

BITS AND BYTES

The Newsletter of the Midland Computer Club

August 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: August 26th

**THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: Annual Club
Picnic w/short presentation by
Joe Lylowski**

PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Contact : Co-Chairpersons

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What you missed!

June had Laura Hammel talking about how to get information over the Internet, if your local newspaper reduces their publication or goes out of business completely. She talked about sites that present local, national and financial information. Discussion also featured specific sites for areas of interest by various members. Laura also talked about how to get information of interest on several blogging sites that cater to a wide variety of topics.

Upcoming Activities

The **August** meeting will feature the annual club picnic at the Midland Community Center. As in years past, the club will provide the hotdogs, buns and sodas. Please bring a dish to share with the other people in attendance. After eating, Joe Lylowski will give a short presentation on what is necessary to upgrade the wiring in your home to satisfy some of the increases in bandwidth that some of the new technologies that we are installing require.

The President's Corner

A member recently asked me to comment on the trend for software to move to the "cloud" — doing everything online. There has been some discussion that Microsoft Windows 7 will be the last operating system as we know it. This means that Microsoft will step back, take a look at where Windows is currently at and determine where they want to go in the future. There has been talk that they will integrate the operating system into the "cloud." We are already seeing some of this today with the new Google Chrome operating system, Microsoft Office Online, Google Docs, etc. In some circumstances, this makes sense as the data (and software) is stored online (via the web) and is available anywhere from any computer. This is especially good for businesses who try to implement extremely secure systems with redundancy built into their systems and want to make sure that all of their employees are using the same software. The online apps also make sense for those who travel a lot and need access to their data wherever they go.



Although system security has come a long way since the "wild west" days of computing, so have the hackers. Some of the breaches that are being seen today are actually being perpetrated by gangsters who have very deep pockets and can get the best people for cracking into very secure systems. We don't hear very much about security breaches anymore because they just don't make the news, but according the Identity Theft Resource Center, there has been 333 security breaches so far in 2009 with over 13 million records compromised. This would indicate to me that the system is not all that secure at this time. Many of us do not want to put our personal information online. We do realize that our information is available online via our financial institutions, etc., but we would rather not put our consolidated information which we store on our computer up there for the public to access. I know I don't.

(Continued on page 2)

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(Continued from page 1) *President's Corner continued...*

If some of these trends continue, I'm sure more people will move to Linux and Open Source software. What are your thoughts? Let me know.

— Howard Lewis

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

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

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

If you're interested in some new books, enter the books that you like and this site will recommend others that you might find interesting.

www.allpointnetwork.com

If you're looking for a surcharge-free ATM, this site can help you find one in its network. Just enter your zip code and it will provide a map showing those in that zip code.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYpUs87ha0w>

Here's a couple of men with incredible strength. Watch this Youtube video.

[http://www.pcworld.com/article/162106/article.html?](http://www.pcworld.com/article/162106/article.html?tk=nl_tnxnws)

[tk=nl_tnxnws](#)

Remember dot matrix printers? Modems? Mini-disks? Whatever happened to them? This *PC World* article documents the life of 25 of these products that refused to die.

www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov

If you need to go into the hospital, you might want to check out the hospitals for the quality of care. This site gives information on many local hospitals and the quality of their patient care.

Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be 7 p.m., September 8th, 2009, @ 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

Protecting a Word document (Word 2007)

If you have a Word document that you want to restrict others from reading or modifying, you may add a password to restrict access. To add a password to a Word document:

- In the open document, click on the *Office button* and select *Save As*.
- Next click on *Tools* and select *General Options*.
- Now type in the desired **password**, making sure that it is not something easily guessed by unintended viewers. Notice that there are two slots for passwords: **Password to open** and **Password to modify**. The passwords may be the same or different. The first one will allow a person to open and view the document but not make any modifications. The second one will allow viewing and modifying the document. You do not need both passwords, depending on your particular situation.
- Next click on *OK* and you will be prompted to reenter the password(s). Click *OK* and from now on a password will be required to access the document.

Although previous versions of Word used very weak encryption, Office 2007 uses AES (Advanced Encryption Standard), which is much stronger. However, this should not be interpreted as absolute security as an accomplished cracker can still access the document.

