do this Vista automatically maintains an index file which contains all this information for the file linked to your personal user folder. To keep the index file from becoming too large and to speed up the search process, it does not maintain a list of files located in your Windows system folder, contents of application file folders or on a local computer network (information usually only useful to computer programmers). When you start searching for a file or word, it only has to check this index file to find what you want. The results are displayed almost as fast as you can type the search name.

To use the most basic features of Vista's search engine, click on the "Start" button. When the "Start Menu" appears, a "Start Search" box appears directly above the "Start Button". As you start to type a folder or file name, a list of folders and files appears above the box. As you type more letters, the list of names becomes more specific. If you don't see what you are looking for, at the bottom of the list is an option to search for the file name on the Internet (assuming that you have an Internet connection of course). When you do this, the Internet search uses your default Internet search engine whether it be Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, etc.

The Search Results window does not show the name of every file match found. Using some form of artificial intelligence Vista limits itself to to the 20 most likely matches. It shows them under file group headings such as "Programs", "Files" and "Communications".

An interesting aspect of this feature is that you can point and click on a program listed in the Search Results window and actually run it. Document or spreadsheet files can also be accessed this way. Printing at the file name activates the default file program, such as Microsoft Word.

Using this feature of Vista's search function moves it beyond just a way to locate files and folders. It becomes a way to quickly locate files and then take action to use them. To prepare this column I simply went to my desktop, clicked on the Start Button, entered "vista.rtf" in the Search Box and then clicked on the file name to open it with my word processing program. How simple is that! No need to open a series of folders to burrow down to my Vista column files.

In most cases, doing the above steps will locate the information you are looking for. But suppose it doesn't. Windows will tell you that the information can't be located and suggest that you use some of the advanced search features. We'll address advanced search features next month.

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### Online Backup Services

#### There Are Pros & Cons But They Are Up & Coming

Written by Ira Brickman, President, ICON PC User Group, Inc., New York

From The ICON Graphic, Newsletter of ICONPCUG, October 2008 Edition

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quire the permission of the author (see e-mail address above).

The changing face of how we use our computers includes the latest concept: using programs and services directly from the Internet. Many of us, for example, have found it more convenient to access our email using a Web browser (a.k.a. "Webmail") instead of a dedicated client like Outlook Express. The Internet's evermore ubiquitous nature means that receiving email is as simple as finding an available computer with browser software. Backing up your hard drive using an online service is one of the up and coming online services. The advantages are:

No need to buy backup software or purchase external USB drives or optical media to backup to.

Not storing backups where the computer is located secures against fire, theft, and other risks.

Like Webmail, the backups are available from any computer with an Internet connection & a browser.

As good as that sounds, some of the other considerations are:

There are some costs usually involved.

Backup privacy and security is dependent on a third party and transmitting your data over the Internet adds privacy and security risks.

You become dependent the backup service staying in business. If not, you are out of luck.

It takes a lot longer to backup or restore than using a local hard drive.

There is no imaging which means you are not backing up a picture of your hard drive, including your operating system installation. Rather you are backing up folders and files.

All in all, the pros certainly make trying online backup worthwhile. The cons, however, mean you have to judge how private the files are and how large your backups will be. And the risk of a service folding means you should be wary of using smaller, totally free backup services for anything very critical to you.

There are some well-known, reliable services which can be free to use, within certain limitations. Or for a small monthly fee, you can get all the pros and limit your risks.

If you want to use an online backup services, there are three commercial services you can explore and consider to start with. They are: Amazon S3/Jungle Disk, Mozy, and Carbonite. All three have similarities:

They require that you download and install a desktop client to configure backups, manage restores.

Once your first backup is created, the client program then works in the background to backup of new and altered files.

All three encrypt your data before transmission and store it in encrypted form on remote servers.

None require you to restore from the original computer.

You can also restore your data to a different computer.

If you search the Web, you will find an abundance of reviews about each of these services. There is much that has been positively written about Jungle Disk and Amazon's Simple Storage Service (Amazon S3). The S3 service is part of a package of Amazon services meant to be accessed through third party software. Jungle Disk is the leading program to do that. It "mounts" the online storage so that it seamlessly appears as another drive in your Windows Explorer. Jungle Disk can schedule automatic backups, but the mounted drive means you can drag and drop to manually backup files and folders And it allows for incremental backups.

