



# BITS AND BYTES

The Newsletter of the Midland Computer Club

October 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: October 28th**

**THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: Setting up a  
personal wireless "hotspot" presented by  
Frank Koenig.**

### PROGRAM COORDINATORS

**Contact : Co-Chairpersons**

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

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

## President's Corner

At the last club meeting, I announced that I will not accept the nomination to be president of the club for 2010. I have been president for thirteen years and figure that it's time for someone else to take up the mantle to lead the club. I do not plan on dropping out of the club, as did my predecessor, but plan on still attending meetings and giving presentations as my time and skills allow. I am willing to be elected to an at-large position on the board if the club wishes, but I would like to see someone else leading the group. With nominations coming up this month (and elections set for the November meeting), I am searching for someone willing to take over the presidency. If no one has volunteered before the club meeting, someone will have to be nominated from the floor (and I will not accept that nomination). I feel that the club provides a good avenue for keeping people up-to-date in the technology arena, so I am hoping that someone will step forward to lead the group to the next level in providing this method of communicating. I have enjoyed the meetings and look forward to continuing to enjoy them, but as a member, not the leader.

— Howard Lewis

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



## What you missed!

Laura Hummel gave a very good introduction to the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) project. She gave an overview of the project and then demonstrated one of the laptops. The laptops are very child-centric and are being used in significant numbers in several third-world countries. The laptops, which are Linux based, run mostly open source software and help the children connect with one another and the world through the Internet.

## Upcoming Activities

**October** will have Frank Koenig talking about setting up your own wireless hotspot. He will talk about setting up a private and semi-private hotspot so you and/or you guests can have Internet access while at your house. The discussion will also include how to keep your own personal computers safe from others trying using or trying to use your hotspot.

In **November**, Bill Tower will talk about backing up your personal data. The presentation will focus on backup utilities and various online options for providing off-site backups.

**Remember, our November & December meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday of the month, due to the holidays.**

## 2009 MCC OFFICERS

### POSITION

President Howard Lewis lewis3ha@chartermi.net  
 Vice Pres. Bill Tower stressed@tir.com  
 Treasurer Laura Hammel Lhammel@gmail.com  
 Membership Gary Ensing btiger6@yahoo.com  
 Editor Jan Ensing btiger6@juno.com  
 Webmaster Frank Koenig frankspc@hotmail.com

### EMAIL:

<http://mcc.apcug.org/>

### Special Interest Groups:

### CLUB PROGRAM COORDINATORS

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

### BOARD MEMBER

Mary Branson molly688@chartermi.net

### INTERNET SIG

Terry Brown t\_bbrown@yahoo.com

### PUBLICITY

Kathy Bohl kboh130265@aol.com

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

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

If you are interested in "living green," this is a great place to start. offered by National Geographic, this site offers many ideas on how to live "greener."

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

Tired of staying in motels or hotels while on vacation? This site offers some bed & breakfasts across the country that may offer some fascinating options. Enter a location and the site will return a list of B&Bs in the area.

<http://lunchtimers.com/>

Here's a fun diversion. Move letters around to spell words while others try to use them at the same time.

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

This site provides biographical information on various people. Type in their name and the site returns various links with biographies on that person.

<http://safemanuals.com/>

Need a manual to one of your appliances? This site offers manuals on over 5,000 different products.

## Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be 7 p.m., November 10th, 2009, @ Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church, 5501 Jefferson Ave., Midland.

Nominations for next year's board positions will take place @ this month's meeting. Will you serve?

### **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

### Sticky Notes (Windows 7)

One of the new features in Windows 7 is something called Sticky Notes. This little applet allows you to create sticky notes on your desktop for tracking ideas, reminders, etc. To create a sticky note:

- Click the **Start** menu and click *Sticky Notes*. A blank sticky note will appear on your [desktop](#).
- Click inside the note and type your text.

The sticky notes can be arranged on the desktop as you wish like any windowed program. To delete the sticky note click the “x” in the upper corner of the window.

### Change The Size Of Vista’s Blinking Cursor

Sometimes it is difficult to find the blinking cursor in Vista because it is so thin. If you have difficulty finding the cursor, you can make it thicker. To increase the thickness of the blinking cursor:

1. Open the [Control Panel](#).
2. Click *Ease of Access*.
3. Select *Optimize visual display*.
4. Scroll to the bottom of the window screen to the section labeled **Make things on the screen easier to see**.
5. In the box next to *Set the thickness of the blinking cursor*, select a larger number. The larger the number, the thicker the cursor.
6. Click *Save*.

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### Improve PC Performance with PerfectSpeed

By Ira Wilsker

#### WEBSITES;

<http://www.perfectdisk.com/home>

<http://www.perfectdisk.com/products/home-perfectspeed/free-trial>

One of the most common pleas for help from readers of this column is to improve the performance of their computers. A common thread is that the computer was fast when new, but is now frustratingly slow. Common solutions include performing normal maintenance tasks such as deleting useless files on the hard drive, defragging the drive, cleaning the registry, and tweaking Windows settings. I recently had the opportunity to try a \$30 software product “PerfectSpeed” from Raxco Software.