Changing your file associations

If you try to open a particular file and it is opening in the wrong program, one of your “file associations” has probably been hijacked by another program. This is fairly common with graphics and sound files. If you want to change the application that opens when you select a particular file, you easily change what program is associated with that file. BUT REMEMBER, that when you change the association, it affects all files of that particular type. For example, if you prefer to open a specific JPG file with IrfanView instead of the default Windows Photo Gallery and you change the association to open the file with IrfanView, from now on all JPGs will be opened in IrfanView unless you later change the association again later

- To change a file’s association, first find the file you want to open.
- Next, right-click on the file and select *Open With*
- Now click on *Choose Default Program* and you will see a list of programs that Windows knows will open that particular type of file. Click on the application you wish to use. If the application that you wish to use is not in the list of applications presented, click on *Browse* and a **Windows Explorer** screen will open allowing you to migrate to the application of your choosing.
- Make sure that *Always use the selected program to open this kind of file* is checked and click on *OK*.

Change The Number Of Items Displayed On The Windows 7 Jump List

Windows 7 has added a new feature called **Jump Lists**. **Jump Lists** give you quick access to frequently used files or documents associated with a particular application. For example, the Word icon in the **Start Menu** will have an arrow next to it to give you access to the most recently opened Word documents. Simply click on the document and Word will start up with that document already open. By default, the **Jump List** shows the 10 most frequently accessed files. To change the number of items being displayed:

- First right click on the *Start* button and select *Properties*.
- Next on the *Start Menu* tab click on the *Customize* button.
- Under the **Start menu size** section, change the **Number of recent items to display in Jump Lists** option to whatever number you want displayed (it can be any number between 0 and 60).
- Finally, click *OK* twice and the number of items displayed on the **Jump Lists** will be whatever you have selected.

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The Computer as Crime Scene

Written by Michael Gemignani, a member of HAL-PC, Texas
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When most folks think of criminal activity, the computer is not the first thing that comes to mind.

But computers are arguably one of the most powerful instruments of crime in history. A poor sucker who robs a bank may get a few thousand dollars. He will almost invariably be caught and may wind up spending decades in jail. But a cybercriminal who causes billions of dollars in damage (witness the conficker worm), or who manages to steal millions of dollars electronically, may not even get caught and, if caught, is not liable to spend a much time in prison as the low tech robber. Computers offer the opportunity for theft and vandalism on an unprecedented scale. Some feel that the next world war may not be fought by soldiers with guns and bombs but by hackers who try to destroy a nation's power, utility, economic and communication capabilities.

However, we do not have to think in terms of grandiose acts or international plots for a computer to be associated with criminal activity. The fact is that even seemingly innocent activity can get a user in trouble with the law.

Suppose, for example, that pornography, or worse, child pornography, was found on your computer. Many companies will fire an employee if they find pornography on a computer that the employee uses at, or for, work. If child pornography is found, the computer user is subject to harsh criminal penalties. But one need not even download pictures to be subject to prosecution.

The relevant federal statutes are sections 2252A and 2256 et seq. of chapter 110 of Part I of Title 18, which is the United States Criminal Code. Child pornography basically involves the depiction of someone under age 18 engaging in sexually explicit activity.

It is not required that someone actually have downloaded child pornography. The law applies if someone attempts to violate the provisions against possessing child pornography. Thus, if the FBI were to establish a decoy website that purports to provide child pornography, as some allege has already happened, someone clicking on the website could trigger an investigation and possible prosecution. Lest you think such language is overly broad and therefore unconstitutional, be aware that the Supreme Court of the United States has already ruled the statutes to be constitutional in their entirety as written.

I am not by any means defending the loathsome trade in child pornography. Nor do I seek to defend those who deliberately seek out child pornography. However, as is well-known to those who do not exercise appropriate caution, malware can play all sorts of tricks on a computer, including downloading images that the user would ordinarily avoid completely, usually without the user's knowledge. If a worker is provided a computer by his or her employer, the computer may already have illicit files stored on the hard drive and the new user may be none the wiser.

What of it, you might ask? Surely the police would understand that it was not the current user but, rather, the previous user or malicious software that downloaded the illegal files. But suppose such files were found on your own computer. How would you prove that you were not the one who downloaded them? If child pornography were found on your hard drive, how could you convince someone that you were not the one who put it there? Indeed, if someone at work wanted to get you fired and the person had the requisite expertise, he could put incriminating files on your hard drive and then let it be known to your superiors that he had observed you downloading pornography on the job.

