

BITS AND BYTES

October 2011

Newsletter of the Midland Computer Club

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

GENERAL CLUB MEETING

7:00 P.M.

4th Wednesday of the month at the
Midland Community Center
2001 George St., Midland, MI

This month's date:

October 26, 2011

This month's topic:

Skype—presented by Howard Lewis
and Carol Picard

What you missed!

September—presentation on eBooks by Ann
Jarvis of the Grace A. Dow Memorial Library

Upcoming Activities:

November—Tech ideas for Santa —Joe
Lykowski

Program Coordinators

Howard Lewis lewis3ha@chartermi.net
Bill Tower stressed@tir.com

Please let Howard or Bill know of topics you
would like covered at future meetings.

President Piper's Ponderings

There is a saying that 'women speak
two languages, one of which is
English'. The implication is that the
second language is body. Of course
we all send body signals.



I have a 1984 book called *The Four
Minute Sell* which says that 75% of
the impression a speaker gives is made before we they
even open their mouths: our race, gender, age and
appearance send this powerful message. While the U.S.
has improved with the race issue since 1984, we have
more than offset this gain by our prejudices in the religion
and political party arena.

The older members of our Club see this effect every day.
I would not call it discrimination, but rather perception.

I would like to throw into this communication dilemma the
term argot, which means the jargon spoken by a
particular group. Computer terms and military acronyms
are the two best examples of argot.

I have become painfully aware that I speak using sayings
and idioms that are two generations removed from my
listener. When you add in the educational and
technological gap that has developed, plus the fact that I
use subtle humor a lot, it is a wonder I can communicate
with anyone, particularly those under 55.

I guess my point is communication. I remember team
meetings at Dow on developing our group's Mission
Statement. Better communication was always a factor.

So help me out when I sound like an unintelligible idiot.
And do your part to better communicate your messages
to the world, particularly if it is computer technology

What are your thoughts and experiences is this area?
How do you deal with the medical world? The sales
people? The teenage crowd?

*(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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Board Meeting

Next board meeting:
 7 p.m.
 November 8, 2011
 Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church,
 5501 Jefferson Ave., Midland MI

Useful, useless and strange (in no particular order) Web Sites (submitted by Howard Lewis):

<http://www.fold3.com/>

If you are interested in researching military information from the government archives this site provides that information. They also provide many documents from the government archives.

www.pcappliancerepair.com

If you have an appliance in your home that is having issues, this site may be able to supply you with repair information and parts.

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

How does your broadband speed compare with Lithuania or Bulgaria? How about compared to North Dakota or Illinois? This site provides speed comparisons for all states and many countries from around the world. In most cases, you can drill down through the data to find the speeds in your town and by the various ISPs available.

<http://tinyurl.com/3dlrdr3>

This blog provides an excellent article on how to avoid malicious downloads from respected Internet sites. The author also explains how this malicious software becomes available on these sites.

<http://tinyurl.com/66uhyfm>

This YouTube video shows one possible way to control Asian Carp. They just jump right into the boat!

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
 1816 Bauss Ct
 Midland, MI 48642-4023

Attn: Membership Chairman

You may also pay for membership at a regular club meeting

Tips, Tricks & Techniques (submitted by Howard Lewis)

Windows 7 Taskbar Toolbars

By default, Windows 7 does not have any toolbars on the **Taskbar**. However, there are several toolbars lurking in the background that can be added. To add one to the **Taskbar**, perform the following steps:

Right-click on the **Taskbar** and select *Properties*.

In the **Properties** dialog box, select the *Toolbar* tab.

Select the *toolbar(s)* that you wish to display.

Click *OK*.

The toolbar(s) will now be displayed on the **Taskbar**. To remove the toolbar, simply uncheck the boxes selected above.

Quickly Open My Computer

Do you frequently find yourself opening **Computer** (Vista/Windows 7) or **My Computer** (Windows XP)? There is a keyboard shortcut which will allow you to quickly open it up without needing to use the mouse. To use this shortcut, hold down the *Windows key* and press *E*. With this combination, the **Computer (My Computer)** window will open.

