



Midland Michigan

BITS AND BYTES

March 2013

<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:

March 27, 2013

This month's topic:

Scams and Email - Howard Lewis, Joe
Lykowski, Larry Piper

What you missed! Ann Jarvis, Grace A. Dow
Memorial Library - eBooks and the Library

Program Coordinators

Howard Lewis lewis3ha@chartermi.net

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

President Piper's Ponderings

When Ms. V. O'Hanlon asked her father if there was a Santa Claus, he suggested she contact the NY Sun because, "if you see it in the Sun, then it's so." Thus came about the most famous editorial ever written: "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Clause."



Now, 116 years later, we no longer have the definitive resource of the NY Sun. What we do have is a much reduced newspaper industry, a nearly infinite variety of periodicals, plus a massive network of radio and TV stations. We always have books. What these five information sources do retain is 'peer review'. To me that means at least one other person has signed off on the content, the spelling is correct and a consistent style guide has been applied.

What we now also have is the Internet and all of its ramifications: individual comments with no review, no method of ranking the sources and no censorship. If you add wireless capabilities, then all this information comes to us instantaneously. Now apply a veneer of ads or sponsorship to everything you read or hear.

How is an individual to sort out the truth from the fiction? A related problem is the Turing Test (<http://www.loebner.net/Prize/loebner-prize.html>). This test involves distinguishing between responses of a computer and a human. There is \$100,000 to the first person to accomplish this Herculean task—which seems within our grasp in a couple years.

March's General Meeting will address some of these problems as they apply to email—the worst offender of misinformation. A triumvirate of speakers will

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Board Meeting

First Thursday of the month
 7:00 PM
 Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church,
 5501 Jefferson Ave., Midland MI

President Piper's Ponderings (cont'd)

describe their specific and personal encounters with this minefield of spam, viruses and misinformation. Come to the meeting armed with your personal 'close encounters' with email misinformation. Keep a sharp eye on your inbox—a test may be right around the corner.

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

Useful, useless and strange (in no particular order) Web Sites: (Submitted by Larry Piper)

<http://www.pcworld.com/article/2027945/how-to-banish-metro-from-your-windows-8-pc-forever.html>

How to banish Metro from your Windows 8 PC forever

http://www.technologyreview.com/news/510901/the-bank-where-doctors-can-stash-your-genome/?utm_campaign=newsletters&utm_source=newsletter-daily-all&utm_medium=email&utm_content=20130219

A bank where doctors can stash & interpret your genome

<https://lastpass.com/>

LastPass to remember passwords

Membership Enrollment Form

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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

Windows key+left/right arrows

Most people Snap their windows into place using a mouse, dragging each one all the way to the edge of the screen to lock it in. But there's a quicker way: Windows key+the left or right arrows.

To put two windows into half-screen mode without taking your hands off the keyboard:

Windows key+left arrow, Alt+Tab, Windows key+right arrow.

Shortcut for a top-of-the-screen Snap, which maximizes the current window, is:

Windows key+up arrow

Windows key+shift+left/right arrows

If using dual monitors, the shortcut is Windows key+shift+left/right arrows. Using this combination will full-screen the current window into the left or right monitor. It's a nice way to push an item out of the way, but still have it visible when you need to refer to it.

Windows key+r

By default, Windows 7 hides the Run option that was once a Start menu fixture. But that power tool isn't gone, and the same Windows key+r shortcut that brought it up in past Windows versions still works.

Ctrl+Shift+Escape

Ctrl+Alt+Delete is the go-to key combination when things go wrong. But Ctrl+Alt+Delete doesn't take you directly to the Task Manager, the section that you actually want when a program needs to be forced-closed. Task Manager has its own dedicated shortcut: Ctrl+Shift+Escape. If you can break your Ctrl+Alt+Delete habit, this combination will save you a click.

Windows key+d

The rectangular button at the right end of the Windows 7 taskbar instantly minimizes everything and gets you back to the desktop. The Windows key+d combo does the exact same thing, and doesn't require mousing down to the lower-right corner every time.

Windows key+f

Windows key+f takes you straight into a search window and puts the cursor in the text field so you can start typing immediately .

ARTICLE INDEX

2013 International CES In One Word: Innovation - Page 4

Lou Torraca, President, The TUG MOAA Computer User Group, Hawaii

Extending the Life of Your XP PC - Page 7

Dick Maybach, September 2012 issue, BUG Bytes, Brookdale Computer Users' Group, NJ

Is Technology Turning Us into Couch Potatoes? - Page 11

Sandy Berger, Compu-KISS, www.compukiss.com, sandy (at) compukiss.com

Living in the Past? - Page 12

Computing in a Software Museum, John Davey

HDTV – What to Buy - Page 14

Sandy Berger, CompuKISS, www.compukiss.com, sandy (at) compukiss.com

Look Back Tech - Page 15

Greg Skalka, President, Under the Computer Hood User Group, CA

Performance, Capacity, Ports...Tablet discriminators - Page 18

Phil Sorrentino, Member, Sarasota PCUG, Florida

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2013 International CES In One Word: Innovation

by Lou Torraca, President, The TUG MOAA Computer User Group, Hawaii
www.the-tug.org, Af06hi (at) gmail.com



This is not a large poster. It's a TV!