The saving grace in all this, if there is one, is that one is presumed innocent until proven guilty. Hence you would not be required to prove that you did not download the files. Rather, the police would be required to prove that you did, and this might be quite difficult, particularly if your computer were found to be riddled with malware, or it could be shown that someone had hacked into your machine, or that your machine had been used by others.

Even if the charges were dropped, or never even filed, because they could not prove that you downloaded the illicit files or even knew about them, you would still suffer unimaginable emotional trauma, legal expenses, and the probable loss of your job. Moreover, the failure to prosecute would not be the same as exoneration. You would still be under the cloud of having the material found on your machine. Mere pornography can get you fired. Child pornography can get you five to twenty years in prison.

Detective stories often feature someone poisoning another's food or attempts to frame someone for a crime. Now we have the added possibility of poisoned computers destroying lives or being used to frame others for crimes they did not commit. Hope it does not happen to you.

The Rev. Dr. Michael Gemignani, an attorney and Episcopal priest, is also a former professor of computer science who has written extensively on legal issues related to computers. Although he is now retired, he enjoys writing and speaking about computer law and security.

BENEATH THE SURFACE: DeepPeeping the Web

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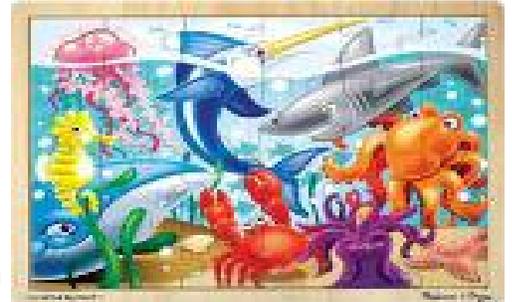
Last summer Google announced it had passed the one trillionth mark in its list of known and searchable Web pages.

If you think Google does the best job of searching the World Wide Web you will be in for a big surprise. By 'big' I mean a search engine that goes way beyond standard search engines like Google, which only look at the surface of the Web compared to the vast, deep, and so far uncharted depths of the Web. I say "you will be in for a big surprise" because a deeper search engine is only in its initial research stages.



Standard search engines only skim the surface of the Web. Kind of like you're looking over the surface of the ocean, instead of looking into its vast undersea life. The plan is to create a search engine that will open 90% of the Web to searches.

What we MISS



A study at the University of Utah is trying to find a way. The study searches typed text rather than the hyperlinks that the present search engines use. A beta version of DeepPeep is available at: <http://www.deeppeep.org/>.

We have a long way to go but eventually almost the entirety of the Web will be searchable. Web pages exist already that tell you the best taxi fare, flight schedules, and shopping catalogs. DeepPeep wants to give you access to this information. A whole new way of searching has to be worked out first.

Scientists have said that 90% of what we know was discovered in the last 50 years. DeepPeep is working out a way to get that knowledge to you.

It's out there . . .



**DeepPeep is finding
the way to get it to you.**

FastStone Image Viewer 3.9

Written by Charlotte Brown, President of the Canton/Alliance/Massillon Users Group, Ohio
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If you want a really simple but powerful basic photo program, look no farther than FastStone Image Viewer 3.9. This is the program that I encourage my students to use in the beginning of their picture enhancing journey. When you want to do more things than Image Viewer offers, you can add another program. Many of the programs that help you through the next steps are also free. Working through the basics into more advanced techniques is not as overwhelming as jumping into the middle of a professional program and wondering how to do simple things such as cropping, adjusting light, changing to sepia or grayscale, or even converting to other file formats.

FastStone Image Viewer has powerful capabilities of batch converting images from one format to another, for example, from jpg to png. It also allows for batch renaming & resizing, batch watermarking and dpi adjustments and more. To keep things simple, let me walk you through the process of taking only 1 picture at a time through a series of adjustments to make the final print.

I always use 3 windows when working with FastStone Image Viewer. This is the default setting. The upper left window allows you to browse through Windows Explorer to the folder containing your photos. Double clicking the folder opens thumbnails of the files in a large window on the right. When you click on a picture to select it, you see a large thumbnail in the lower left-hand window. Look over my shoulder as I browse to **Pictures** and double click the folder inside that I have named Christmas 08. Large thumbnails of all the picture files in that folder now appear in the large window. I will select a file titled Jayden. Now Jayden's picture appears not only in the window on the right but also as a large thumbnail in the lower left hand corner.

