

BITS AND BYTES

December 2010

Newsletter of the Midland Computer Club
Midland MI

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

GENERAL CLUB MEETING 7:00 P.M.
Meets 4th Wednesday of the month at
the Midland Community Center
2001 George St., Midland, MI

This month's date: December 15, 2010
(3rd Wednesday)

This month's topic:

Club Christmas Party. Pizza and pop provided. Please bring a dish to pass.

Program Coordinators

Contact : Co-Chairpersons

Howard Lewis lewis3ha@chartermi.net

Joe Lykowski joseph@lykowski.com

(Vice) Presidents Corner



I thought by resigning from the office of VP for the club I would escape before having to write a letter. Instead President Piper had his hip surgery moved to Thanksgiving week and Carol Picard called and requested I substitute. I really think it was collusion by those two. Anyway Larry's back home now with more hardware in his hip than in my garage. He is in good spirits but may not be getting around too much for a number of weeks. We wish you a speedy recovery Larry.

I am actually really pleased to be able to thank all you great people.

I would like to thank President Piper for his organization, enthusiasm, programs and some of his humor and jokes this past year. You were great Larry and we look forward to your speedy return!

Laura Hammel has done a great job in the position as Treasurer and program presenter. Her programs are always well prepared and interesting.

Gary Ensing our Membership chairman is doing a fine job. Our membership information is always up to date and I wish to thank Gary for his suggestions and cheerful help over the last year.

I would also like to extend special thanks to Carol Picard for her dedication and skills as Editor of Bits and Bytes, our newsletter. Carol is also our Webmaster and fine program presenter.

Joe Lykowski and Howard Lewis, Co-Program Coordinators have been very willing and able to give us interesting and educational programs and suggestions.

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What you missed!

In November, Howard Lewis presented an overview of Microsoft Office 2010

Upcoming Activities:

January Meeting

Scams by Joe Lykowski

Keeping your Computer Updated by
Carol Picard

February Meeting

Utilities (mostly free software) by
Howard Lewis

2010 MCC OFFICERS

<u>POSITION</u>		<u>EMAIL</u>
President	Larry Piper	larryP56@chartermi.net
Vice Pres.	Bill Tower	stressed@tir.com
Treasurer	Laura Hammel	Lhammel@gmail.com
Membership	Gary Ensing	btiger6@gmail.com
Editor		
Webmaster	Carol Picard	webbyte@yahoo.com

Special Interest Groups

CLUB PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Co-Chairman	Howard Lewis	lewis3ha@chartermi.net
Co-Chairman	Joe Lykowski	joseph@lykowski.com

BOARD MEMBERS

Al Adams
Rich Holbrook

PUBLICITY

Kathy Bohl kbohl30265@aol.com

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

Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be 7 p.m.,
January 11, 2011, at Chapel Lane
Presbyterian Church, 5501 Jefferson
Ave., Midland.

(Vice) Presidents Corner (con't)

Both are very technologically knowledgeable and enthusiastic presenters. They both make it a real pleasure to be a club member.

Al Adams joined the board recently and has provided much valuable input and is likely to be a co-presenter next year.

On behalf of all the board members and members I would like to give a special thanks to Kathy Bohl for her years of service and providing for our Publicity needs with the Midland Daily News. Kathy has also volunteered many times as support person for our computer room obligation. Good luck Kathy. We will miss you.

Last but not least I would like to thank all of our members for providing inspiring questions and answers, suggestions for topics, help with presenting programs and for volunteering for the board and manning the computer room to help provide us a place to meet.

Happy Holidays to all,

V.P. Bill Tower

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

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

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

<http://feelslikechristmas.com/>

If you like Christmas music, this site has tons of music available for free download. The music is performed by contemporary artists who release it out of love for the season.

<http://www.miniclip.com/games/en/>

This site offers free online Christmas games for a little break from the stress of the holidays.

<http://www.fda.gov/Safety/Recalls>

Find out what products under the auspices of the FDA are currently being recalled and sign up for their e-mail recall notices.

<http://www.geekstuff4u.com/>

I'm sure some of you are looking for new interesting geek stuff for Christmas. This site has plenty.

Tips, Tricks & Techniques

Creating a Self-Running Slideshow in PowerPoint 2010

Sometimes when you create a presentation, you may want it to run without you being present. This is a two-step process in PowerPoint 2010. The first step is to create the timings for each slide and then the second step is to make it so it will run unattended. To accomplish this, do the following steps:

Set up the timing desired between each slide.