One of my daughters recently brought me her five year old Compaq notebook computer, a relic with the old style Celeron processor, XP Home, 40 gig hard drive, and 512 megs of memory. It was very slow to boot, sometimes taking up to 10 minutes to boot, and when shutting down would take a like amount of time, or not shut down at all. Loading programs such as Word were agonizingly slow, her browser (Firefox) would take several minutes to load, and overall performance was dismal. When new, the computer was comparatively fast as I had doubled the memory from its factory installed 256 megs, to 512. With the price of memory being fairly reasonable, I had considered purchasing another stick or two of memory, and replacing one or both of the 256 sticks with a 512 meg or 1 gig stick; there are only two memory slots on the motherboard.

My first step was to do what I do on all computers that I work on, and that is to do a comprehensive scan for malware. I performed a full scan with an updated MalwareBytes AntiMalware, and other than several tracking cookies, her computer was clean. For verification, I then ran a freshly updated a-squared, which is both anti-malware and antivirus, and

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## Thousands of Free Books Available Online

### By Ira Wilsker

#### WEBSITES:

<http://www.feedbooks.com>

<http://www.flatworldknowledge.com>

[http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page)

<http://www.booksshouldbefree.com>

I enjoy reading. I find that reading is intellectually stimulating, broadens my horizons, and provides vicarious experiences. My daughters grew up in a home full of books where they all became avid readers; this substantially contributed to their academic and professional achievements.

My students at LIT should be reading more, but the cost of books is a deterrent, and a trip to the college or public library is often an inconvenience. Many of today's students have grown up in the era of online information, email, Twitter, Facebook, Yahoo!, and Google and to them "online" is their primary information resource. Now there are internet resources where anyone can read literature of any genre, including hundreds of current textbooks, for free. Depending on the rules of the respective websites, these complete books can be read online in a browser window, or downloaded in a variety of formats, often including the popular and universal PDF format.

The granddaddy of the free online library is the Project Gutenberg at [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org). According to its website, "Project Gutenberg is the first and largest single collection of free electronic books, or eBooks. Michael Hart, founder of Project Gutenberg, invented eBooks in 1971 and continues to inspire the creation of eBooks and related technologies today." The mission statement of Project Gutenberg is simple but succinct, "To encourage the creation and distribution of eBooks." Project Gutenberg has the full-length unabridged copies of over 30,000 titles on its servers, and links to over 100,000 titles located on other services. In addition to the printed word, Project Gutenberg also has hundreds of audio books available for download. About 400 of the audio books have a very realistic computer generated voice that provides the audio, and another 600 are recorded human voices. There are also about 150 recordings of mostly classical music, and a few dozen historically significant recordings from no less than the likes of Thomas Edison. Project Gutenberg has books available in many languages with the largest number being in English, and even some written in Mayan or Yiddish. I know people who download the audio books in MP3 format, burn them to CD, and play them in the car. I know of one individual who has downloaded several of the Edgar Allen Poe audio books, and plays them from an MP3 player as spooky stories for the kids around the campfire.

I teach economics every semester at LIT and try to instill in my students some of the history, culture, and philosophy that created our economic system. While he is briefly recognized in our economics books, Adam Smith is believed by many to be the father of classical economic philosophy. The full unabridged version of his most recognized tome "An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations", better known as the "Wealth of Nations" is on my recommended reading list. In the past the students had to compete for the limited number of copies available in the library or purchase a copy, an often difficult task for a cash strapped college student. Today's college student, or anyone for that matter, can simply go online and read it on his monitor, or download a copy for future reference. This is but one example of how technology can be positively used to expand the minds of society, and provoke inspired thought and discussion. The book "Wealth of Nations" is but one of many thousands available for free online at Project Gutenberg.

While not as extensive as Project Gutenberg, one of my favorite free eBook websites is Feedbooks at [www.feedbooks.com](http://www.feedbooks.com). Feedbooks are almost all in PDF format, and can be read unabridged online or downloaded for reading at the individual's convenience. Feedbooks has books in four languages, English, French, German, and Spanish, and from hundreds of authors. Feedbooks' selection is exemplary by having what may be the complete works of many authors, including Arthur Conan Doyle, 32 titles; Charles Dickens, 45 titles; Edgar Rice Burroughs, 68 books; Washington Irving; Henry David Thoreau; Jonathan Swift; and hundreds of other authors. Feedbooks is totally searchable, but I enjoy browsing my favorite categories, such as Novels (1382 books), History (111 books), Politics (32 books), Humor (68 books), and Non-Fiction (83 books). There is an extensive "Young Readers" selection composed of over 100 titles that would be good for parents to read to their children, or as a reading experience for the kids themselves. Titles include such classics as Grimm's Fairy Tales, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Peter Pan, American Fairy Tales, Fairy Tales of Hans Christian Andersen, Black Beauty, and over a hundred other age appropriate titles.