Yup... CES is back again!

From the Consumer Electronics Association Press Release:

...the 2013 International CES is the largest in the show's 45+ year history, with 1.92 million net square feet of exhibit space. The previous record was 1.86 million net square feet of space at the 2012 International CES. More than 3,250 exhibitors unveiled some 20,000 new products at the 2013 CES, drawing more than 150,000 attendees, including more than 35,000 from more than 170 countries outside the United States...

"Innovation abounded at the 2013 CES and executives from every major industry that touches technology were here this week," said Gary Shapiro, president and CEO of the Consumer Electronics Association. "From amazing new products, to CEA's new book *Ninja Innovation*, to our new publication – *It Is Innovation (i3)*, innovation prevailed across 37 football fields of technology at the 2013 International CES. Our event is the biggest mobile show to kick-off the year and showcase our new mobile future."

Major product launches occurred across all 15 product categories at the 2013 CES. In wireless/ smartphones, highlights include the launch of Sony's Xperia Z, the Huawei Ascend Mate and ZTE Grand S. In video displays, LG featured its touchscreen Ultra HD, Sony launched the first Ultra HD OLED display, Samsung featured its bendable OLED and Hisense launched its transparent 3DTV. Digital Health and fitness launches included new products from Fitbit, Withings and BodyMedia. Audi and Lexus featured driverless vehicle technologies. For gamers, the 2013 CES saw the launch of Nvidia's Project Shield, the Oculus Rift, the Sifteo and Razer Edge. Other noteworthy products launched at the 2013 CES included: the Valve SteamBox, Tobii eye recognition technology, the Kickstarter-funded Pebble smart watch, Qualcomm's Vuforia augmented reality, multi-device connectivity from Ultraviolet, NFC technology from LG and Sony, tabletop applications from Lenovo, MakerBot's Replicator 2x and Samsung's Smart TVs with voice recognition.

It was really something to see and see, I did... as the numbers indicate there were lots and lots of things, but fortunately, the show's press events... unveiled on Sunday, all day press conferences Monday,

Pepcom's Digital experience Monday evening and Showstoppers on Tuesday evening made it a bit easier to see and feel some of the more exciting new stuff. So, with that introduction, here are just a few things I saw and thought you'd like to hear about. I'll continue the list in my next few columns so stay tuned {:-)



Chevrolet's MyLink

Chevrolet's next-generation MyLink will debut on the 2014 Chevrolet Impala this spring, followed by other 2014 Chevrolet models such as the all-new Silverado full-size pickup. The newest generation of the MyLink infotainment system runs smoothly and employs icons that look, and can be rearranged, like those on a smartphone. In addition to icons covering everything from navigation to phone to music apps such as Pandora, Chevrolet's next-gen MyLink is designed to accommodate new features and enhancements and be highly customizable. It also represents Chevrolet's first use of natural language voice recognition that allows customers to safely place calls, enter destinations, browse media, play music and control other functions simply by telling the vehicle what to do.

Another first for Chevrolet is that MyLink can store up to 60 favorites, including radio stations (AM/FM/XM), contacts, destinations, music and other media. This feature is convenient for those who travel to the same destination regularly and want to save locations such as hotels and restaurants.



Ring Mouse

Finger mouse Genius: The product shrinks and combines a computer mouse, presenter and laser pointer into one small ring. It has been around for a couple of years, but this year, developers created rings with single functions. The newest version is a mouse only, which allows users to search the web by moving their fingers. The Ring Mouse sells for about \$70.

BeeWi has an impressive list of wireless products ranging from Headphones, Transmitters, Receivers, Car Kits, Smart Devices (Toys ...really for big kids... my favorite is the helicopters, but their licensed cars and camera buggy run a close second) plus multi media-keyboards, adaptors, Wi-Fi, and Mouses. Visit <http://www.bee-wi.com/> to see their many impressive products.



BeeWi Helicopter



TrakDot Luggage

TrakDot: If u have ever lost ur luggage or even if you haven't and u fly a lot...this one's for u. Millions of bags either get left behind, sent to the wrong city or simply disappear completely every year. GlobaTrac has created Trakdot Luggage to give the constant flyer a little more of a sense of security. The palm-sized plastic device slips discreetly into your duffel or suitcase and updates the owner on its location via an app, SMS, email or the Trakdot website. Rather than rely on GPS, the Trakdot Luggage relies on a quad-band GSM chip and triangulation, which lasts up to two weeks on a fresh pair of AAs. Visit <http://www.globatrac.com/> for pricing info including activation and annual fees.