Back Up Your Firefox Profile Folder

All of the tweaks that you make in Firefox, are stored in the **Firefox Profile**. The folder containing all of your Firefox settings are usually stored deeply, in a hidden folder under your user profile on the drive C. Backing up this folder is a good idea in case your hard drive crashes, etc. But to back up this folder it is necessary to drill down a long way to find the folder and copy it to a safe place for storage. A simpler way to back up the folder is to let Firefox help you find it. The following steps will help you locate the folder:

Open Firefox.

Type *about:support* in the Firefox address bar. This will open up the **Troubleshooting Information** page on your computer. This page contains all of the information about your setup that is important to Firefox.

In the **Application Basics** section, click the button labeled *Open Containing Folder* (located on the **Profile Directory** line). This will open up the Firefox profile folder in **Windows Explorer**.

Close **Firefox**, but keep **Windows Explorer** containing the Firefox profile folder open. (This is necessary to make all of the information available for backup.)

Copy the contents of this folder to your preferred backup location for safe keeping.

Close **Windows Explorer**.

That's all that is involved in quickly finding and backing up the Firefox profile information.

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An End to the “Tablet Takeover?”

Commentary: President's Corner by Greg Skalka, President, Under the Computer Hood UG, CA
September 2011 issue, Drive Light, www.uchug.org, [president \(at\) uchug.org](mailto:president (at) uchug.org)

August was an interesting month for computer news. First we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the introduction of the IBM PC. Though “personal” computers were already available when the IBM PC came on the market on August 12, 1981, it started the adoption of this technology by business and individuals. A week after the PC anniversary, HP announced it was discontinuing its TouchPad tablet and apparently abandoning the tablet market. Sales of the \$499 device touted as an “iPad killer” were slow until they were given a close-out price of \$99, at which point they flew off the store shelves. Finally, the mastermind behind the iPad, as well as iPod, iPhone, iTunes and most things “i”, Steve Jobs, stepped down as Apple CEO for medical reasons. Apple’s ailing founder will remain on the board, with his recommended successor, Tim Cook, at the helm.

All these events make me think the predictions of the death of the PC and the takeover by tablets are at least premature and possibly downright wrong. Traditional computer manufacturers have seen a slip in sales and have been working on their own tablets, but I think a device that has lasted 30 years in the market is not ready to be replaced yet. Tablets bring a lot of great features to the table, but they appear to be more of a niche performer. The current tablet craze may well turn out to be similar to that of the netbook a few years ago, introducing a new kind of computing tool that adds to the arsenal, but cannot supplant the traditional laptop and desktop.

I do believe the tablet computer concept is a good one, so much so that I bought one. Though I call my Velocity Micro Cruz Reader a poor man’s iPad, it is really just an e-reader that can surf the web, get email and display color pictures and video. At only \$120, it is certainly not a substitute for a laptop PC, but to me, neither is a \$500 iPad nor other manufacturer’s similar Android tablets. The 12.1” Asus eeeSlate tablet PC, which has an Intel Core i5 processor and runs Windows 7 might be a substitute for a traditional

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PC (with the tablet's external keyboard), but it also costs \$1000. To take a bigger chunk out of the PC market, tablets will have to be lower in price. To take over the PC market, they will have to be as capable as a laptop or desktop, a tall order for a device based so much on portability.

Right now, the notebook computer or laptop is the king of computer value. The current back to school advertisements show a lot of capable laptops (even with Intel Core i5 processors) for around \$500. There used to be a premium paid for the mobility of a laptop as compared to a desktop PC, but now a similar desktop setup costs more. Since 2005 there have been more laptops than desktops sold in the U.S., and at our Microsoft Store tour last year their staff reported laptop sales at 80% of the total computer sales. Those economies of scale in manufacturing have no doubt allowed laptop prices to be reduced below desktop prices.