The first thing I do is click File > Save As. I rename the file as JaydenP and use the drop-down menu by File Type to select png. Then I click Save. The new file appears in the large window with all the other thumbnails. It is much bigger than the original jpg. It is now in a *lossless* format, allowing me to make all kinds of changes without losing any of the information originally captured by the camera. I could choose to work with tiff to accomplish the same capabilities. Png files allow me to cut out transparent areas if I wish and the file size is smaller.

Let me insert something that will interest those of you who are doing more advanced work. The rest of you can skip to the next paragraph! When I double click the picture, it fills my entire window. Moving the mouse to the right side of the screen brings up information about the picture. One of the tab choices is Histogram. That provides me with information about the lighting. Here is a little tip. If you double click the original jpg or you decide to save as tiff instead of png, the tab titled EXIF will give you all the camera information captured when you snapped the picture: date and time, make and model of camera, ISO setting (much the same as film speed in the olden days), the aperture setting, shutter speed, focal length, and whether or not the flash fired.

Now let me return to the really simple process of working with JaydenP, my png file. I click on Edit on the menu bar, and then click on Resize / Resample. Now I can choose to size my picture by number of pixels, percentage or print size. In this case I want to make a color print so I will click on the radio button titled Print size. Next I will select 300 dpi by using the drop down menu or hand entering the numbers. Remember that digital cameras were developed for digital viewing. Most digital camera settings take pictures at 72 dpi. When you resize to 300 dpi, you have a much clearer picture that has a slimming effect on your subject that is much more flattering!

In this case my picture is portrait, not landscape, so I will choose 5 x 7. I put a check mark in the selection box titled Preserve Aspect Ratio so I don't create distortion effects similar to those created by convex or concave mirrors! I notice that the photo will not be exactly 5 x 7. One thing to remember is that digital pictures are not the same scale as film pictures. In this example, my picture turns out to be 5.25 x 7. I click OK. Now I am back to

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the 3 pane original window and my picture is still selected (blue frame around it). Now I click on the cropping tool. I check the Paper Ration to make sure it says 7 x 5 and has a check mark by Flip Ration so that I get a 5 x 7. A dotted line around the picture shows that the program is suggesting an even crop from both sides. After looking at the picture carefully, I decide I want the entire crop to come from the left side. When I move the mouse onto the picture, it becomes a 4-sided arrow. I click and drag the dotted outline to the right as far as I can and click Crop followed by Close. The picture is still selected in the main work area.

Now I click on the Red Eye control on the toolbars below the menu bars. The picture pops open in a new screen. I like to use a zoom ration of 200%. Then I click in the middle of the eye and draw a circle that covers the entire eye. I can click in the middle of the circle I have drawn, hold down the mouse, and move the circle to fine-tune its location. Then I click Remove Red Eye. Whoosh! It is gone. The program takes me back to the mail work are with the three windows.

I click once more on Edit. This time I chose Enhance Colors. The picture opens in a full screen with controls at the bottom for adjusting brightness, contrast, gamma, red, green and blue levels, hue and saturation. You can create some wild looks here. I brighten the picture slightly and make a small color shift to enhance the reds. I click on "Hold Down to See Original Image" to make sure I like the adjustments I have made. When I am satisfied, I click OK. Once again I click on File > Save As. This time I rename the file Jayden 5x7 and select the type as jpg. All my changes hold. The picture is still 300 dpi. The size will be perfect with no surprise cropping by the photo lab.

The program allows for so much more: adding text, straightening a picture before cropping, creating slide shows, and things I haven't yet explored. I downloaded the newest version this week. There is now an 83-page manual you can download to learn from clear directions and screen shots how to take advantage of this marvelous program. The manual was written by Bill Westerhoff who has written tutorials on other free photo products as well as Photoshop Elements 3-7.

I suppose you now are wondering about the price. First of all you need to know where to get the program. Go to www.faststone.org. There is **no charge** to download this program. You will be encouraged to give a donation keep the developers encouraged to work on future enhancements. If you decide you like the program as well as I do, you will want to help them. There is no set fee, so whatever you choose to give is up to you.