Many of us are all too aware of the high cost of textbooks. There is currently a move on to publish current textbooks online for free. While this project is in its infancy, there are already many recently published e-textbooks available online at [www.flatworldknowledge.com](http://www.flatworldknowledge.com). It is worth noting that hundreds of college faculty have already adopted these free titles. Students typically have the option of reading the chapters online for free, or printing individual chapters for a nominal fee (about \$2 per chapter), printing the entire book, or purchasing a bound copy of the book. Faculty may request a free bound copy as well as support materials such as test banks, PowerPoint slides, instructors' manuals, and other supple-

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mentary materials, just like the existing commercial textbooks. Even for those who are not currently college students, these online free college textbooks can be a valuable resource for personal and professional enrichment. For those who especially appreciate audio books, [www.booksshouldbefree.com](http://www.booksshouldbefree.com) offers a wide selection of free audio books for download. Audio books are available in 20 categories and are available in MP3 format. When downloaded in MP3 format, files can be played on any MP3 player, most car CD players, computers, compatible cell phones, and other audio devices. Some of the files are "Zipped" or compressed with the common ZIP format in order to make the download a smaller file, but modern versions of Windows will open and uncompress the files, or third party utilities can "unzip" the files for play.

With the hundreds of thousands of eBook titles available for free, both in print and as audio, there is no reason why we should not be reading (or listening) more than we currently read. Whether for reference or personal enjoyment, eBooks are here to stay and the free ones can create a massive and competent virtual library for all.

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## **Google Chrome 3 – Ready for Prime Time!** **By Ira Wilsker**

### WEBSITES:

<http://www.google.com/chrome>

<http://www.google.com/chrome/intl/en/features.html>

<https://tools.google.com/chrome/intl/en/themes>

Longtime readers of this column may remember that I wrote about Google's Chrome browser when it first came out. I found that Chrome version 1 was unstable, and incapable of loading many of the websites that I routinely visited. About a year ago, with high hopes, I tested the then new release of Google Chrome version 2, and found many of the same bugs and incompatibilities that I found in version 1; my title of that column said that Chrome 2 was "Not Yet Ready for Prime Time." I am now happy to report to you, my faithful readers, that the newly released Chrome version 3 is indeed "ready for prime time."

Google Chrome is a free download from Google at [www.google.com/chrome](http://www.google.com/chrome), and runs on XP and Vista, both 32 and 64 bit systems. The Google setup is a small 557kb executable file that downloaded quickly, and installed smoothly with no problems or conflicts on my Vista Home Premium 64 system. During the very quick install, Chrome identified that Firefox was my default browser, and asked if I would like to import my bookmarks (favorites) and other information from Firefox. A pull down menu was offered which would have also allowed import of items from Internet Explorer as well. Not surprisingly, Chrome had setup as a default home (startup) page Google.com, which I chose to change to my existing personal startup page (My Yahoo). Other than the trivial question about whether I wanted a desktop and quick-start icon for Chrome, the new browser installed in seconds.

Since I was skeptical about Chrome, based on my past problems with the earlier versions, I proceeded to immediately visit those websites that I was unable to load in versions 1 and 2. To my pleasant surprise, all of the sites that failed to load in the earlier versions of Chrome not just loaded flawlessly, but also opened very quickly.

My first impression of Chrome was that it loaded far faster than Internet Explorer or Firefox on my computer, and that it has a very clean look to the browser, in that it is not cluttered by a lot of infrequently used icons and toolbars, as well as other items that take up the precious real estate on the desktop. When I entered the URLs of my frequently visited websites, Chrome already had them filled ahead of my typing them, evidence that Chrome successfully imported them from Firefox. Since this was a clean install of Chrome, such that there could not be any online cache to load, I was amazed as to how quickly web pages loaded. While it was not a scientific experiment, and the evidence would only be anecdotal, I opened Internet Explorer 8 (IE8), Firefox 3.53, and Chrome 3 in adjacent windows. Without the need for a stopwatch, it was glaringly obvious that Chrome loaded the same web pages much faster than IE8 did, and somewhat faster than Firefox. Of these three browsers, all the latest builds running on a quad-core machine, Chrome was clearly the speed demon of the three. Chalk up a performance win for Chrome.

While I appreciated the clean appearance of Chrome when it opened, there are undoubtedly many who would like to change the appearance of Chrome to modify it to meet personal preferences. As I type this, Google has 29 themes available for Chrome at [tools.google.com/chrome/intl/en/themes](https://tools.google.com/chrome/intl/en/themes). The available themes range from "Minimal" that has an almost blank window with only minimal coloring, to several that are complex and brightly colored.