Select all of your slides and then click on the *Transitions* tab.

Select the type of **Transition to This Slide**.

In the **Advance Slide** area, under the **Timing** section of the Ribbon, click the checkbox by *After:* and set the duration that the slide is to be displayed in minutes and seconds.

This will set up the entire presentation with the same transition and timing. You probably will want to modify this for each slide.

Make the slideshow self-running.

In the *Slideshow* tab, click on *Set Up Slide Show*.

In the **Show type** section, click on *Browsed at a kiosk (full screen)*.

In the **Advance slides** section, make sure that *Use timings, if present* is selected.

That's all there is to it!

BeWARES!

*By Berry F. Phillips, Member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City
www.ccokc.org - wijames (at) sbcglobal.net*

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The wares have often perplexed computer users with numerous decisions regarding software. The multitude of wares have been even more confusing. Comware is commercial software which generally has more "bells and whistles" but requires the highest financial expenditure without the option to try the software in advance. Trialware is usually characterized on the Internet as a free download for a limited time but requires a purchase to continue using the software. Shareware is also free to download but often has features turned off or has an expiration date unless you purchase the software. Trialware and Shareware do offer an opportunity to use the software before making the decision to purchase. Freeware is free for personal use on the Internet but it may contain adware, viruses, or be poor software. Further, the marketing promotion of the wares can be even more misleading, causing you to download and then delete software that you thought was freeware when you discover it is, in fact, pay ware.

The world of wares can be very frustrating as well as expensive to the computer user. One can spend considerable time, frustration, and even expense downloading and deleting various wares on the Internet. Beware, retailers will not accept returned comware after it has been opened for a money back guarantee. Relax, my holiday gift to my readers is a solution to the problem that I have used for several years, saving me considerable time and money! However, I have had to endure personal comments from some of my fellow computer users that I am "cheap!" Since my ancestry is Scottish who are known for being thrifty, I do not consider that comment an insult. However, I do prefer the use of the word "conservative" to the rather blunt, "cheap."

Excluding my operating system, I have nothing but freeware downloaded from the Internet on my system! Aha, you are thinking, but what about adware, viruses, or poor freeware, and the considerable time in downloading and deleting it takes to find the best freeware on the Internet? There are several sites that contain only freeware. However, I recommend Gizmo's Freeware site because I have used it for several years and found it to be very effective in reviewing freeware and efficient to use in going quickly via links to safe and secure freeware sites for downloading. I am reluctant to recommend other sites that I have not used for purposes of this article.

Gizmo's Freeware is easy to use and makes it very simple to locate the best freeware on the Internet because it is extensively reviewed before it is recommended. Until July 2008 Gizmo was the editor of "Support Alert", a highly recommended technical newsletter that was distributed to over 150,000 subscribers. The site evolved from his highly popular list of the "46 Best-ever Freeware Utilities." The site grew well beyond 46 and reached the point that it could not be maintained by one person. Today, the site has grown into a kind of Wikipedia for Freeware utilizing contributions of dozens of volunteer editors who edit and moderate suggestions from thousands of site visitors. As a result, the range of free software covered by the site is ever increasing and the quality of the reviews are ever improving. Gizmo's Freeware has, in a real sense, become the "Wikipedia for Freeware." I strongly suggest you check your freeware on your system against the recommendations of the best and consider downloading the best.

The primary purpose of Gizmo's Freeware is to make it easy to select the best freeware product for your particular needs. The best freeware programs are as good or better than their commercial counterparts but finding the most appropriate programs can be challenging. There are dozens of freeware download sites but few of these actually help you select the best program for your needs.

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The site has no downloads just honest advice and useful guidance. Links are provided where you can safely and securely download the product you want. Furthermore, you will know that what you have selected is the best available. Gizmo's Freeware is easy to use and will save you time, money, and lots of frustration!