This last is important because there are costs involved. Amazon currently charges 10 cents per Gigabyte per month for storage and another 17 cents per GB for the data transfer . Incremental backups mean the transfer costs are kept to a minimum after your initial backup.

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JungleDisk costs \$20 after a 30-day free trial. Amazon S3: <http://tinyurl.com/qx87a>  
Jungle Disk: <http://www.jungledisk.com>

Mozy, at <http://mozy.com/>, on the other hand, can be free if you use the "MozyHome" alternative, limited to 2Gb of storage. But for \$4.95 per month, Mozy offers unlimited backup of a single home computer. Though not as convenient as Jungle Disk, the MozyHome software makes backing up easy and has many backup options..

Carbonite, <http://www.carbonite.com/>, offers a yearly subscription for unlimited backup of a hard drive, starting at \$49.95 per year, with lower costs for upfront payment of multi-year subscriptions. This makes it a little less expensive than Mozy per year. The Carbonite software might be a little easier to use than Mozy. Some reviewers found Carbonite to be slower and the Carbonite Web site does contain a caution about speed.

With costs potentially less than the upfront cost of a hard drive, these backup services are at least worth a look for their convenience for computer users.

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### **The Kindle2 May Make Newspapers Obsolete**

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Every now and then a revolutionary new product comes along at a time when it is most needed. So it is with the just released Kindle2 wireless reading device, fondly called an e-book reader.

Up to now, electronic book readers have been very slow in taking off. Sony has had a book reading device for several years. Last year Amazon came out with the first version of the Kindle, which was impressive and fairly popular, but had a few drawbacks.

Now, however, the time for these devices may have finally come. At 8" x 5.3" the Kindle2 is about the size of a paperback. At about 1/3" thick, it is thin but strong. In this second iteration, Amazon has corrected the design flaws of the original Kindle. It is now easy to use. The e-ink technology allows you to read the words on the Kindle just as you would read a book, with no eye strain or glare. You can adjust the size of the text to your liking. To turn the page you simply press a button. The reader even lets you read several books at once, always returning you to just where you left off. You can look up any word with the built-in dictionary. You can underline words and add your own notes to the pages. This Kindle will even read the text of most books to you. So if you are engrossed in a book on the Kindle and need to pick up the kids, you can take the Kindle along and have it read to you in the car.

The best part of the Kindle, however, is the reading material and how it is delivered. The Kindle2 can hold more than 1,500 books. You can choose from over 240,000 books in the Kindle's Amazon store. Most of the books are priced at \$9.99. You can also subscribe to newspapers and magazines on the Kindle. The books, newspapers, and magazines are downloaded directly to the device over a free cellular network. I drove down a rural highway in North Carolina and downloaded a book and was reading it in less than five minutes. Better yet would be sitting on a beach and downloading a romance novel. In any case, the Kindle is ultimately useable. The biggest drawback for the Kindle right now is the price. At \$359, the Kindle is pretty expensive.

But if you are ready to watch the ebook market explode, stick around for awhile. The Kindle2 has appeared on the horizon just as the economy is slumping. There are many hard-hit business sectors, but the newspaper and magazine industry is already showing signs of cracking. CNN reports that many major newspapers are struggling including the San Francisco Chronicle, the Chicago Sun-Times, the Minneapolis Star Tribune, and the Miami Herald. Certainly online versions of newspapers and magazines are an alternative, but up to this point very few newspapers or magazines have been able to support themselves with online subscriptions and/or advertising.

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As the print industry is looking for ways to cut costs, ebook readers may be an answer. If there were no print costs, perhaps large newspapers would be able to provide e-book readers to subscribers as part of the subscription costs or at least at a highly reduced rate. If the electronic device were done well enough, it could mimic the printed version and be filled with ads just like the print newspapers and magazines. Normally I would expect that this type of transition would take a few years, but the economic woes may put a rush on this type of move. The Hearst Corp., one of the largest publishers, is already planning to launch its own wireless e-book reader. Most are speculating that this would be a device with a larger screen that would more closely imitate the newspaper and magazine reading experience. Hearst, who is a mega-publisher, would be in a great position to create the liaisons needed to make this type of device and its content work. Fortune reports that the Hearst device will be available sometime this year.