While Chrome is written in tight code, and loads very quickly, it is still very feature rich. It is amazingly intuitive and easy to use. One of my favorite features is clicking on a "+" in the tabs on the top of the page to open another browser window, and being greeted with interactive thumbnails of both open and recently closed websites; clicking on one would open that page in an instant. Chrome remembers the most frequently viewed pages, and displays thumbnails of those when a "New Tab" is selected. This makes it very easy to select a page, or the user can always type an address in the

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address bar or click on a bookmark. Another useful feature is the ability to search directly from the address bar. By simply typing a search term in the address space, the default search engine will be queried, and the results displayed. While Google was obviously the initial default search engine, it was a simple process to change the default to my personal favorite, AllTheWeb. To test the search function from the address bar, I typed my name in the space where I would normally type a web address (URL), hit enter, and the AllTheWeb page instantly opened with the web pages with my name. It was also actually fun to drag and drop tabs, watching the contents being moved around the browser page; this way open tabs can be organized to satisfy the whims of the user. Tabs can also be dragged and dropped on the Windows desktop, where they appear as a complete new window, and can be dragged back to the original browser where the tab will be integrated back with the other tabs. Each tab is independent, and a problem or crash in one tab will not likely crash the entire browser and other open tabs. Many would wonder why Google would create and promote Chrome as another free browser in the now crowded field of browsers. The developers of Chrome identified needs and problems with the existing browsers, and addressed those issues on the web page "A fresh take on the browser" ([www.google.com/chrome/intl/en/why.html](http://www.google.com/chrome/intl/en/why.html)). "Under the hood, we were able to build the foundation of a browser that runs today's complex web applications much better. By keeping each tab in an isolated "sandbox", we were able to prevent one tab from crashing another and provide improved protection from rogue sites. We improved speed and responsiveness across the board. We also built V8, a more powerful JavaScript engine, to power the next generation of web applications that aren't even possible in today's browsers." By design, Chrome is intended to be more secure than its competitors, more stable with the "sandbox" concept, and faster. While I have not significantly tested the security capabilities of Chrome, and I am fully cognizant that security is a continuing effort, my initial impression is that Chrome is reasonably secure, although Google has recently released some security and features patches to harden the browser. As stated above, the Chrome developers were very successful in creating a very fast browser. Chrome is an open source product, meaning that anyone can get the code and write applications for it. In writing Chrome, the developers acknowledged that they used open source code from other sources, including code and components from Firefox and Apple's WebKit. Google has done an excellent job with Chrome 3, and in its first few days of release has captured a small but rapidly growing share of the browser market. As more users download and install Chrome and find that it does indeed offer substantial performance and safety improvements over Internet Explorer. Other than not being compatible with some of my favorite Firefox add-ons, I found Chrome to be a most capable browser. Since Chrome is open source, I can foresee comparable add-ons being developed for Chrome just as they had been for Firefox.

I can now give Chrome my highest recommendation, and suggest that Windows users download Chrome and give it a try. It is perfectly OK to have multiple browsers installed on a computer, and select which one to run at any time. Since Chrome will import favorites, bookmarks, and other information from IE and Firefox, it would be fully ready to use after being installed. Download Chrome from Google ([www.google.com/chrome](http://www.google.com/chrome)) and try it. Since it is free, you really have nothing to lose, and will likely gain dramatically improved browsing performance, security, and satisfaction. After all, is that not why we surf the internet anyway?

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**Preventive Computer Maintenance**

Written by Stuart Rabinowitz, Editor-in-Chief, the PULP, newsletter of the Hartford User Group Exchange, CT  
[www.huge.org](http://www.huge.org)  
 s.e.rabinowitz (at) att.net

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The single most important maintenance item that should be done on a regular basis is BACKUP YOUR DATA. What the schedule is depends on much data you can afford to lose. Try daily/weekly to an external hard drive and monthly to a CD/DVD, or use a backup application. Make sure that your software is updated; primarily the operating system and your primary browser.

Use utility software: get a sense of how your computer operates when it's operating correctly. For the Mac use 'Activity Monitor' or 'Tech Tools'. On the PC (in the control panel) administrative tools/performance. You can also check your internet connection speed at: <http://reviews.cnet.com/internet-speedtest/?tag=ont.int.band>

For the PC users--do regular spyware/virus scans. Make sure the definitions are up to date. Primarily for PC users--

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Defragment your hard drive (this may take a while). Mac users do not really need to do this since OS X (10.3 +) does it automatically.

Free up some space on your hard drive (PC users can use disk cleanup; Mac users can use CacheOutX). Clean out old files that you don't use, after you've backed them up. Uninstall those programs that you don't use. Apple recommends that you have at least 10% free, a bit more for PCs, this will improve virtual memory and may improve disk performance.