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Windows 7 XP Mode

Written by Ash Nallawalla, APCUG Director, Review Editor, Melbourne PCUG, Australia

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I will be writing a review of Windows 7 in due course, but here is a preview of a key feature that will interest many readers.

Windows XP Mode

Windows XP Mode is aimed at small business users who wish to run their Windows XP-era applications on their Windows 7 desktop. They might have avoided upgrading to Windows Vista owing to an incompatibility with their old programs or the simple reason of "Windows XP does the job." However, as they buy new computers later this year or by January 2010, they might find a copy of Windows 7 included with the purchase, or they may have other compelling reasons to upgrade.

An exciting optional feature that was kept under wraps until recently was Windows XP Mode (XPM). This fea-

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ture will work in certain editions but is an additional download.

Key Facts

- Windows XPM is included with Windows 7 Professional, Windows 7 Ultimate and Windows 7 Enterprise customers.
- Windows XPM combines Windows Virtual PC and a pre-installed virtual Windows XP environment to enable users to run many older applications.
- Windows Virtual PC enables users to launch virtual applications from the Windows 7 Start menu.
- Windows Virtual PC includes support for USB devices and is based on a new code base that includes multi-threading support.
- Windows XPM is pre-configured with the Windows XP firewall and can apply updates automatically from Windows Update. It is not pre-configured with anti-virus or anti-malware software, which need to be sourced separately.

IT Professionals

Windows XPM is not recommended for corporate deployments. Wait for Microsoft Enterprise Desktop Virtualisation (MED-V) Version 2.0, which will be released as a beta 90 days after the general availability (GA) of Windows 7.

- MED-V v1 is currently available for Windows Vista and it enables Virtual PC deployment in larger organisations. It provides centralised management, policy-based provisioning and virtual image delivery.
- MED-V v1 builds on Microsoft Virtual PC 2007 to help enterprises with their upgrade to Windows Vista when applications are not yet compatible.
- MED-V v2 will add support for Windows 7 (both 32 bit and 64bit) and Windows Virtual PC.

Windows XPM is for SMBs

Windows XPM stand-alone is intended for small and medium business (SMB) users who can install their XP applications themselves and who might not have IT Professional staff. Each PC has its own virtual Windows XP environment that is controlled and managed by the user.

Windows XPM is best suited for older business and productivity applications such as accounting, inventory and similar software. These applications tend to conform to the basic Windows Application Programming Interface (API).

Windows XPM not for Consumers

Windows XP Mode does not have 100 percent compatibility with all Windows XP software. It is not aimed at home users because many consumer programs require extensive use of hardware interfaces such as 3-D graphics, audio, and TV tuners that do not work well under virtualisation today.

In Use

Windows XPM is available from the Windows 7 Start menu. It displays a regular Windows XP desktop and you can install your old software from there just as you would on a Windows XP machine. Thereafter, those programs appear just below the Windows XPM menu item.

Requirements

Of course, there's always a catch. Not all CPUs will support Windows XPM. You need hardware-based virtualisation (go and check your CPU specs now). Intel and AMD have CPUs that have this feature but don't assume all recently purchased CPUs support hardware virtualisation. See these sites for more information.

- Intel: <http://www.intel.com/technology/virtualization/>
- AMD: http://www.amd.com/us-en/0,,3715_15781,00.html

My PC is about six months old and has a Core 2 Quad processor - the Q6600 chip. I checked this Intel page