**BE SURE TO BOOKMARK GIZMO'S FREEWARE BECAUSE YOU WILL USE IT
FREQUENTLY TO SOLVE PROBLEMS -- SAVING YOU MONEY, TIME, AND LOTS OF STRESS:**

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

Acronis True Image Home 2011

A Software Review by Dr Herb Goldstein – Sarasota PC Users Group – www.spcug.org

Nightmares can come in abundant varieties, but the day you turn on your computer and nothing happens you are in for a whole new meaning of the word. As your heart sinks somewhere around the level of your shoes, visions of years of accumulated files, data, and software flash before your eyes as the sudden realization that maybe it's all gone nauseatingly sinks in. Are we talking about a rare occurrence? Unfortunately, it's a lot more common than you might think. Computers and their component hard drives are, after all, man-made electronic devices that are subject to an enormous variety of glitches. Preparing yourself for the inevitable day they visit you is the name of the game called *BACKUP!*

Yes, decent backup software used regularly needs to be the very first thing installed on your computer after its operating system! To do otherwise is an invitation to the disaster that time alone will inevitably visit upon you!

Backup software comes in a variety of types but it is commonly recognized that "imaging" is the most complete and accurate. Only imaging produces a byte-for-byte true reproduction of the contents of your original hard drive. Leading popularity today in the world of imaging backup software is Acronis True Image Home 2011. My True Image backups have on at least 5 occasions for me over the years restored dead computers/hard drives to full functionality from an otherwise total loss. A veritable electronic lifesaver!

Acronis True Image Home 2011 is currently available for free trial download at acronis.com. You are urged to try it and put it through its paces before purchasing. Some careful reading and using is necessary to employ it properly. In addition, it comes with a "Swiss-army knife" of extra utilities that greatly increase its functionality when properly used. Acronis offers enough trial time for you to familiarize yourself with the software.

To use True Image Home 2011 most effectively you should setup a regular schedule of automatic backups. Personally, I have elected to perform a full backup every 14 days implemented with a regular differential backup daily. Regular scheduled differential or incremental backups take hardly any time at all and can keep your backups current on a daily (or whatever interval you elect) basis. It is essentially a simple "set it and forget it" automatic procedure. Once your backups have been created, you can easily restore any part or all of it as necessary. Although you can elect to backup only your email or other specific data files, it is highly recommended that you backup your entire hard drive which allows you to restore its entirety or individual files as necessary.

Your backups should be placed on an external USB-connected hard drive of more than adequate size to accommodate them. Such drives are readily available today at relatively modest expense. For safety's sake, you can also easily disconnect and store them at a different location from your computer if you so desire.

If you were to use True Image Home 2011 only for routine backups and restores it would be worth its entire cost, but its passel of new and improved utilities make it an easily worthwhile investment.

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Predefined backup schemes designed for specific user needs - from a disk space-efficient scheme suitable for users with limited backup storage capabilities to a scheme for those users who need higher security for their data and system. The program offers different backup schemes for disk and file type backups. You just select a scheme and the program automatically manages your backups. In addition, you can create a custom backup scheme which will exactly suit your needs.

Check points - The Acronis Backup Explorer timeline shows Windows and software installation and update dates. Moving your mouse over a check point opens a balloon with information about the update or software. With check points you can check the changes to your system and recover the system to a specific backed up state.

A Non-Stop Backup feature automatically creates incremental backups every five minutes, allowing users to roll back their system, files, and folders to any point in time. In addition, you can now use the Acronis Secure Zone as Nonstop Backup storage. This may be desirable for notebook users with a single hard disk drive, however it defeats the purpose of keeping your backup separate and apart from your current hard drive in case it fails.

A Try-And-Decide feature allows temporary trial installation of new software which permits you to consequently completely eliminate it before any system changes are made.

Acronis Online Backup permits offsite continuous backup online to an Internet location.

A new and attractive graphical interface makes for easier program manipulation. Windows 7 is fully supported in all program aspects. A Plus Pack option, allows you to restore your PC to dissimilar hardware regardless of make, model, or installed components, or to a virtual machine.

While the software contains a "cloning" feature to copy your hard drive contents to a new drive, you are advised instead to restore a backup image of your old drive to a new one. The cloning feature can get somewhat "sticky" and is best avoided.

An Erase feature allows to completely and permanently erase the contents of your hard drive. This is a must for safety sake before disposing of a hard drive.

Automatic update notification. By default, True Image Home 2011 will automatically inquire about the availability of a program update at every program start. When an update is available, Acronis True Image Home 2011 will offer to download and install it. You can also check for availability of updates manually through the Help menu. This current highly useful feature makes updating a much easier and more convenient process.