Clean the Hardware -- to clean the monitor and keyboard use a dry microfiber cloth (be sure the computer is turned off) and gently (don't press hard) wipe the monitor, unplug the keyboard and wipe. If there are hard to clean areas, spray the cloth lightly with a vinegar/water solution and then wipe. For an optical mouse wipe the bulb gently. You'll need to open a mechanical mouse to clean the rollers. Use a cotton swab with isopropyl alcohol.

If your computer case is easy to open (i.e. not an iMac or Mac Mini), then open it up (after shutting down and unplugging it) and use compressed air to blow out the dust. Do not use a vacuum since it may create a static charge that could damage the electronics. After closing the case you can clean out the fan in the back.

You'll also probably want to have the following tools:

Screwdrivers--standard, phillips, and torx in different sizes (especially the small ones)

Nutdrivers--1/4" and 3/16"

Pliers, part grabbers, and tweezers

Compressed air

Microfiber cleaning cloths

Antistatic strap--especially if you want to put your hands inside the computer

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other than some more questionable cookies, and some suspicious traces of malware that had likely been removed previously, her computer was clean. She does have a major security suite installed which is auto-updated frequently, and performs scheduled scans, a most worthwhile precautionary activity. I used MSCONFIG to check her startup files, and found an excess of unnecessary programs loading at boot, which I unchecked; since they will not be loading at subsequent boots, her boot process will be faster, performance will be improved because less system resources are used and therefore free, and there will likely be fewer software conflicts and crashes. Since fewer programs will be loaded, shutdown will also be faster.

My next decision that I had to make was what utilities to use to conduct performance improving maintenance on her computer. There are several utilities available that can perform that function, but I was tempted to try something new from a Maryland company that I knew from prior experience published excellent quality software, Raxco Software. Raxco recently released its PerfectSpeed PC Optimizer 2.0, retailing for about \$30 for a single license, with a 3 license pack currently on a promotional price of \$39.99 (regularly \$59.99), and a 10-pack for \$99.99. A fully functional 15 day free trial is available for download from [www.perfectdisk.com/products/home-perfectspeed/free-trial](http://www.perfectdisk.com/products/home-perfectspeed/free-trial). I installed PerfectSpeed PC Optimizer on her computer, and put it to work.

The first task is to click on the "Performance Check" button which scans the registry for errors, checks for useless clutter and duplicate files on the hard drive (Free Space check), looks for "privacy traces" such as cookies, and then checks the hard drive for fragmentation. After running the Performance Check, the performance status gauge on the top right corner showed her computer's status as "Poor". Her registry had over a thousand errors, there was about 2 gigabytes of useless files on her hard drive, she had hundreds of cookies and other privacy traces (but no tracking cookies as they had been deleted by the previous malware scans), and a terribly fragmented hard drive.

With my approval, I allowed PerfectSpeed to clean the registry. It uses a proprietary system to safely clean the registry without threatening the performance of valid programs. This process removes obsolete registry entries that can degrade performance, and lead to a host of other problems. A corrupted or bloated registry can also lead to slow boots and difficult shutdowns. After PerfectSpeed cleaned the registry, I allowed it to reclaim space on the hard drive by deleting hundreds of obsolete temporary files, thousands of old browser cache files, useless duplicates of files, and other debris left on the hard drive. The "Traces" scan detected data on her hard drive that could be a privacy issue, such as browser cookies, internet history, and other privacy threats. In this case, I

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chose not to delete the browser history, and many of the cookies, as their convenience value outweighed the small amount of space they take up on the hard drive. It is a proven fact that the more fragmented a hard drive, the longer it takes to read and write files, a major drag on performance. PerfectSpeed has a Microsoft certified defragmentation utility that optimizes the hard drive for maximum drive performance. By rearranging files on the hard drive, and writing them in contiguous sectors and tracks, the drive does not have to work as hard when reading and writing data. This speeds up all of the drive related performance issues, often resulting in significant increases in speed. It took about 40 minutes to defrag her hard drive, a time no doubt increased by the high degree of fragmentation present on her drive before the optimization. Raxco is recognized for the excellence of its PerfectDisk series of disk optimizers, and that pedigree was evident in the defragger in PerfectSpeed.

After I completed the optimization process, which took about an hour in this case, I shut down the computer and asked my daughter to turn it on. It booted quickly, much to her surprise. I asked her to load Word and Firefox, which loaded very quickly, compared to before the optimization. I asked her to shut down the computer, which she did; the blue shutdown screen appeared, and in a matter of seconds, it disappeared, and the computer turned itself off. The grin on her face was all of the compensation that I needed.

PerfectSpeed is not just for running on demand, as it also has an "AutoPilot" feature which will periodically run the optimization utilities at scheduled times, and when the computer is on but idle or in a state of low system activity. With AutoPilot engaged, the computer will be re-optimized on a regular basis, maintaining a high level of performance.

There are many tweaks which can be implemented in Windows to make incremental improvements in performance, security, and appearance. PerfectSpeed has a "Tweak Your PC" button which displays the tweaks that are available, with a "Learn More" link adjacent to each one which will open a balloon-window with a description of the tweak.