At \$500 for a decent laptop, a \$500 tablet computer does not make much sense, either as a substitute or complement to the notebook PC. This was certainly proven out by the HP TouchPad being discontinued. HP had problems selling them at \$500, but one can only wonder how many could have been sold for \$99, were they willing to manufacture more at a loss. The correct price point to me for tablets would seem to be no more than \$250; that is where the Barnes & Noble Nook Color (Reader Tablet) is priced. Amazon would do well to keep that in mind if the rumors of a future emailing and web surfing Kindle are true.

How does Apple sell so many iPads for \$500 or more? I think there must be a lot of people out there with more expendable income than I have. I admit I've never used an iPad, and don't know anyone that has one, but based on experience with those I know that own the iPhone, the iPad is probably quite good as products go.

Apple's products are usually innovative and ahead of their time, and remind me of hybrid and electric vehicles. They are technically advanced and forward thinking, copied by their competitors and carry a premium price, but often don't make economic sense initially when compared to existing products. There will soon be a lot of electric and hybrid cars on the market, but they are all so expensive that unless gas gets well over \$5 a gallon, a conventional gasoline-powered economy car is still a better overall value.

I was able to participate in a GM-sponsored event this month in the Qualcomm Stadium parking lot, where I got to drive a lot of different new cars (with no sales pressure). The Corvette and Camero were fun to drive, but the most interesting ride was undoubtedly the Chevy Volt. In my opinion it blows all the existing and near-term hybrid and plug-in electric vehicles away. The Volt is a plug-in electric car (wheels driven by electric motors which are powered by a battery charged by external 110 or 220 VAC), but it also has a gasoline-powered generator to provide electricity for driving when the battery is low. Unlike the Nissan Leaf, a plug-in electric with no gas engine, the Volt can be driven across the country like a gasoline-powered car if there is no time or place to plug in. Unlike the Toyota Prius hybrid which can't be recharged from external power, it can operate on battery alone at all speeds for trips within its battery's range. The Volt is the future for electric cars. No matter how much I like it, however, I'd never own one, because they cost \$40K. They can call me when they get the price down to \$25K.

Apple can call me when they offer the iPad for \$250.

The tablet's strength is in bringing portability to web access and graphical media. Without a real keyboard, however, I can't imagine using any tablet as my primary computer. Writing this column on a touchscreen would be a big pain; the times I wrote it in a car on a laptop were painful enough. I admit I once thought a laptop keyboard was a lot harder to type on than a full desktop keyboard (and I don't do touch typing). Now of course a lot of businesspeople use a laptop as their primary computer. I know typing a lot on my netbook is a pain, and its smaller display screen makes for difficult reading by older eyes; a tablet computer display would be similar. While I suppose I could perform graphical tasks like photo and video

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editing, create large documents or file my tax return on my netbook, I wouldn't want to if a computer with a larger display was available.

In my view, the tablet PC is good for consumption of media (photos, videos, music, web pages), but its smaller screen size and lack of a keyboard make it less useful for the creation of such material. A tablet might be acceptable for email, but it wouldn't be so great for creating an important document like a resume. The market for tablets will thus be limited to content consumers, while content creators will still prefer traditional PCs.

The final problem with the tablet's takeover is its competition from the smartphone. While portability is the tablet's big advantage over all forms of the traditional PC, the smartphone has it beat there. You can carry an iPhone in your pocket, but you need a case or bag to take an iPad.

While I'm hoping the tablet continues to develop and evolve as an alternative computing platform, especially if it can come down in price, I don't see a way that it can take the place of the laptop or desktop computer in general business or personal usage anytime soon.

And I'd like to remind those of you out there with Apple stock that the company did not do so well between 1985 and 1996, while Steve Jobs was absent. His shoes will be hard to fill.

Why You Need a Webcam

By Sandy Berger, CompuKISS, www.compukiss.com, [sandy \(at\) compukiss.com](mailto:sandy@compukiss.com)

Would you like to talk on the telephone where you could see the other party? Even better, would you like to talk to 3 or 4 people at once and see them all? Want to do videoconferencing for business? How about setting up a camera to monitor your home?