There is no doubt that we live in a world that is changing because of technology and this type of technology may be in your hands sooner than you think.

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## Dropbox

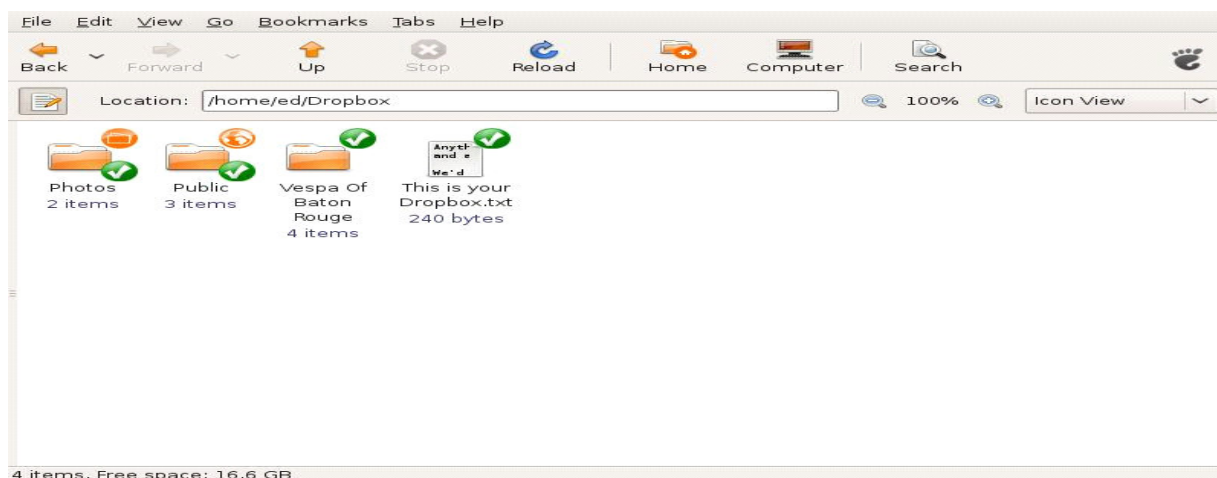
Written by Ed Richard, Leader of the Open Source SIG, Cajun Clickers Computer Club, LA  
[www.clickers.org](http://www.clickers.org) / <http://cccclinuxsig.pbwiki.com>  
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So just exactly what is Dropbox, you might ask? Have you ever needed to sync files between two or more machines? Have you wanted to also have an off-site copy of those files? Have you needed to sync files between Windows, Linux and Macintosh machines?

Have you wanted to have a public photo album to share pictures with your friends and family? Have you needed a shared on-line file repository for collaborating with co-workers? Are you tired of carrying around a pocket full of thumb drives? Dropbox is all of these and even more. It is cross platform so it runs on Linux, Windows and Mac computers.

After installing the Dropbox application on one machine, you create an account and link that machine to the account. Then, any file that is placed in the My Dropbox folder (which in Windows lives inside the My Documents folder, and in Linux lives in your user folder, the Linux equivalent of My Documents) gets automatically synced with your Dropbox folder on all other linked machines. This is what my Dropbox looks like on my Ubuntu Linux machine:

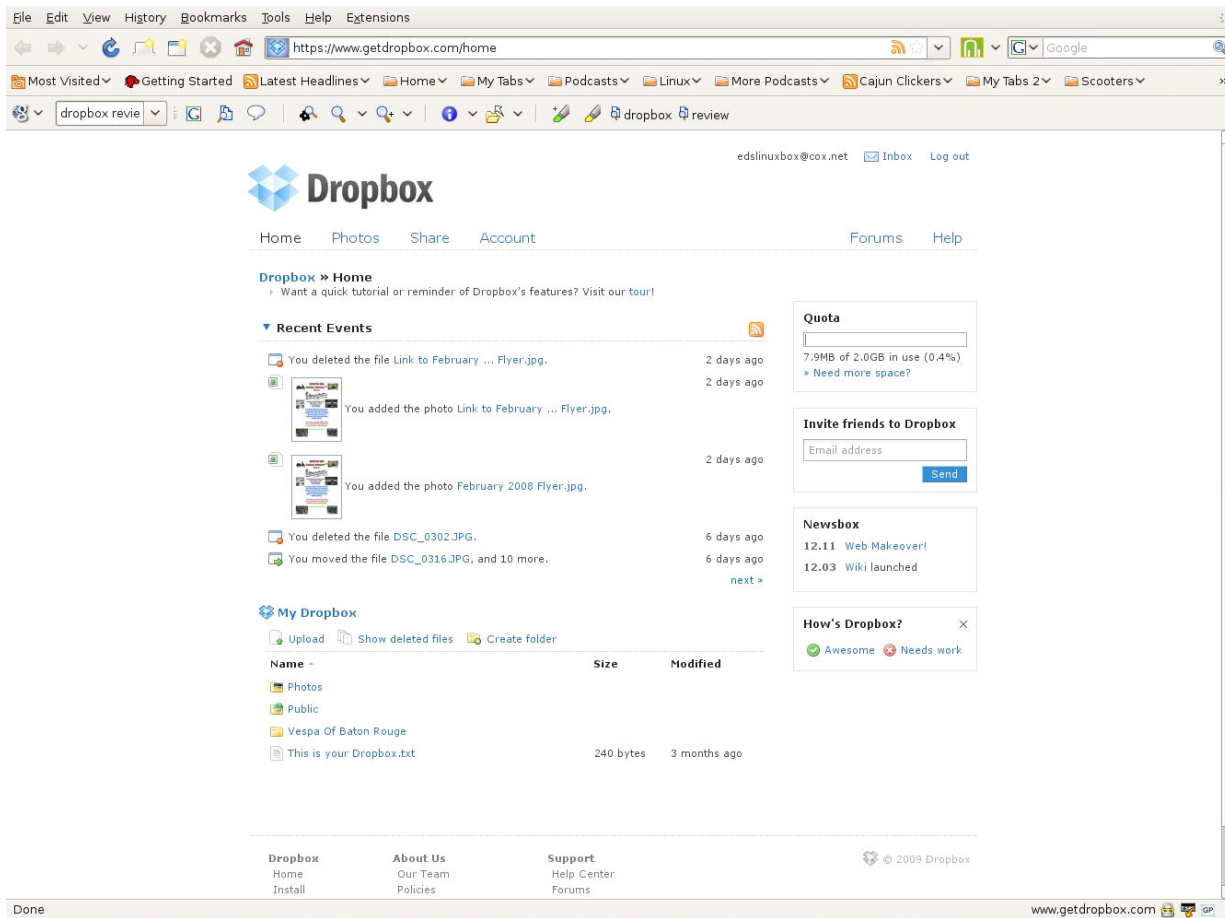


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If you only have Dropbox installed on one machine, it becomes an off-site backup service. Dropbox uses Amazon's S3 service behind the scenes to house your data. So files placed in your Dropbox folder are automatically uploaded to the Dropbox servers. Should you delete them on your local machine or suffer data loss, they can easily be retrieved from the Dropbox servers by installing Dropbox on a replacement machine, or Directly from the Dropbox website.

Dropbox also supports shared folders that allow anyone you invite to the folder to have access to the files in that folder. This is a great way to collaborate and share files with coworkers. There's also a folder specifically configured to hold photos. Any images placed there are automatically turned into a photo album with a publicly accessible URL you can give out. Go here to see a photo album of pictures in my pictures folder: <http://tinyurl.com/cafvvh>

There is also a Public folder that is accessible to anyone and a web interface that allows you to access files on machines that don't have Dropbox installed. Here's what my Dropbox homepage looks like:



You can also access previous versions of files from the web interface. So if you foul up that file and need to go back to last week's version, you can.

To learn more about Dropbox go to: <https://www.getdropbox.com/screencast#screencast> and watch the video.