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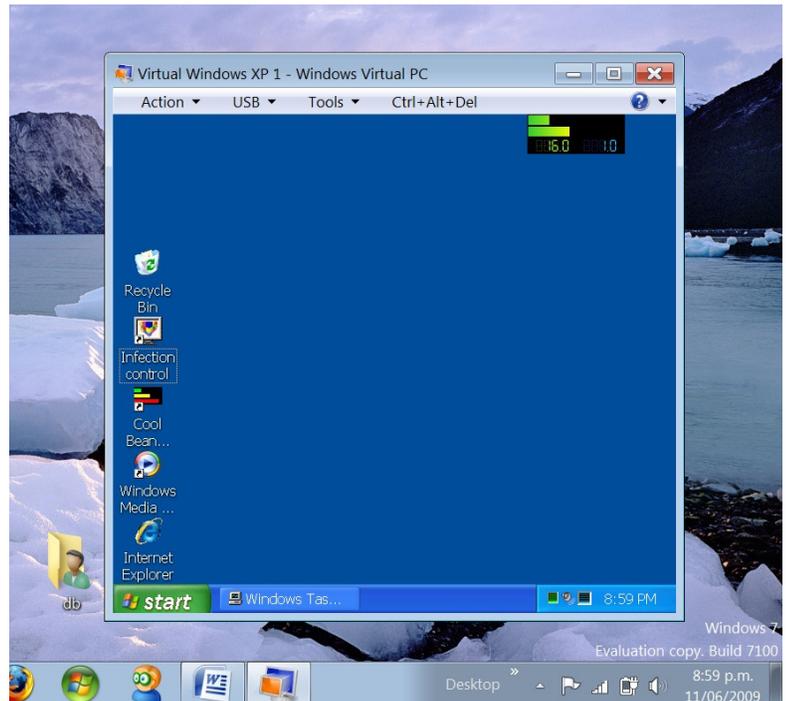
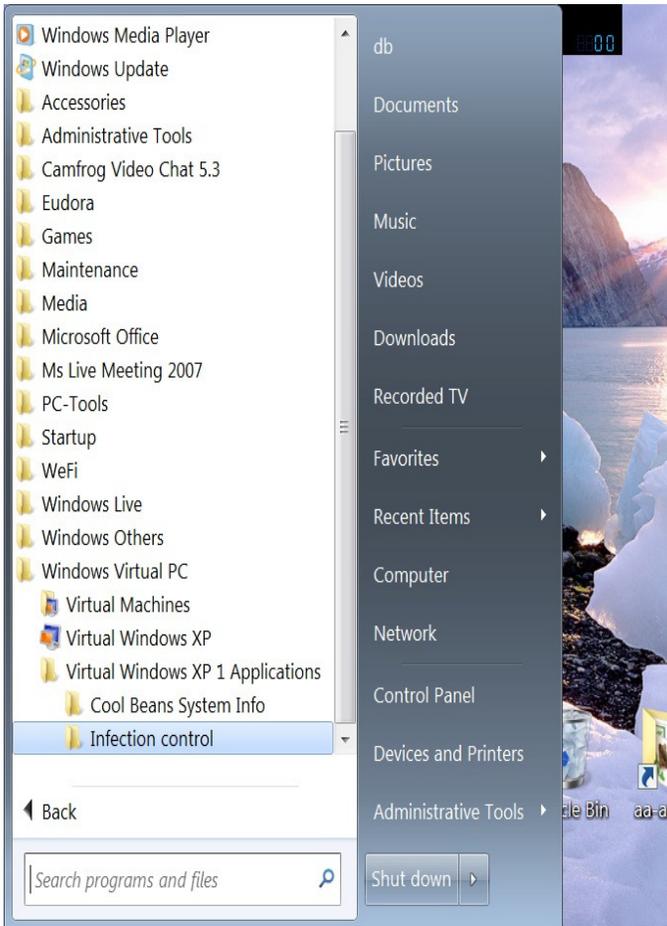
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to confirm that I'll be able to test this feature when I get my hands on it:

- <http://ark.intel.com/cpu.aspx?groupId=29765>

The next thing to check is for BIOS support on your motherboard. I have an Asus P5K SE/EPU and its user guide mentions Vanderpool support is enabled by default (you can turn it off). Vanderpool was the code name for Intel Virtualisation.

While Windows XPM isn't for everyone, it will certainly address the need of some businesses that need to run legacy applications.



Dozens of Free Utilities from Camtech

Written by Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio Show Host
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WEBSITES:

<http://camtech2000.net/Pages/Downloads.html>

I will admit that I am a junkie when it comes to free utilities. I enjoy trying new software, especially if it is legitimate freeware from a reliable source. Occasionally I have a special need for a utility, and there are a few places that I typically check to see if such a freeware utility is available. One of those websites is Camtech2000 (camtech2000.net).