All these things are possible with a simple little inexpensive device called a webcam. A webcam is simply a camera attached to your computer to transmit video over the Internet. Many of the current crop of laptop computers have webcams built right into the computer. All you see is a small "eye" above the screen. The software comes pre-installed on the computer so you can start using it immediately.

If you don't have a laptop with a built-in webcam, don't dismay. You can easily add a webcam to your current computer. You can purchase a webcam fairly inexpensively. Logitech, one of the major webcam manufacturers, has webcams that retail from \$30 to \$130. Of course, you get what you pay for. The cheaper cams have basic capabilities and minimal picture quality. Logitech's top-of-the-line model has motorized tracking, autofocus, and Carl Zeiss optics. That said, I will tell you that even the cheapest webcam can open a whole new world and can really be fun.

Once you purchase the webcam, you simply install the software and plug the webcam into your computer. Most webcams use the USB port on your computer and come with the necessary cable. Almost all webcams have a built-in microphone, so they handle the audio as well as the video.

Once installed, you can start to use the webcam immediately. If you are already chatting with friends on Windows Live Messenger, Yahoo! Messenger, or AOL Instant Messenger, you can immediately use your webcam to show your friends live video of yourself while you chat.

You can also use your computer with its webcam for calling other friends and relatives through their computers. The most popular software for doing this is a free program called Skype. You simply download their free program. Have your friends and/or relatives do the same. Each party gets a Skype user name

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when they install the program. Then you simply use the Skype software to call your friend's computer, using their Skype user name. The whole process is pretty simple. I use Skype to call my daughter and her family in Sweden. Not only do I get to see the grandkids, but since we are using the Internet, there are no long distance telephone charges.

Copyleft

By Cal Esneault, President of CCCC (Cajun Clickers Computer Club) and leader of many Open Source Workshops & SIGs, ccnewsletter (at) cox.net

September 2011 issue, Cajun Clickers Computer News, <http://cccclinuxsig.pbwiki.com>, www.clickers.org

We are all familiar with the term “copyright”. This is where a government grants to the creator of an original creative work certain exclusive rights to its distribution and use in return for the public disclosure of the work. There is usually a time period for this protection (for example, life of the author plus 75 years). Common examples are art work, photographs, and music. With a few exceptions (such as “fair use”), the copyright owners have strict control over the copying and distribution of such work unless they grant exceptions or specific permissions.

Although there is debate over the details, computer software can also be covered under copyright law. This can be more restrictive than patent law since “inventions” establishing patents require a more extensive proof of originality and usefulness and last for a shorter period of time (about 20 years). Proprietary software distributors solve any ambiguities by having users forfeit most of their rights immediately by requiring End-Use License Agreements (EULA's).

Originators of the concept of Free and Open Software (FOSS) wanted to ensure that their free work and any subsequent derivatives would have legal standing to continue to be free in the future. They created the play on-words term “copyleft” for using copyright law to provide copyrights which ensured the free distribution of their work and any derivatives thereof. This gained the term “viral” protection since, with certain legal language, any product which contained any part of this open code would render the entire project to be free and open. Thus, this piece of code would propagate like a “virus” and infect any piece of proprietary code.

The first widespread use of copyleft was conducted by Richard Stallman for the GNU General Public License (GPL). There have been several GPL versions:

1. GPLv1 (1989)
2. GPLv2 (1991)
3. GPLv3 (2001)

In general, they allow the license recipient the right to use, study, copy, share, and modify the original code. Users must acknowledge the original author and distribute any modified software under the same restrictions obtained from the original license. The GPL license is the mainstay of Linux systems. The author has the right to have only parts of the software covered, or extend other limitations. The concept is that anyone using this “free” software is bound by its initial conditions as a minimum requirement.