New Backup Explorer. Now you can use the Acronis Backup Explorer's time line for exploring not only Acronis Nonstop Backup and Acronis Online Backup contents, but contents of all other backups as well. Clicking My backups in the main window will show all your backups on the time line. In addition, you can start recovery of disks and partitions right from the time line.

Enhanced scheduler. The completely redesigned scheduler makes scheduling much easier. In addition, it now allows you to wake up the sleeping/hibernating computer to perform a backup. The "At system shutdown" and "At user logoff" options are now available to users of Windows Vista and Windows 7.

Drag & Drop functionality. You can recover backed up files by dragging them from Acronis Time Explorer to your Desktop or a folder of your choice. In addition, you can create shortcuts for backups by dragging their boxes from the My backups area on the main screen to your Desktop. This will allow you to run a backup by simply

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double-clicking on its shortcut. You can also create shortcuts for frequently used Acronis tools by dragging their icons from the Start menu to the Desktop.

Integration with Windows 7 Control Panel. True Image Home 2011 replaces Windows Backup in the Backup and Restore item. The Backup and Restore window will show the Nonstop Backup and your oldest disk or partition backup. You will be able to recover the backed up data, refresh the backups, and pause/start Nonstop Backup directly from the Control Panel.

Over a period of many years, SPCUG has been served by our backup guru and Acronis representative, Gene Barlow and his wife Linda. They have provided us with backup presentations, advice and assistance and Acronis software at substantial discount. You can purchase this excellent product from Gene for about half the normal list price by going to his secure web site at www.ugr.com. Use the following order code (UGTI2011) when placing an order to get the discount price of \$29.

Music-- Capture it, Organize it and Enjoy it

by Phil Sorrentino

Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.

Music in the past was captured and made available on analog sources and played back on analog devices. Those analog sources were tubes (in Thomas Edison's times), record disks (78s, 45s and 33-1/3 vinyl), and finally tapes (reel-to-reel, 8 track, and cassette). And they were played on a phonograph (circa late 1870s), a turntable (spanning the 20th century) or a tape machine (spanning the late 20th century). All those devices were engineered to convert the analog music on the source media to sound that eventually hit our ears. Analog music was the capture of some sort of wiggle, like the wiggle of a turntable needle or stylus, or the wiggle of a magnetic field on a magnetic tape. The quality of the music we experienced improved all along the time that analog music was available, finally culminating in High Fidelity, Stereophonic Sound. Stereophonic because there are two tracks, one for the right and one for the left, to match the hearing mechanisms on our head, one on the right and one on the left. High Fidelity is the property of reproducing all of the music frequencies that were originally produced by the original source, like a singer's voice, or a rock and roll band, or a symphony orchestra. The frequency response of the human ear is about 20 Hz to around 16,000 Hz (although sometimes it is stated as 20 to 20k). These are general ranges and as we age, the lower limit tends to rise and the upper limit tends to be lowered. (By the way, if someone is exposed to very high intensity sounds or noises {measured in decibels}, their hearing range could be affected. In fact, sounds greater than somewhere around 100 decibels {db} can produce permanent damage to ones hearing range.) So, High Fidelity Stereo was developed to deliver two channels, each with about a 20 to 16,000 Hz frequency range. What more could you ask for. (Well, actually now with digital reproduction you can have much more, like 5.1 surround sound, but that is a subject for another time.)

Enough of the past, now on to the digital music age. One of the differences between analog and digital sources of music is the fact that with an analog source, the music quality deteriorates with each play. Each time a record or tape is played, some of the range of the music is lost. But with digital sources (digital files), the quality always remains the same. Go ahead and play away. The reason for this is that the digital representation for music is just a series of ones and zeros (which is reproduced exactly with every Copy). As long as that series is reproduced (and the process that interprets the ones and zeros doesn't change), then the results, the music, will always be the same. So, once we get the music, we have it at that quality, for good. But how is digital music created? What is the source? And what devices are used to reproduce it.