Sculpteo 3D Printing

Sculpteo: This one really amazes me... ok, I know that's not hard to do... but really... 3D printing? It's a prototyping process that makes it possible to create an actual object from a 3D file. The object is formed by applying successive layers of solid material. - Google provides a free, easy to use application called Google Sketchup. This tool allows you to design everything you want in 3D, through an intuitive interface, and offers free 3D models for download. BTW, they can make more than smart phone covers... go to <http://www.sculpteo.com/> and see all the possibilities.



JAM Wireless Speaker

JAM Bluetooth Wireless Speaker: This one I was able to hear as well as see.

Highlights: Incredible sound quality from a small package; Easy wireless connection--works up to 30 feet away; Works with all Bluetooth-enabled devices: smart phones, tablets, and most notebooks; Lithium-ion rechargeable battery provides up to 4 hours of wireless play--no need to buy batteries; Simple on/off switch on the bottom of the unit.

That's a wrap for now; as I said at the top... stay tuned for more.

Aloha, Lou

Extending the Life of Your XP PC

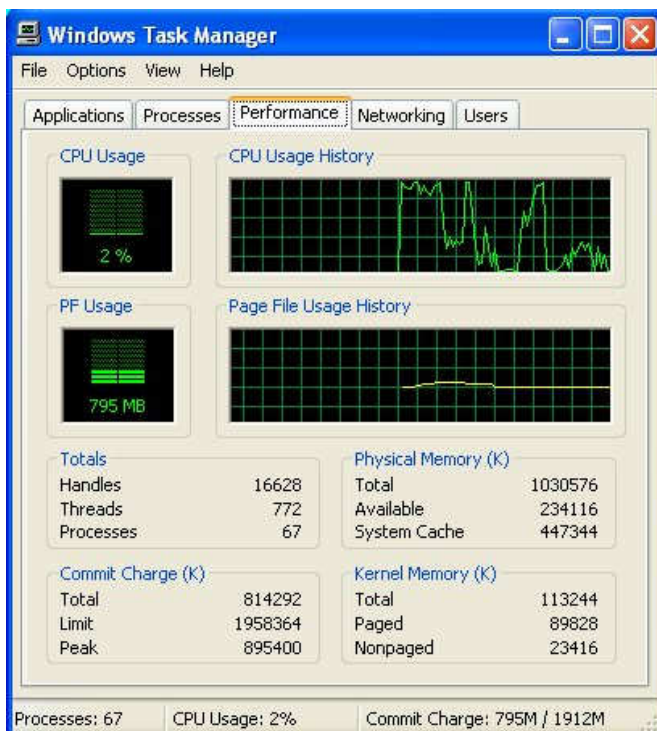
By Dick Maybach, September 2012 issue, BUG Bytes, Brookdale Computer Users' Group, NJ
www.bcug.com, n2nd (at) charter.net

When you first got your PC with Windows XP it was blazingly fast and its hard disk was huge. But now, maybe 10 years later, it has slowed, perhaps drastically so, and its disk is nearly full. The cause of the disk-space shortage is probably obvious, you've stored thousands of photos, songs, and documents, and installed many programs. But what about the speed? Unlike you and I, electronic hardware doesn't slow down as it ages.