Camtech2000 has dozens of freeware utilities available, many of which will run on most versions of Windows, from Windows 95 to Vista. The Camtech2000 download page is broken down into categories, such as desktop enhancements, assorted games, screen savers, desktop themes, internet related, utilities, and system related. The website is very easy to navigate; clicking on the name of a program will bring up a program specific webpage with information on

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the selected program, often including screenshots demonstrating how the program functions. Clicking on the "DL" on the right side of the listing downloads the program. According to Camtech2000, "Camtech Freeware is developed for free personal use and is NOT supported by Banners, Adware or Malware of any type!" For those desiring to support Camtech2000, a PayPal link is provided for donations. My personal choice (and recommendation) is to make a donation to Camtech2000 via PayPal whenever I download a program that I find useful, and intend to use on a periodic basis. Some of the utilities displayed are free to download and fully functional for a limited period of time, but request a fee to register the programs for continued use. In my experience, I have always found Camtech2000 software very intuitive and easy use, requiring no special skill or knowledge.

In the category "Desktop Enhancements" are 16 programs that can be used to customize the users' desktop or Internet Explorer. With these desktop enhancements, the user can easily customize the appearance of folders, create MP3 play lists, create and manage desktop icons, change the appearance of the desktop and toolbar wallpaper, and create customized logos to display on Internet Explorer rather than the default Microsoft logo. For those who like to customize the appearance of Windows, and would like features not otherwise included in Windows, some of these utilities would be appropriate, as well as fun to play with.

I am typically too busy to play games on my computer, but I do know that a lot of users enjoy simple but entertaining games to pass the time. Camtech2000 offers five games free for the taking. Gamers can play darts, or manipulate squares in an obvious knockoff known as "Cubik's Rube". Word Finder is a common word game for those wishing to practice their observational skills and gamblers may appreciate "Camtech Slots" which has some of the excitement of a slot machine, without actually losing money to the "one armed bandit".

While they are functionally obsolete, many computer users still like to use screen savers. In the early days of computing, it was somewhat common to burn-in an image on the CRT if it was displayed too long. While typically unlikely with a modern monitor and video card, burn-in is still theoretically possible, and this is where screen savers are of use. (For the record, I do not use a screen saver on any computer that I use, and choose to turn the computer off if I am not going to use it for any reasonable length of time). Camtech2000 offers an even dozen screen savers offering a variety of shapes, colors, images, music, and other visual treats. I have seen the Camtech Space screensaver in use, and it is very attractive as it changes between a series of astronomical images. For those who like and use screen savers, and would like some variety, these may be a worthwhile addition to their collections.

I have made some use of the "Internet Related" utilities, of which Camtech2000 offers 30 titles. The one that I have used the most is Password Reveal Pro 2.0, which displays the hidden passwords in programs that display a password as "*****". Loading Password Reveal Pro 2.0 and dragging the lock image over the asterisks displays the underlying password. Another neat utility that I have used on some of the web pages I have created or edited is RedirectEm, which generates a small script file to be placed on a webpage that automatically connects the user to another webpage. This is especially helpful when the new webpage has a different address than the old page. You may have noticed that some email users have fancy signatures at the bottom of their emails; it is very easy to create your own professional looking email signatures using Camtech2000's Signatures 2.0. With this program the user can create custom email signatures with a choice of colors, fonts, and graphics. Additional graphics, both static and animated are included with the program. Another especially helpful and possibly even profitable program is Multi-Stock Browser, which can display stock quotes and charts. While the basic version of Multi-Stock Browser is free, a registered version is \$20.

Camtech2000 offers 45 miscellaneous utilities which can be used for such tasks as cleaning up startup files to creating and storing passwords. I just had the occasion to use UnlockMe, a utility to unlock files which may have been used by another program. Many users complain about how slow the computer boots, and seems to run slower than it did in the past. This problem may be quickly and easily resolved by cleaning up the startup files by using Ultimate Startup Manager. This program displays all seven places that contain startup information, not just the three sources displayed by some competing programs. While the program is free, a registered version is \$20. With 45 utilities available in this category, most users will likely find something useful here.

There are nine system related utilities available including a System Restore Control, XP Repair Install, RegKey Backup, MemCheck Pro, CT Attrib (file attributes), and a Visual Basic Runtime Library. I used CT Attrib to manage a troublesome folder on my hard drive, and it worked admirably.

Camtech2000 has an impressive list of useful utilities available for download. Users of all levels will likely find something useful to download and try.