PerfectSpeed PC Optimizer worked well on her computer and made a dramatic improvement in its performance. While the features offered by PerfectSpeed are comprehensive and appropriate, and do an excellent job at what they do, the one feature that it is lacking that would also contribute to PC optimization is a startup manager. If Raxco will include a startup manager in its next version, PerfectSpeed may be unbeatable as an optimizer. Still, as it stands in its current version 2.0, PerfectSpeed PC Optimizer did an outstanding job in cleaning up my daughter's computer, and dramatically improving its performance. Based on my experience with it, Raxco's PerfectSpeed PC Optimizer is a winner, and should be strongly considered by anyone who wants an optimized PC getting all of the performance he paid for in a machine. I recommend that readers download the free 15 day trial version ([www.perfectdisk.com/products/home-perfectspeed/free-trial](http://www.perfectdisk.com/products/home-perfectspeed/free-trial)) and experiment with it. Once you find that it will likely improve the performance of your computer, an affirmative decision to purchase PerfectSpeed will be an easy one to make.

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## **TweakNow PowerPack 2009 – Comprehensive Free Utility for Windows**

By Ira Wilsker

### **WEBSITE:**

<http://www.tweaknow.com>

<http://www.v3.co.uk/downloads>

<http://www.downloadjunkie.co.uk>

Regular readers of this column are well aware that I am a utility junkie. I like downloading PC utilities in the never-ending saga of trying to improve PC performance and reliability. There are many very good performance utilities out there, both free and commercial, which will likely improve the functioning of the PC. Sadly, there are also some utilities that are downright dangerous or are scams that try to separate the desperate computer user from his money. Still, I have this insatiable desire to try these utilities and see what they can do. For safety and security reasons, I always have a current backup of my critical files just in case something goes wrong, which has inevitably happened to me more times than I am comfortable to admit.

I subscribe to several software email lists and RSS feeds where I get the latest software news and information on new releases and updates. One British list that I subscribe to via RSS is Download Reviews ([www.v3.co.uk/downloads](http://www.v3.co.uk/downloads)), and its sister site Download Junkie ([www.downloadjunkie.co.uk](http://www.downloadjunkie.co.uk)). These websites are excellent sources of software news, including occasional announcements about some prominent commercial software publishers that sometimes release full versions of their commercial soft-

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ware at no charge, but which are only available free for a very limited time.

I recently read a review of a free utility that piqued my curiosity, TweakNow PowerPack 2009 ([www.tweaknow.com](http://www.tweaknow.com)). Being the skeptic that I am, I had this inner drive (addiction) to download it and try it. The reviews about it were very positive, and I searched several of the independent computer magazines' online editions, and found some complimentary reviews of TweakNow products. Verifying that my backups and security software were in order, I installed TweakNow PowerPack 2009 on my Vista 64 machine, as it is more software finicky than my XP machine when it comes to software utilities. I was pleasantly surprised to have TweakNow install smoothly and quickly on the 64-bit machine. The version that I downloaded and installed was 1.6.0000 Beta 2 which appears to be stable and fully functional. It is explicitly written for Windows XP, Vista (32 and 64), and Windows 7 (32 and 64). The interface is clean and intuitive with an even dozen menu items listed on the left side under the heading "System Tools". Clicking on an item in the left menu opens the main window with a more detailed selection of functions.

At the top of the list is "Disk Cleaner" which selectively searches all attached drives for obsolete and useless files, freeing up space on the hard drive. It has never failed to amaze me how much clutter I often find when I work on others' computers, and this utility is good at finding that clutter. The "Disk Usage Analyzer" graphically displays the makeup of the directories on the hard drive along with information on the directories. "Miscellaneous Tools" has six tools which can be used to control the processes running on the computer, optimize the memory (many pundits claim that this function is unnecessary), and control how CDs autorun.

As we install and uninstall software and hardware, the Windows registry becomes bloated with outdated and obsolete entries, which at worst can lead to substantial degradation of performance, conflicts between components, and other maladies. Some self-proclaimed computer experts tout that the registry should be cleaned periodically, or at least monthly, to remove the debris and outmoded entries that may be the source of many computing problems. As a safety precaution, it is good practice to create a system restore point or otherwise backup the registry before doing anything to the registry, just in case something goes wrong. The "Registry Cleaner" integrated with the TweakNow PowerPack is also available as a freestanding utility from the [tweaknow.com](http://tweaknow.com) website. Scanning the registry for errors may take a few minutes, and this software uses a green shield icon with a white checkmark to indicate those registry items that are likely safe to delete. As items are written to and deleted from the registry, gaps are created in the file structure which waste space, and may lead to slower booting and shutdown. Included with TweakNow is a Registry Defragmenter which will remove the gaps from the "hives" or sections of the registry, making it smaller and more efficient.