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The recording process starts with (analog) microphones which produce a small analog signal. This signal is amplified and then digitized. From this point on everything is digital, therefore perfectly reproducible. Digitization produces a file that has been engineered to contain the complete audible frequency range. This is the .wav file that is on the CD that is purchased. The CD becomes the source for the music. (Today, most music is distributed on CDs, although more and more music is being downloaded to computers for eventual listening.) Typically there are about 15 songs on a CD, but with the capacity of a CD (700 MB) and the average size of a song (35MB), you might get as many as 20 or 21 songs on a CD. So, if CDs are the source of the music, a CD player is the device that is used to reproduce the music. CD players come in two basic varieties, stereo cabinet type to be used with a stereo system maybe in the family room, and portables for use on the go. Some larger stereo cabinet models can hold as many as 400 CDs and provide a place to store all the CDs (without their cases).

Now that's how the digital music is produced, distributed, and played, but what about MP3s? Well, an MP3 file is the result of processing a WAV file with an MP3 conversion program, the product of which is much smaller than the original. (WMA is another file type similar to MP3 that has been introduced and used by Microsoft.) MP3 files are typically one tenth the size of the corresponding WAV file. The resultant file size can vary because there are settings used by the MP3 conversion program. The MP3 conversion process is a "Lossy" conversion, that is, some of the quality can be lost in the conversion. The quality is selected by choosing a bit rate for the conversion. For music this rate typically goes from 128 kbps (considered near CD quality) up to around 320 kbps (for those audiophiles that have very good hearing and reproduction systems). There are also lower qualities for low frequency range (voice only), files which are 32 kbps and 64 kbps. The lower the quality, the smaller the size of the MP3 file, and similarly, the higher the quality, the larger the file size. Some people might be able to detect the difference between a 128 kbps quality and a 320 kbps quality, but if you cannot then the smaller file would be a better choice. (If you're not sure if you can detect the difference, create an MP3 of one of your favorite CDs at two different bit rates and then play each one and see if you can tell the difference. If you can tell the difference, use the higher bit rate as your quality setting.)

So, with that bit of background, we are able to discuss the process of converting songs on a CD to MP3 files. This process is called Ripping a CD. (Don't blame me, I didn't name it.) The process does nothing like its name implies, it simply converts the WAV file on the CD to an MP3 file on the computer, at the chosen quality. Ripping can be done with many programs like Windows Media Player, Musicmatch Jukebox, Audacity, and Winamp. (Windows Media Player (WMP) which comes with all Windows Operating Systems will be used here in examples.) To Rip a CD, place the CD in the CD/DVD reader/writer tray, start WMP, and click Rip on the top Selection Bar. It's that easy. A list of the files on the CD will be shown with a checked check box for each. If you don't want one of the songs, uncheck the box. When the conversion is finished you will have an MP3 file for each of the checked songs. Typically, the MP3 files will be in a Folder with the name of the CD Album, within a Folder for the Artist within the folder that was setup as the Rip Folder. From this folder, you can move or copy the songs to a library folder. Most people will probably use the Music (or My Music) folder that is part of Windows for this.

Next month we'll discuss organizing the Library to take advantage of the fruits of your (possibly) considerable labor in creating the music files. And don't forget: backup all that music regularly, so you don't have to go through that process again.

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Creative Griping Makes Friends and Brings Rewards

By Gabe Goldberg

In a perfect world, there'd be no problems with hardware, software, or services; businesses would be fully staffed with articulate human beings ready to accommodate all requests, and every product would meet or exceed customer expectations.

But that's not how things work on planet Earth in 2010. Instead, things break quickly or are badly designed; customer service is outsourced to far-away lands; and even when they're accessible, company staff often isn't responsive.

So what to do? Nobody I know is cut out for frontier living, self-sufficiency, and subsistence farming. That means we're all making the best of living in our techno-fragile and sometimes irritating culture. So let's have at it.

First, when life's little outrages intrude, avoid the temptation to accept them as unavoidable -- and, worse, unfixable. Just as slickdeals tips help you find bargains, a few techniques and some practice can remedy a bad situation or even turn it pleasant.

Stay Calm and Be Convincing

Complaining courteously to the right person with a specific remedy in mind can be rewarding. If a company Web site has a "Contact us" link, start there with an email or telephone connection. Be polite, identify yourself, mention how you're connected to the organization (current or potential customer, etc.), and describe your dissatisfaction.

If you're always happy after your initial dialogue with a company, you're a unique individual, and you can stop reading now! Too frequently, however, a first complaint contact goes nowhere. That's when to escalate. Calling may work but you'll likely deal with a low-level (and low-powered) call center. So writing is better.