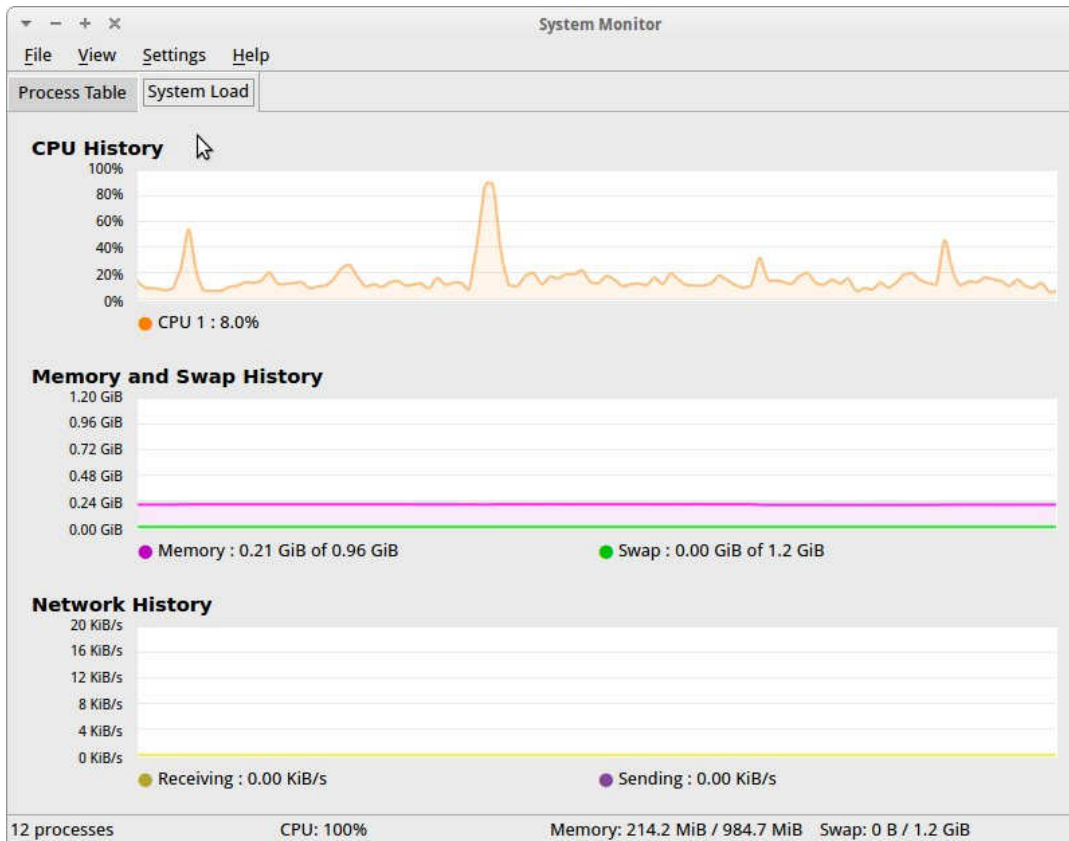
Hopefully, you've kept your software, especially your anti-virus program, up to date and have avoided downloading files from questionable sources. If not (or if someone who uses your PC is less careful), run a full virus and malware check and update Windows and all your applications before you try anything else.

At the time you bought your XP PC, 500 Mbytes of RAM was plenty, but the patches and enhancements you've added over the ensuing years means that the XP you now use is much different than the XP you originally bought. In particular, 500 Mbytes of RAM is now woefully inadequate. To check your RAM use, simultaneously press the *Control*, *Alt*, and *Delete* keys, select the *Task Manager* button on the Window that pops up, and then select the *Performance* tab.

I did this on my laptop and, as the screen-shot shows, found that with no applications running except for my virus checker, it was using about 814 Mbytes of RAM (see the *Commit Charge* box). Fortunately, this PC has 1 Gbyte of RAM (as shown in the *Physical Memory* box). Note also that the Commit Charge limit is nearly 2 Gbyte. The second Gbyte is provided by the swap file; when Windows needs more memory than you have physical RAM, it moves some data from RAM to a swap file on your hard disk to make room. If this happens more than occasionally, the situation is called *thrashing*, which results in Windows slowing to a crawl as it continually moves data from RAM to disk and back again. If your XP PC has only 500 Mbytes of RAM, it will begin thrashing as it boots, and will be frustratingly slow. The only fix for this is to increase RAM to at least 1 Gbyte. Removing programs, defragging, and other such measures will not improve the situation at all, despite what fraudulent TV ads say.