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PC PitStop OverDrive – Free Online Testing and Analysis

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WEBSITE:

<http://pcpitstop.com/betapit>

Often, it seems that our computers just do not seem to run well. There can be many reasons for poor performance related to hardware and software issues. While there are many utilities which can be purchased or downloaded and installed that can run a battery of diagnostic tests on a computer, one of the most popular and comprehensive testing services is free and online. This service is PC PitStop OverDrive, available online at pcpitstop.com/betapit.

PC PitStop is very popular, with over 100 million tests run. Tests can be run anonymously (no registration required), or the user can register for free, and track computer performance over time. The diagnostic exams are safe, and performed through the Internet Explorer browser. Since many of the tests are performed using Active-X, PC PitStop will not work on Firefox or other browsers, and requires that Internet Explorer be used. The tests are performed on various components in the computer, including the video card, CPU chip (processor), memory, and disk drives. No settings on the computer are changed by PC PitStop, and no content on the hard drive is accessed, meaning that private data is safe and not being read by PC PitStop. Once the diagnostic process is completed, a report card is produced designating the conditions of what is found. Only with the users' express consent will the automated repair utilities attempt to fix many of the problems that are found. The entire diagnostic process is fairly fast, just taking a few minutes.

The first step in running PC PitStop OverDrive is to download and install an Active-X utility, which takes only a few seconds on a broadband connection. All of the diagnostics are performed on web pages that use Javascript or Active-X, which display in real time the tests being performed. The first test collects information about the PC itself, such as the CPU type and speed, capacity of disk drive, video resolution, BIOS, memory, Windows version, browser version, and a listing of what is currently running on the computer. After the basic data is collected (no personally identifiable information is collected), the computer hardware is tested. These tests will determine the speed of the system and the health of the CPU chip, as well as the condition of the memory, disk drives, video, and internet connection. One warning is in line here, and that is that users with epilepsy or other ailments that may be affected by rapidly changing colors and patterns should not view the graphics card component of the tests. Once the diagnosis is completed, PC PitStop will analyze the data collected, and make recommendations about performance improvements. A full graphical report is provided to the user.

On my computer the entire process was completed in about four minutes. In that time, several dozen tests were performed, and the results of each were displayed. The reports are tabbed into the categories of Summary, Performance, Security, Software, and Drivers. Clicking on a tab may open another level of information. Under the Summary tab is a tab for Fixes, which displays any problems found on the computer. Moving the mouse cursor over a displayed problem will give the user a brief description of the problem. Clicking on any item will open another window with very detailed information giving instructions on resolving the problem. The Summary – Rankings selection displays how the computer tested compared to the millions of other computers tested. In my case on this old computer, I have a very fast processor (top 7% of those tested), but I am sorely lacking memory (bottom 43%) and hard drive space (bottom 23%). My video card performed well, being in the top third that have been tested.

Performance is what matters to most of us when it comes to our computers. The tab "Performance Results" lists 32 performance categories, and the results of each performance test. Items that pass the diagnosis are displayed with a check mark, and those that fail are noted with a bold red "X". By correcting whatever deficiencies are found may lead to an improvement in performance may result.

Security is another category that should be of high concern, and PC PitStop checks for 37 security breaches, including a very quick scan for viruses and spyware. Included in the security diagnosis are browser tests, desktop security, file download and pop-up ad security, cookie analysis, and other security issues. Each item is clearly displayed and rated, with additional information and fixes being only a click away.

The Software diagnostics displays the name and version of all software installed on the computer, as well as Microsoft hot-fixes and updates. The Software – Processes displays the software that is currently running on the computer along with the CPU usage and memory used for each. Clicking on the title of any software listed will display detailed information

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about that software, as well as any recommendations.

Our computers are heavily dependent on the drivers installed for our components and peripherals for proper performance and security. PC PitStop identifies the drivers installed on the computer, and shows those that are in need of updating. If an updated driver is recommended, a link to the download may be displayed.

I have run PC PitStop OverDrive on several computers and found it to be a very fast and reliable tool to identify the hardware and software problems on the computer. I have registered as a user so I can track performance degradation over time. PC PitStop Overdrive is free, very fast, and comprehensive. It is an outstanding tool to checkout the condition of any computer, and possibly resolves any hardware and software issues that may degrade security and performance.