Many computers are slow booting and sluggishly running because too many items are loaded when the computer is turned on, and this consumes system resources. While Windows has a "geekish" MSCORECONFIG utility that can be used to control what loads when the computer is booted, the Startup Manager in PowerPack makes the process easy by simply unchecking the box adjacent to an unwanted item. If the user changes his mind later, or finds that an item unchecked is desired, simple re-checking the item will load that item at the next boot.

Sometimes it is necessary to know explicitly what is in your computer in terms hardware and the operating system. The "System Information" component displays the hardware components model numbers, firmware versions, driver builds, and other technical information that may be critical to have when repairing, updating, or upgrading the computer, as well as details about the build and version of Windows.

Personal privacy is an issue that many of us are concerned with, and the PowerPack has a "Track Cleaner" which will delete temporary internet files, cookies, cache, and other internet tracks left on the computer. PowerPack can clean tracks left on Internet Explorer up to version 8, and Firefox up to version 3.5, as well as those tracks left by Windows itself. While somewhat redundant with Windows' own Add/Remove utility, PowerPack has a capable "Uninstall Program" function that can be used to uninstall any no longer wanted programs.

One of my favorite features in TweakNow PowerPack 2009 is the "Windows Secret" utility which has eleven sections each containing tweaks that can be used to improve the performance of Windows, en-

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hance the appearance of the desktop, secure the control panel, customize the start menu, and control the way that the Windows Explorer file manager appears and functions. Well over 100 tweaks are available with this “Secret” utility. For those who just want to improve performance with minimal effort, the “Quick TuneUp” offers a single click way to perform the basic tune-up functions, such as cleaning the registry and removing hard drive clutter.

I will be the first to admit that I have made many mistakes when fooling around with computer settings. What is nice about TweakNow is that it automatically makes a backup of whatever was changed, enabling the user to restore or un-do what was done. This is accessed by clicking on “Restore Backup” which shows a directory of the changes implemented, and a single click will restore the selected changes.

TweakNow PowerPack 2009 is a very capable free utility that can do much to enhance the performance of a PC. TweakNow is about to release a low-cost “professional” version with even more features for XP, Vista and “7”, but with a bargain price of only \$10. The free version of PowerPack 2009 is quite capable; I eagerly look forward to see what TweakNow can add to a professional version.

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### **Net Neutrality**

By Ira Wilsker

#### **WEBSITES:**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Network\\_neutrality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Network_neutrality)

<http://www.google.com/help/netneutrality.html>

<http://www.savetheinternet.com>

<http://www.ncta.com/IssueBriefs/Network-Management.aspx?view=2>

<http://www.ustelecom.org>

<http://www.ustelecom.org/Issues/PreventingInternetRegulation/PreventingInternetRegulation.html>

I have taken pride over the years that I have written this column to offer my readers a non-political and non-partisan break from the political tribulations of the day. Unfortunately, sometimes politics and technology clash, with each side having an argument supporting its opinions, and expressing why the other side is wrong. A long standing dispute rages in the technology world about the internet, and who should control the access to it. This is not some type of political censorship like what we often see in totalitarian regimes, but an economic issue where strong powers on both sides of the issue are taking a stance on the future of the internet. This is not a classical Democrat versus Republican, or liberal versus conservative squabble, but a dispute about the potential revenue streams and the use and control of the bandwidth that we have available. This often heated discussion has made it to the halls of Congress and to the bowels of the regulatory agencies, with heavy input from the participants, all of whom are trying to protect their turf. While the issues are complex, and I will try to explain both sides of the issue in an impartial manner, the name of the controversy carries the simple moniker of “Net Neutrality”.

According to Wikipedia, “At its simplest, network neutrality is the principle that all Internet traffic should be treated equally. Net neutrality advocates have established three principal definitions of network neutrality: Absolute non-discrimination; Limited discrimination without QoS (Quality of Service) tiering; and Limited discrimination and tiering.” The expression “Absolute non-discrimination” was defined by Columbia Law School professor Tim Wu as “The idea is that a maximally useful public information network aspires to treat all content, sites, and platforms equally.” The part about limited discrimination without quality of service tiering basically means that while internet services providers can offer different levels of service (speed and volume) to their customers at different prices, they should not charge special fees for a higher quality of service, or priority in delivering information. University of Michigan Law School professor Susan P. Crawford “believes that a neutral Internet must forward packets on a first-come, first served basis, without regard for quality-of-service considerations.” “Limited discrimination and tiering” means that there can be no exclusivity in service contracts, and that internet service providers and carriers cannot

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charge users for exclusive access to another's content. This concept is not some new creation of the internet age, but a well established 150 year old legal principal. Again, according to Wikipedia, "In 1860, a US federal law was passed to subsidize a telegraph line, stating that messages received from any individual, company, or corporation, or from any telegraph lines connecting with this line at either of its termini, shall be impartially transmitted in the order of their reception, excepting that the dispatches of the government shall have priority ... An act to facilitate communication between the Atlantic and Pacific states by electric telegraph, June 16, 1860."