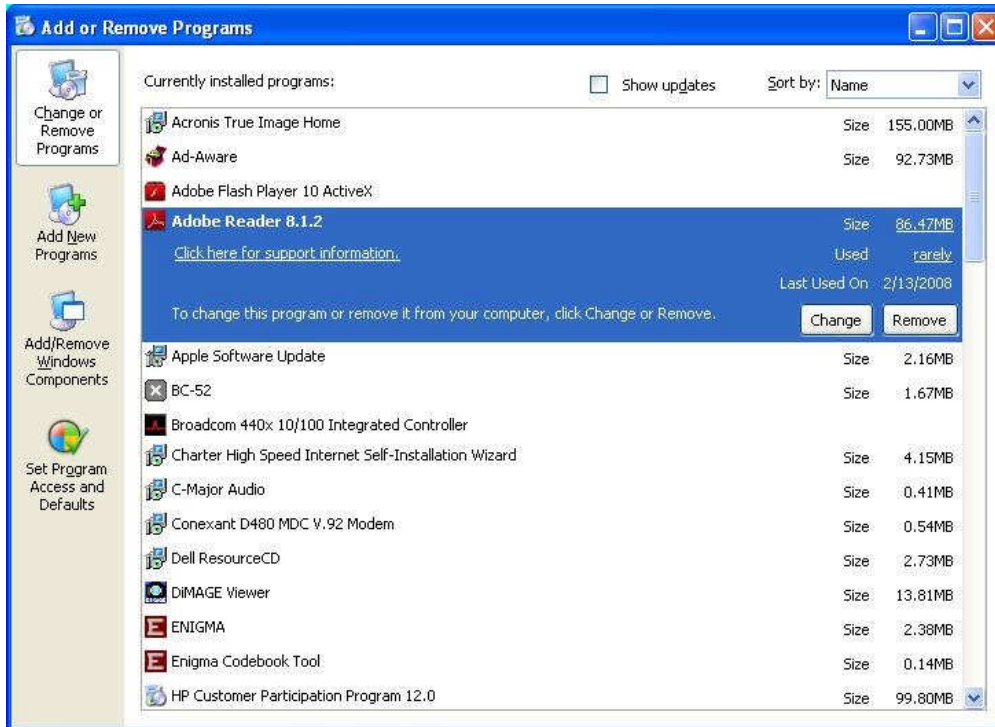


Instead of adding RAM, you could switch to Linux, although for an old PC you will have to use a lightweight distribution, such as Xubuntu. (Mainstream Linux distributions, such as Ubuntu, require modern display controllers.) The only difference between these and the mainstream cousins, such as Ubuntu, is that the displays are simpler; that is, you lose some of the visual bling that the software vendors think you want; both types support all the same applications. The screen-shot below shows Xubuntu's resource on the same laptop as above.



Note that only 210 Mbytes of RAM are in use, compared to XP's 814 Mbytes. Linux thus provides a way to extend the useful life of old PCs by many years. This approach is especially attractive for laptops, whose hardware is difficult to upgrade.

If you want to keep using XP, you have little choice but to increase the amount of its RAM. Beyond this there are other steps you can take, although their effects on performance will be much smaller. Before you do any of the following, back up your entire PC. If you haven't already, use your favorite anti-virus software to get rid of any malware, use Microsoft Update to bring the system up to date, and update the drivers. Then look at the installed programs with the sequence *Start*® *Control Panel*® *Add or Remove Programs*. Highlight each in turn to see how much disk space it occupies, how often you use it, and the date you used it last. Ask yourself if you really need it, and if not click the *Remove* button to remove it. This will free disk space and may speed up your PC if the program has a module that resides in RAM. As the screen-shot shows, I haven't used Adobe Reader for over five years and I could recover 86 Mbytes of disk space by removing it.



You can clean up a drive with the following sequence: Double-click on *Computer*® right-click on the desired drive® select *Properties*® click on the *Disk Cleanup* button.

The screen-shot below shows the result on my laptop.

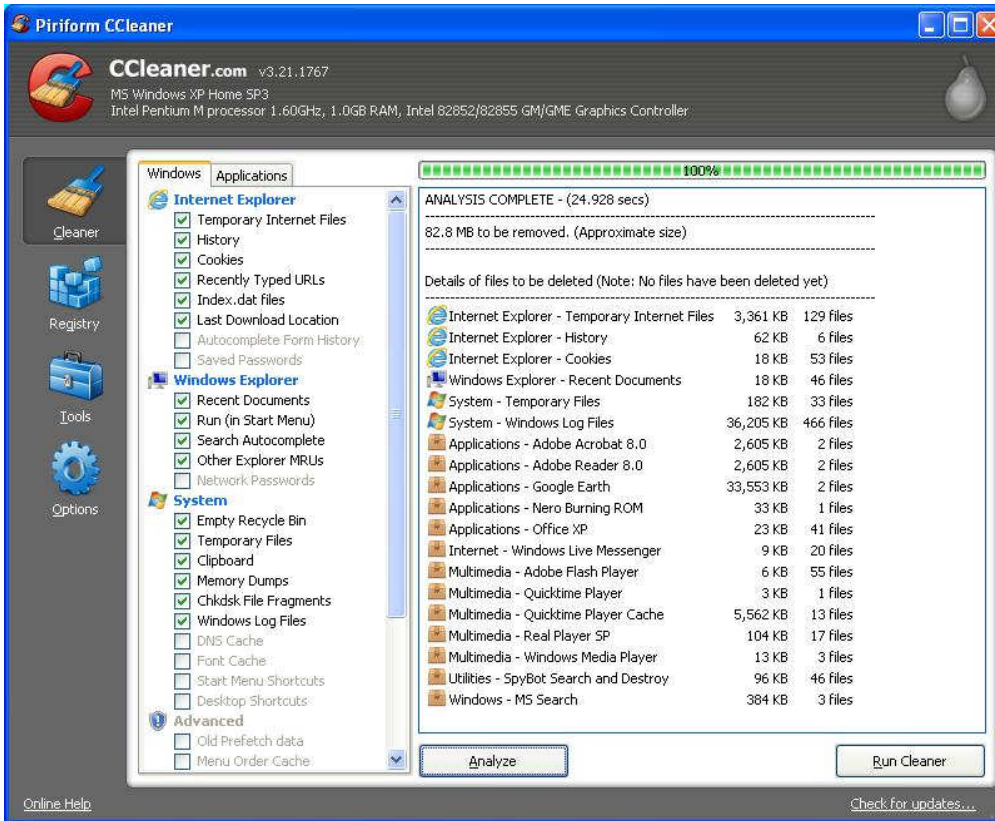


As you can see, I can recover almost 22 Mbytes of disk space by performing the checked operations. (Although it doesn't appear in this shot, I could recover almost an additional 3.7 Gbytes by compressing old files, which I prefer not to do.)