No matter how you're communicating -- phone, email, instant message, letter, online support chat -- keep records of contact names and what's said. These are essential for recapping, summarizing, and (especially) escalating. If it's a large company or you expect to have further contact with them, request a case or "ticket" number for tracing your request.

Use company Web sites, Google, and other online resources to identify and locate senior executives. Check Web site links such as "About us", "Press room", and "Investor relations". Write to the CEO by name and title, briefly describing, with a tone of regret, what went wrong. You certainly won't hear back in person from Ms/Mr. CEO, but most large companies have an Office of the Chairman with staff to calm down and cheer up unhappy customers. Pursuing matters to the top works. After Starbucks' Web staffers were unresponsive to a complaint, escalating to the chairman resulted in an apology and a \$50 store card.

Remain courteous. Don't rant or threaten and surely don't overuse CAPITAL letters. That makes your message hard to read and look like a crude ransom note. No matter what you're told, emphasize that you're not angry at whoever you're speaking or emailing with and that you understand they're probably bound by company policies. Staying calm and cheerful sets you apart from most people and improves the odds of your getting satisfaction.

Be brief but complete. Provide enough history and detail to be clear and compelling but don't ramble or include non-essential details.

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(Creative Griping - Continued from page 9)

Be precise. Quote error messages, identify people involved, list event sequences so you're believable. When I complained that a Web site didn't use encryption for processing credit card information, the owner at first disagreed but when I proved my assertion, he was outraged – at his Webmaster, for botching security. He then asked what I'd intended to purchase and sent it to me free, along with other items.

Include good news. If you're a long-time customer, had a recent pleasant experience with the company, can praise a particular employee, or have ever recommended the company's products or services, say so. If whatever you're griping about was a mixed picture, begin by describing what you liked.

Let Companies Turn Problems Into Rewards

Raise issues when there's time and flexibility to remedy them. For example, when finalizing a stay at Nemaconlin, a luxury Pennsylvania resort, I was unhappy to learn that two signature restaurants would be closed during our planned stay. Instead of suffering in silence or -- with difficulty -- changing our travel dates, I politely contacted the general manager to suggest that guests be informed of such restrictions when initially making reservations. He agreed, and offered to have his Five-Diamond chef prepare a fantasy meal for us including anything we requested. His only advice was, "Challenge the chef." So we did – and the world-class chef and two assistants spent three hours serving us privately, with Champagne and cocktails, on a day that the restaurant was indeed closed. And -- as arranged in advance -- one of the most memorable meals of my life cost half the normal price of dining there. So a problem identified early and solved graciously resulted in my being a huge fan of the resort, the general manager, and the chef.

Complaining, even to the top, doesn't always work. I've certainly been ignored -- received no response -- and received dismissive responses offering neither apology nor any gesture of atonement. When this happens, the final option is going public via Twitter, blogs, etc. Many companies monitor their online reputations and respond to credible complaints with remedies. But usually, company management values and responds to customer feedback; I've established cordial relationships with executives by identifying areas needing improvement. Writing letters is easy and inexpensive enough -- and after sending a few you'll have stock phrases that make it simple -- that it's worth doing to remedy all but the smallest problems.

Five minutes and a stamp has been a small price to pay for a \$50 Starbucks card, a unique luxury meal, Web site merchandise, and many hundreds of dollars' worth of refunds, merchandise, and services.

Gabe Goldberg has developed, worked with, and written about technology for decades. This article originally appeared on the slickdeals.net Web site, <<http://slickdeals.net/>>.

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You Know 'Copy and Paste' -- Meet their Cousin, Format Painter

By Nancy DeMarte – Sarasota PC Users Group – www.spcug.org

When you begin to use the programs that are part of Microsoft Office, it is easy to overlook some of the tools which could make your life easier. I found that to be the case with Format Painter, a command which appears in several

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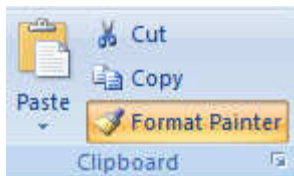
versions of Office programs, yet is greatly underused. Once you know what it can do and how easy it is to use, you will wonder why you never got to know it before.

In Word 2007, Format Painter is located on the Home tab in the Clipboard group. In Word 2003, it's on the Standard toolbar. It provides a quick way to copy formats from one place to another in the Office programs: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Publisher, even Access. It doesn't change any content like its cousins, Cut, Copy, and Paste, but it can reproduce even the most complex formats in seconds.