There are alternatives to the copyleft approach. Copyright owners may freely give their rights away (“public domain”), or they may grant only certain rights (“permissive” restrictions). For example, Apache and BSD have permissive licenses, and, users may use this free software and then combine it with their own software to create a new proprietary work. This, for example, is how Mac OS uses an earlier open version of a Unix-type OS with their own handiwork to create their own proprietary operating system

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(which, of course, you readily agree to by checking acceptance of the EULA!).

To protect the legacy of open software, the Free Software Foundation (FSF) was created in 1985 to ensure compliance with copyright protection established to maintain the open software conditions. They have attorneys to take legal action against anyone not following the open distribution of free software and also maintain a large set of copyrights and patents for community use.



Not everyone agrees that “copyleft” is the best approach (for example as no surprise, Microsoft Corp. objects to it). For example, inadvertently putting a small piece of open code into a large program could invalidate proprietary usage of the entire software package. Options exist, such as dynamic linking, which tend to minimize this problem. Future modifications of the GPL and permissive licenses continue to occur as technology advances and as originators of open source software seek to ensure its continuing legacy.

File Types: What are they? And why should we care?

By Phil Sorrentino, President, Sarasota PCUG, Florida

August 2011 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor, www.spcug.org / [president \(at\) spcug.org](mailto:president@spcug.org)

Understanding File Types is the key to successfully organizing and using your computer files and folders. The File Type is the extension to the file name (the characters after the period). Unfortunately, File Types are hidden when you first startup your computer Operating System. I've always thought this was odd because knowing the type of a file can help explain what is going on, or at least what can be done with that particular file. (Because the file type can be changed using the Rename option, I suspect this was done to prevent a user from renaming the file type and possibly making that file un-useable.) Without the file type, confusion can arise. Hiding the file type leads to the appearance that there are multiple files in a folder with the same file name. While actually, the file names are different because they have different file types. It is only the file type that shows them as two distinctly different files. File Types can be shown along with the first part of the file name. In XP and Windows 7, this is accomplished in the View tab of the Control Panel's Folder Options Applet. Just uncheck “Hide extensions for known file types”.

Let's start with some very basic File Management concepts. Every file in a folder has to have a unique name. (Two files may have the same name, but they must reside in different folders.) The name has two parts, separated by a period. The part after the period is called the file type or file extension. Typically the file type is three or four characters, but it can be longer. The limit is tied into the overall size of the path of the file in question, but practically you will see file types of around three or four or five characters. If you Google “file types,” you will be amazed at how many file types have been defined and you will also see some pretty long file types, like the following 8 character file type, “.debuglog.” In these lists you will see all the familiar file types like .doc, .docx, .txt, .rtf, .xls, .jpg, .bmp, .gif, .mp3, .wav, .m3u, .wma, .avi, .mov, .mp4, .wmv, and so on.

A few sentences ago I mentioned “path.” The path is a unique description of where the file in question is located. Typically we think of a file's location as being in a particular folder, but the path is more general. The path starts out with the computer followed by the drive, then the folders in hierarchical order, leading

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down to the particular file. So the path to a picture of a group of cousins taken on July 4th, 2009, might look like: \\Desktop2\D:Photos\Family\2009\FourthOfJulyPicnic\Cousins.jpg where "Cousins.jpg" is a picture (or at least a .jpg file) in the "FourthOfJulyPicnic" folder, which is in the "2009" folder, which is in the "Family" folder, which is in the "Photos" folder on the "D:" drive of the "Desktop2" computer. (Note that the "\" is used to separate components of the path. Similar to the way "/" is used to separate the components of an address on the internet.) So you see the path to every file must be unique, so that the file can be unambiguously found. This also explains why we can have two files, with the same name and extension, exist in different folders. The path would be different, not by the file name and extension, but by one of the folder components. So, when all is said and done, the file type is part of a file's name that makes that file unique.