You may gain some speed by disabling some of the visual display effects. Navigate *Start*® *Control Panel*® *System*® *Advanced* tab® in the *Performance* box click on *Settings* and uncheck everything except
 Show shadows under menus,
 Show shadows under mouse pointer,
 Show translucent selection rectangle,
 Smooth edges of screen fonts,
 Use drop shadows for icons labels on the desktop, and
 Use visual styles on windows and buttons.

The following will recover an impressive amount of disk space, but do it only if you have a recent back-up that you know to be good. Move to the directory *C:\Windows* and make the hidden items visible by clicking on *Tools* (in the menu bar), selecting *Folder Options*, selecting the *View* tab, and the selecting the *Show hidden files and folders* item. You will find a large number of directories whose names begin and end with \$ and include "Uninstall" somewhere in between. These allow you to back out of patches, but it is most unlikely you will ever have to do this, especially if your system is running well. (My laptop had 339 such folders, occupying over 250 Mbytes.) You can delete them and recover the space, but be very careful not to delete anything else, in particular, directories whose names begin and end with \$ but don't include "Uninstall". It would be prudent not to empty the Recycle Bin for a few days, until you're sure you haven't broken anything.

CCleaner (<http://www.piriform.com/CLEANER>) is a clean-up tool with a good reputation. It takes a more aggressive approach than does the disk cleanup procedure discussed above. There is a free version, but read the installer screens carefully as it will install a Google toolbar unless you uncheck the appropriate box. The first time you run the program, click on the Analyze button to see what it will do; the screen-shot below shows the effect on my laptop. (I had earlier performed the Windows Disk Cleanup described above.)



It claimed to find almost an additional 83 Mbytes of disk space that could be freed, although it removed only about 80 Mbytes. The program also includes tools to clean up the registry, uninstall programs, manage system restore points, and wipe disk drives, and will also show what programs run at startup. For more information see <http://www.howtogeek.com/113382/how-to-use-ccleaner-like-a-pro-9-tips-tricks/>. Finally, a different company has developed an add-on, CCEnhancer (<http://singularlabs.com/software/ccenhancer/>). On my laptop, this add-on allowed CCleaner to find 10.7 Mbytes of additional files. However, CCEnhancer requires .NET 3.5, which uses several hundred Mbytes; if you don't already have this installed, forget about CCEnhancer as what it can recover is only a small fraction of the space .NET will occupy.

I haven't mentioned defragging because I've never found that it improves performance by any detectable amount. I'm not saying it's a bad idea, just that you shouldn't expect any performance change.

Also consider a hardware approach to increasing disk space. In particular, USB hard disks are inexpensive and easily installed on both desktops and laptops, and although they are much slower than internal hard drives, they are entirely satisfactory for storing data that you don't access frequently.

Is Technology Turning Us into Couch Potatoes?

Sandy Berger, Compu-KISS, www.compukiss.com, sandy (at) compukiss.com

Do you remember the days before remote control? For those of you who answered “no” to that question, let me tell you that there was a time when you actually had to get up and walk across the room to change the channel on the television. When remote controls were first introduced, there was great fear that we would all become “couch potatoes.” In fact, the first television remote control that was produced by Zenith was called the “Lazy Bones.” Now, more than fifty years later, we can truly assess whether this and other technological advances have made us lazy or have actually given us more reasons to get off the couch.

The television remote was just the first of many high-tech products that “did the work for us.” We now have many more. Whole-house music players like Sonos save you footsteps by letting you control the music for every room in your house with your cell phone.

If it is cold outside, there is no need to run out and start the car, then run back in the house to wait while it warms up. Many new cars have auto-start. Just press a button on the key fob and you can start the car remotely. If you don't want to have to trek down the driveway for the newspaper, you can simply download the paper to your tablet or read it on the Internet. Oh, and you don't have to open the door to check the weather. You can see it on your portable device or on your thermostat. (My Internet-connected thermostat even gives me the weather predictions for the next several days.)

For many tasks, you no longer have to walk into the computer room, now you can use your smart phone or tablet to surf the Web, check your email, read a book, or play a game. And if you keep your cell phone in your pocket, you can make and receive calls without running through the house to grab the landline phone. I believe that these devices have collectively saved us trillions of footsteps.