Google has published a policy statement ([google.com/help/netneutrality.html](http://google.com/help/netneutrality.html)) that says, "Network neutrality is the principle that Internet users should be in control of what content they view and what applications they use on the Internet. The Internet has operated according to this neutrality principle since its earliest days... Fundamentally, net neutrality is about equal access to the Internet. In our view, the broadband carriers should not be permitted to use their market power to discriminate against competing applications or content. Just as telephone companies are not permitted to tell consumers who they can call or what they can say, broadband carriers should not be allowed to use their market power to control activity online." Google is not alone with this concept, and has been joined by many large content providers, including Yahoo!, Vonage, eBay, Amazon, EarthLink, and others

What is happening today is that some internet service providers (ISPs) are either hindering access to popular online video and audio services, or implementing a special fee or charge to the user in order to be able to access these services at the users' normal access speeds. Some of the carriers engaged in these practices cite the infrastructure cost that this high bandwidth usage incurs, and that it is only fair to charge a premium price to those who are taxing the capacity of the systems. According to the website SaveTheInternet.com, "... cable and telecommunications companies such as AT&T, Verizon, Comcast and Time Warner of wanting "to be Internet gatekeepers, deciding which Web sites go fast or slow and which won't load at all. These companies want to tax content providers to guarantee speedy delivery of their data ... to discriminate in favor of their own search engines, Internet phone services, and streaming video while slowing down or blocking their competitors."

The cable and telecommunications companies are represented by the US Telecom Broadband Association ([www.ustelecom.org](http://www.ustelecom.org)) and the National Cable and Telecommunications Association, ([www.ncta.com](http://www.ncta.com)), which have aptly presented the side of the big carriers. The design, construction, maintenance, and upgrading of the intranet infrastructure are very capital intensive, and the demands on the networks are increasing dramatically. As stated by Wikipedia, "... telecom providers should have the ability to provide preferential treatment in the form of a tiered services, for example by giving online companies willing to pay the ability to transfer their data packages faster than other Internet traffic. The added revenue from such services could be used to pay for the building of increased broadband access to more consumers."

The NCTA, on its webpage ([ncta.com](http://ncta.com)) says, "There is no evidence that consumers are being prevented from accessing any lawful content on the Internet, nor are broadband providers impeding customers from subscribing to broadband applications that don't harm the network. The best consumer protection is a vibrant marketplace in which choice for providers exists and allows subscribers to switch if they're not satisfied with the current service. The biggest risk of Internet Regulation is that it will freeze investment and innovation in further broadband deployment and development." USTelecom, representing the broadband providers, states on its webpage ([ustelecom.org](http://ustelecom.org)), "This unnecessary intervention would slow broadband deployment and the arrival of a wide variety of pro-consumer advances. Regulating the Internet would delay the arrival of life-enhancing technological advances in health care, education, the economy and beyond by sending a distinct chill through the investment climate. This 'about face' for U.S. innovation policy would undermine the critical progress being made in today's competitive Internet marketplace, where adoption is accelerating across demographic groups and nearly 1,400 companies are racing to extend broadband's capacity and reach throughout our country. Instead of slamming on the brakes of our information economy and slowing the arrival of new innovations in our lives, our government should stay focused on broadband deployment and pro-investment policies that bring the high-speed Internet and its many possibilities to all Americans." According to Wikipedia, "John

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Thorne, senior vice president and deputy general counsel of Verizon, ... has argued that they will have no incentive to make large investments to develop advanced fibre-optic networks if they are prohibited from charging higher preferred access fees to companies that wish to take advantage of the expanded capabilities of such networks. Thorne and other ISPs have accused Google and Skype of freeloading or free riding for using a network of lines and cables the phone company spent billions of dollars to build.”

None of the combatants in this battle are claiming that the internet should be fiscally free, or that it is wrong for the ISPs to charge different rates for different speeds and bandwidth limits. What is in dispute is whether all content should be treated (and charged) equally in terms of bandwidth and speed used, and whether the users of heavy content providers (such as streaming DVDs by Netflix) get equal access to the capacity the internet. Hypothetically, an ISP could charge a user a premium price for priority access to streaming DVDs, and thus transmit that data ahead of his neighbors’ email, or offer faster speeds to users of its own content than it does to other providers. Another consideration under dispute is whether an ISP should be able to provide a higher quality of service and speed to its own digital phone service than it does another digital phone service, such as Vonage or Skype. Discrimination of these types is contrary to the concept of “net neutrality”.

This is a tough issue with valid points made by both sides. Hopefully the above content and links will provide the reader with adequate information and resources on both sides of the debate such that he can make his own decision. As the technology advances, and our demands on the internet infrastructure increases, we as a society must come up with some viable way to ensure that the capacity is there when and where we need it.

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