But that is only part of the story. The file type is really a definition of all of the data that is held within the file. (It defines in great detail just what every bit and byte in the file means.) And this is where Files and Applications come together, or where they become "associated". File Association links a file type with an Application. An Application knows how to handle a particular file type because of the file type definition. Fortunately, we, the users, don't have to know anything about the details of the file type, only that a particular file type can be used with a particular Application. So if a correct association is made, the Application will handle the file in the expected fashion. If an incorrect association is made, the results will be undetermined.

Many applications can handle many different file types. For example, Windows Media Player can use a whole host of audio and video file types, such as wma, mp3, m3u, aiff, wmv, avi, mpg, mpeg, mpv2. Sometimes when you install a new application, the application will automatically associate with the file types that it knows how to use. This may not be the associations that you originally wanted. Some Applications are much more polite, and ask if you want them to associate with certain file types. If associations happen automatically, you can end up with different applications being used to handle a particular file type. For example, you could end up with "Real Player" playing your music that you originally had Windows Media Player associated with.

The Operating System provides a capability to review and establish the associations. Each operating System is a little different. In XP it is provided in the File Types tab of the Folder Options, Control Panel. In Windows 7 (and Vista) it is part of the Default Files Control Panel (Associate a file type or protocol with a program).

Associations can easily be changed, but be very careful. Only use the Recommended Programs. If another program is used, the results may be undetermined and may even damage the file in question. But this is the way you can get things back to the way you want. You can get your music back to being played by your player of choice, or your videos back to being played by Windows Media Player, or your .bmp graphics files back to being displayed with the Paint application.

So, we care about File Types because they help to uniquely define a file's name and location, and their definitions enable applications to determine how to handle the contents of the file. These are two very big jobs for a seemingly very small (and often hidden) aspect of the Windows Operating System.

Microsoft FixIt

By Ted Wirtz, Member, ORCOPUG (Orange County PC Users' Group), CA
July 2011 issue, nibbles & bits, www.orcopug.org, [twirtz \(at\) pacbell.net](mailto:twirtz@pacbell.net)

My home computer is an HP Pavilion running Vista SP2. It has a memory card reader built into the top faceplate on the front of the computer that is capable of reading many of the common memory cards used in a digital camera. I commonly use it to transfer images from my digital camera which happens to use either SD or SDHC memory cards. (SD cards come in capacities up to 2 GB per card. SDHC cards come in capacities greater than 2 GB.)

Recently I inserted an SDHC card, and instead of seeing pictures, Vista saw it as a blank card and wanted to format it. Not good. Obviously I didn't want to format the card because I knew there were images on it. I ejected it and inserted a SD card. Vista saw images. Reinserted the SDHC card. No images.

I put the SDHC card back in my camera fearing the worst. All the images were there. Whew!

Okay, the card is good, but for some reason, now my system would not recognize SDHC cards. Bummer. Why SD but not SDHC? I didn't have time to mess with it then. I needed to get to my pictures. I connected the camera via a USB port and transferred the images that way. Clumsy but effective.

A couple of weeks ago I decided to attempt a fix for my reader. I opened up Device Manager and looked at the readers. No exclamation marks. Windows doesn't see any problem with the devices. Okay, maybe I need to update the drivers. I asked the system to check, and it reported later drivers were available. I installed the updated drivers and tested the reader. No joy. I still could not read SDHC. Tried an SD card. Oh great, now Vista can't read either type!

I went back to Device Manager, and selected "Roll Back Driver." Vista reported the driver was successfully rolled back. Time to test. Uh Oh. I still can't see any images on either type of card. I've gone from the frying pan into the fire!

Time to Google my problem. Google found something that sounded a lot like my problem. Solution: use Device Manager, delete the devices, reboot, let Vista re-discover the devices and all should be well. Only it didn't solve the problem.