Today, robotic helpers also take the sweat out of home chores. iRobot's Roomba, Scooba, Looj, and Verro will help you vacuum the floor, wash the floor, clean the gutters, and clean the pool.

And with the coming onslaught of Internet-connected appliances, you will work even less. Many manufacturers have Internet-connected washers and dryers which you can control from your cell phone. They let you know when the clothes are dry and even let you give them a few more minutes of fluff time if you can't make it to the dryer to remove them as soon as they are done.

We've had timers on coffee pots for a long time, but the new Internet-connected coffee makers will coordinate with your alarm clock or cell phone to make the coffee at just the right moment, even if your schedule changes. Samsung has partnered with ADT to make a new home security system that shows up on your TV. So if you are watching TV at bedtime, you won't have to get up to check the door locks, turn off the lights, or close the blinds. You will be able to do it right from the TV.

Between 1950 and 2000 obesity rates in the United States have increased by 214 percent. Two out of every three people in the U.S. were obese or overweight in 2010. You don't even have to read the statistics. Just look around and you will see overweight people everywhere. Realistically, there are many reasons for this. We are consuming more calories, eating more junk food, and in general getting less exercise. It is also obvious, though, that our reliance on the technology that makes our lives easier is also to blame. Besides letting our devices do the work for us, we are also spending untold hours sitting in front of televisions and computers, and playing games with our fingers.

To be fair, technology is also presenting us with enticements to exercise and keep fit. Nike has pedometers that fit into their shoes and communicate with an iPod for later download to a computer. FitBit and others have wireless activity trackers, sleep trackers, smart scales, and mobile tools. In fact, there are hundreds of apps that will help you track your weight and motivate you to eat better. Take a look at the Apple App Store or the Android Play Store and you will see selections like Lose It!, Monitor Your Weight,

iFitness, Get in Shape, and DailyBurn Tracker. There are also a wide variety of apps and devices like calorie counters, blood pressure monitors, and step trackers.

So I guess it comes down to whether more Americans will use technology to improve their health or to relax and let their high tech devices do the work for them. Although some people are choosing the healthier lifestyle, we know that most are not. In fact, it is estimated that if current trends continue in just a few years 75% of Americans will be overweight. I love technology, but I hate what it is doing to our waistlines.

Living in the Past?

Computing in a Software Museum, John Davey, Workshop Leader, Cascading Style Sheets Workshop
Philadelphia Area Computer Society, www.pacsnet.org
<http://pacs-css.blogspot.com/>, mail (at) jadavey.net

It was at a recent meeting of my computer user group that it hit me – I do my computing in a museum.

It's not my hardware. My printers from several presidential administrations ago, and parts from 286 and 386 laptops, have all been delivered to the local recycler. Ditto that 19-inch CRT monster. (Though I did keep the Leading Edge Model D that started me off – you never know when you will need a fallback.)

No, I'm talking about software.

It was at the PHP session. The topic was email, and the session leader was talking about scripting an HTML email message. He threw in the suggestion to include a fallback version in case a subscriber was using an email client that did not display HTML. It was as if he was talking about writing a webpage for someone who might be using Netscape Navigator 4 -- but I actually use an email program that does not display HTML pages, at least not with my setup. Not surprisingly, I was the only one in the group. And that got me thinking about how many software relics that I use at home, and even at work, and that I actually reinstall every time I buy a new computer.

Mail from Another Era

The email client goes back to the 90's. Java was a hot new platform, and OS/2 was competing with Windows as a PC operating system (that's a whole 'nother story). A developer built an email client in Java so that it could run on any operating system. It was called JStreet Mailer, and it was perfect for people like me who dual booted between OS's. I made it my email program.

As good an idea as it was, it did not take off. The developer ceased working on the mailer, but he was generous enough to release the source to some volunteer coders. They maintained it for a while as Polarbar Mailer. The last update was somewhere around 2003.

It is a very well thought out program, but needless to say, the feature set is behind the times. And frankly, under Windows 7, it freezes up regularly. I still use it every day, though. At this point, I have so many addresses and folders of saved emails that the task of migrating to a new program is too daunting to consider.

New Data, Old Base

My database program is even older. Back in the DOS days, when Lotus was its own company, they developed the 1-2-3 spreadsheet. When the transition to Windows came along, they purchased a great word processor called Ami Pro and renamed it Word Pro. And they purchased a database program called Approach. It was a relational DB, not flat file, and it was a good one. They put these together with some other programs and marketed the package as SmartSuite. They had both OS/2 and Windows versions, so this one was also perfect for dual booting.