For example, let's say you have created a long document with headings and sub-headings. You want to give it a little pizzazz by changing the sub-headings to a different font, font color, and size from the rest of the document. All you have to do is make your format changes manually to the first sub-heading and use Format Painter to replicate those changes on all the others.

Another instance where Format Painter is a lifesaver is when you are creating a document or outline where certain lines are indented. Occasionally, you will find that the amount of indentation becomes inconsistent as you work your way through the document. Rather than dragging the indentation marks on the ruler to the correct positions, you can use Format Painter to copy the exact indentation from the last correct area to any others that need to be fixed.

This tool works with text formats, like fonts, italics, and font colors. It also works with paragraph formatting, such as indents, alignment, bulleting, and line spacing. And it is available in all the popular Office Programs. When creating a custom PowerPoint presentation, for example, Format Painter can help overcome the challenge of keeping your custom headings formatted the same on all slides. Excel users can copy formatting from one cell to another with Format, which is Excel's name for Format Painter.



It also works with certain graphics in some Office programs. In Word, you might want to include an auto shape like a large arrow on the cover of a brochure for emphasis. You might have resized it, added a border, and filled it with a custom color. Format Painter can reproduce that format on another arrow on the back page with very few clicks.

Here's how it works. It is best if you follow the advice from the professionals and type the entire document before formatting it. Then, once you get an item – word, phrase, or paragraph -- manually formatted the way you want it, select it. Then click the Format Painter icon once, which turns the cursor into a paint brush. Scroll to the item you want to change and select it. Immediately it changes to match the format of the original item. If you have more than one item you want to change, double click the Format Painter and use it on as many items as you need to. It will remain active until you click its icon to turn it off.

Some quick tricks:

If you want to copy text formatting, select a portion of a paragraph. If you want to copy paragraph formatting, select the whole paragraph plus the paragraph mark.

Make a mistake? Use Undo.

Want all formatting done for you? In Word, choose one of the Templates (or Themes in Word 2007).

Format Painter is only one of several commands that even beginners can learn to use to save time and frustration when using Office programs. Other tools will be featured in future articles.

Social Networking and Seniors

by Hewie Poplock

"Hewie's News & Reviews" (www.hewie.net)

There is a new report that shows that Internet users 50+ have nearly doubled in just the past year, from 22% to 42% in 2010. The survey goes on to say that almost half of Internet users 50-64 and about 26% users age 65 and older now use social networking sites.

While email and online news are still more appealing to older users, these people are now using the social sites and are repeat users, at that. The report goes on to say it shows that one attraction to seniors and others as well, is reconnecting with people from their past. It also states that older adults are more likely to be living with a chronic disease and are more likely to seek out online support with others afflicted or with medical professionals.

I am in the "older adults" category, as are many of my friends. Although I am more technically savvy than most, I am still seeing many people from my past and present in my age group using Facebook. I also must say that I have many friends who resist this new social stuff.

I am amazed that many of my friends, who have resisted a lot of the Internet hoopla and used AOL for many years because it was easy, are using Facebook and doing so daily. Some are very passive and are mostly lurkers. Others have immersed themselves in social networking and have renewed friendships and have become closer friends to many that they only occasionally see in person.

I have never played any of the games on Facebook and "hide" the references to Farmville, Mafia Wars, and such. I don't post that I went to a movie or had stopped at McDonalds on the way home, but do not mind when my "friends" do. I do enjoy seeing pictures from my friends, hearing that my real estate sales friend sold a home, hearing that another friend found a job, or a friend's daughter finished a charity race.

Each of us has our own interests and it is fun sharing them with your friends. I enjoy seeing what others do and what they are interested in. I can see what others in my age bracket find fun and interesting when using social networking. Being the careful and responsible computer person that I am, I always watch what I say and post to protect my information and the information of others. I also advise others to use the privacy settings that they are comfortable with and not to post anything that they do not want the whole world to see.

The report also says that social media bridges generational gaps. I totally agree. I see that grandparents and the rest of the family keep in touch, but all need to remember that what you share with your peers may not be items that you want to share with your family, your bosses, or your ex.

Various organizations that work with older adults, such as AARP, Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) and Project GOAL, have been actively promoting social media resources that are relevant to mature users.