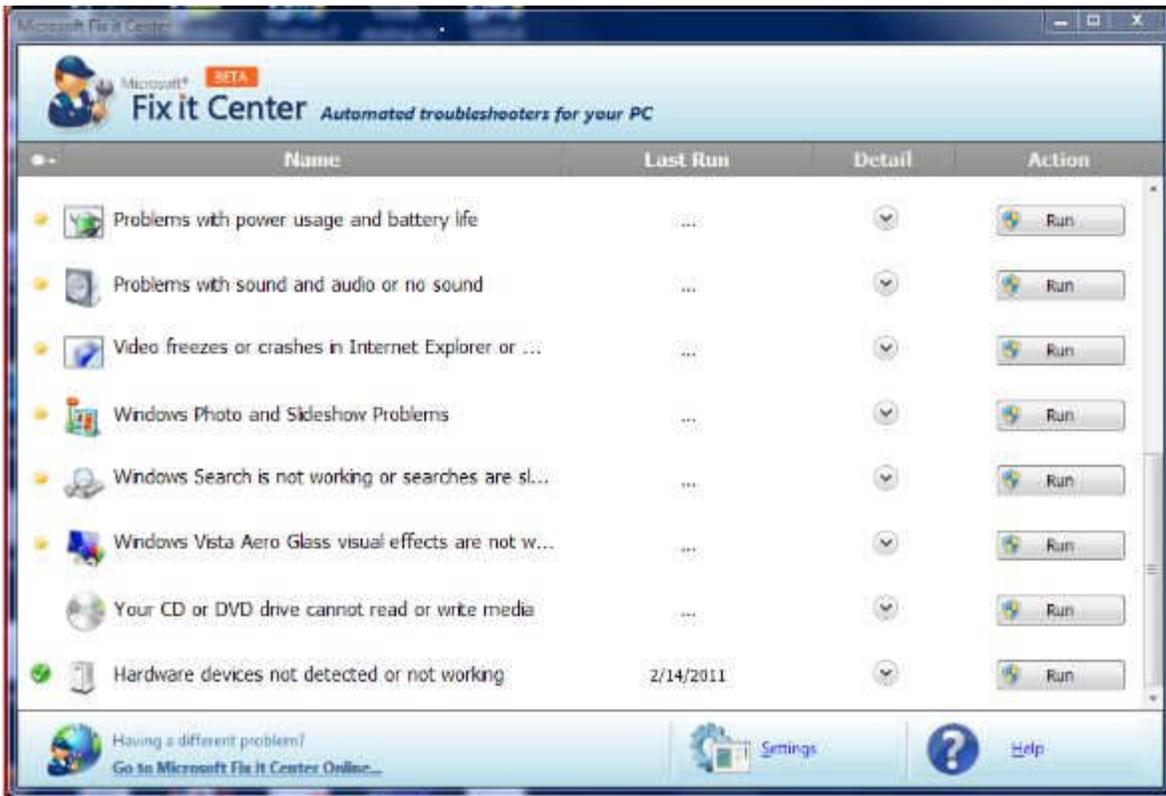
Device Manager found the devices, reinstalled them, no exclamation marks, but they still can't read any of my cards.

Time to search the Microsoft site. I found a somewhat similar problem listed, where somebody was having a Firewire problem. Recommended solution: Use the Microsoft Fix It program.

I downloaded and installed the program. The program opened up showing a series of problems that it could check. I scrolled down until I found "Hardware devices not detected or not working (Figure 1).

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I clicked the Run button and crossed my fingers. The program reported it had found hardware changes might not have been detected, and had successfully updated. It also checked that Windows Update was configured to install drivers (Figure 2).



Okay, time to see if my problem was fixed. Yes! I can now read both types of SD cards just like when the machine was new. Problem solved.

I don't know if the Fixit program can solve other problems as easily, but I'm definitely going to keep this program installed on my computer. It's a keeper.

Save Money on Telephone Calls

By Sandy Berger, CompuKISS, www.compuKISS.com, [sandy \(at\) compuKISS.com](mailto:sandy@compuKISS.com)

Many of us remember when we all paid a monthly fee to the telephone company for our landline and paid exorbitant rates for long distance service. If you had friends or relatives living far away, those monthly bills could really add up. You may even remember that when a call from afar would come in, the person who answered the phone would promptly announce that the call was "long distance" and the recipient of the call would rush over to the phone so the connection time would be kept as short as possible.

Thankfully, all of that is in the past. Technology has brought us many ways to keep in touch with friends, family, and business associates around the world quite inexpensively.

There are actually two different technologies that have greatly impacted our telephone-type communications. First is the emergence of cell phones. Today most of us are using cell phones for everyday communications. Since cell phones work on "minutes" rather than distance, you can basically call anywhere in the US more economically than you can with the old "long distance" service that the telephone companies provide. Each cell phone company offers somewhat unique features, but all are money-savers. For instance, some carriers allow you to call anyone else on that carrier at no charge. Some have special evening and weekend rates. Some allow you to list up to ten telephone numbers that you can call at any time with no charge.

Cell phone charges are generally much more expensive when you want to call overseas, but there is a great technological solution for that too. It is the second technology that has greatly impacted telephone-type communications. It is called VoIP, which stands for Voice Over Internet Protocol. VoIP uses the Internet to make telephone calls. Most of the major telephone and cable companies now offer some sort of "Internet" calling packages. Other companies like Vonage and Net2Phone have made a splash in this industry.

VoIP allows you to use your broadband Internet connection to make phone calls. VoIP service through a major carrier often offers additional features that are not generally offered through a regular telephone service plan. With a VoIP plan from a telephone or cable company you can often get voicemail, call forwarding, caller ID, and 3-way conference calling at no extra cost. Some VoIP providers also offer online account management, online voice mail, detailed call logging, and call-forwarding.

You can also use VoIP without any "telephone-type" company involved. You simply use your computer to make calls. Skype is one of the most popular services of this type. And the price is right. Making Skype calls from computer to computer is totally free.



If you hook up two computers that have webcams, you can make video calls where you can see and talk with someone at the same time. You can also call from your computer to landlines and mobile numbers in the US and Canada for \$2.99 a month. If you don't want to be tied to the computer, you can purchase a Skype telephone that uses your computer to call, while you talk on a traditional-type telephone handset. You can also access Skype from many mobile phones. This lets you to place calls without adding to your minutes. There are many Skype competitors like GoogleTalk, Yahoo Messenger, and iCall.

There are also other unique VoIP solutions. You may have seen magicJack advertised on late night TV. It is a small device that plugs into the USB port on your computer. With magicJack you get your own telephone number. You can make calls right from the computer screen or you can attach a regular telephone to the device and use it to make free phone calls in the US and Canada. I have a set of wireless phones attached to the magicJack that allows me to make and receive calls anywhere in the

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house. If a friend or relative also has a magicJack, you can make free calls to them even if they are on the other side of the world. magicJack costs about \$40 for the device and first year of service and \$20 a year for service after that. It's pretty useful and inexpensive.

By the way, if you have a land-line telephone number that you want to keep, you can move it (port it) over to a mobile phone. magicJack says that starting this August you will also be able to use your old telephone number with the magicJack, as well. So you don't even have to give up your old number to use the new technologies.



Whether you use a cell phone or a VoIP solution, you should realize that VoIP call may not be perfect. Cell phones sometimes drop calls and have areas where you can't get service. Services like magicJack and Skype are dependent on your broadband Internet connection. So if your connection speed is good, the call will be excellent, but if your Internet slows down, you may get a poorer call quality. Yet, both of these solutions will save you money and you may find, like me, that occasional slight inconvenience is worth the cost savings. I gave up both my business and personal land line almost two years ago. I now rely on my cell phones, Skype, and magicJack. I am saving a bundle and enjoying every minute.

September Club Presentation

Ann Jarvis from Grace A. Dow Memorial Library gave a presentation on audiobook and ebook resources at the library.

For more information, check out the Library website:

<http://www.midland-mi.org/gracedowlibrary/downloadable.html>