Then came Microsoft Office -- enough said. The last version of SmartSuite was released around 2002. I bought that update for about \$35 from a vendor at a computer show. Approach itself was worth many times that amount. I used it to learn how to design and build databases. I did one for my passwords and another for our user group's attendance sheets, and I still use them both. The program may be behind the times, but it works, so I hang in there -- again, it's too much of an effort to move.

A Pre-App App

Then there is my address book. I had forgotten this one until I went to do my Christmas cards.

I had a Palm III that I bought used from a guy back when Palm was the thing. It came with a nice desktop application that synched with the Palm and made it easy to enter information in either place. (You could also beam information between devices -- remember that? The original Near Field Communications.) The Palm itself has long been retired, but there were so many contacts in that desktop program, it was easier just to leave them there. So every December, I crank up the Palm Desktop program to retrieve my old addresses for the holidays.

From the Days of DOS

I go even farther back with my diary program. It's not even a Windows application. Lotus again comes into play. The story is that Mitch Kapor, the mind behind 1-2-3, had a habit of keeping notes on slips of paper. Looking for a way to organize information the way spreadsheets organized numbers, he had Lotus develop a personal information manager called Agenda -- running in DOS.

Agenda was my kind of program. It was a free-form database with calendaring functions and organization on the fly. I could create projects, enter notes, set up due dates, and track completions. I bought the first version from an online auction for a Boston PBS station, back when I used CompuServe for access -- pre-internet of course. (I bought a 2400 bps modem at that same auction to upgrade from a 1200 model.) The second version of Agenda came out in 1992, and that was the end of development. When Lotus developed SmartSuite for Windows, it bought an organizer called -- yup -- Organizer. It just wasn't the same.

For whatever reason, I can't find a program that works my way as Agenda does. These days I have to run it in DOSBox. People coming by my desk want to know what website I am using or whether the program would work for them. I just tell them to find something else. It's too much to explain.

A Pioneer's Second Act

The last example is not as ancient, but I have never heard of anyone else using it. In the early days of PC's, before Lotus 1-2-3, there was VisiCalc, a prototypical spreadsheet designed by Dan Bricklin. It was one of the foundations of the desktop computer revolution. Years after VisiCalc, Dan developed ListGarden, an application that lets web designers convert website entries into RSS feeds. I found it because I was looking for exactly that type of utility, and it was literally the only one that I could find. I have been using it for years, and I know that it is time to move to a CMS that will handle news feeds, but here again, there is a lot of work to make that transition. It's on my to-do list. But for now, ListGarden does the job, and I appreciate it being available. I have searched in vain to find anyone else using it, so I guess I am a leftover.

All of this is not to say that I don't keep up with new things. I'm writing this article on a dual-monitor system using Office 10 and saving the document to Dropbox. I keep notes these days in OneNote. And I am learning Access for my database management.

But the old software still works well enough for now. So I'll hang onto Agenda for now -- and wait for the next version.

HDTV – What to Buy

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For those of you who are thinking about buying an HDTV this year, here's a quick recap on the specs that you need to know about.

There are three main types of HDTV: Plasma, LCD and LCD with LED backlighting. Each is different in the technologies they use to light the screen. While plasma used to be the cat's meow, LCD technology has improved more over the last few years and with the addition of LED backlighting, it is now pretty close to an equal contender. Plasmas still have darker blacks and are better in dark rooms. As far as price goes, plasma can give you good bang for your buck if you want a really big screen. However most of us don't want to keep the drapes drawn during the day and many of us are happy with a 42" to 48" screen.

In that size screen, LCD and LED are more cost effective than plasma. An LED TV is simply an LCD with LED (light emitting diode) backlighting. You will pay a slight premium for LED over a plain LCD TV. LEDs offer better energy efficiency and are often thinner. Most, but not all, LEDs have slightly brighter pictures. If poorly done, however, they can have lighting uniformity issues. So let your eyes be your guide in that respect.

You will still hear about 720p and 1080P in the TV specifications. If you have 20/20 vision and sit 12 feet from the TV, you won't really notice much difference between a 720p and a 1080p TV. You would actually have to sit quite a bit closer to see any additional details. These days, however, 1080P TVs are becoming the norm and not adding much to the cost, so you may want to get a 1080p TV just because you can.

Two other common HDTV specifications are refresh rate and contrast ratios. You will see refresh rates of 60 Hz, all the way up to 480 Hz and you will see a wide variety of contrast ratios. These two specs are often used to entice people to purchase more expensive TVs. In another article, I'll give you a rundown of exactly what these two specs mean, but my simple advice is that in purchasing an HDTV, you can pretty much ignore them both without detriment.

When buying an HDTV, the last thing to consider are the extras like 3D and Internet connectivity. I personally don't like 3D. Not only does it give me a headache, but I don't want to have to wear glasses to watch TV. If, however, you like 3D, go for it. Just remember that because of lack of 3D content, the only way to really take advantage of a 3D TV is to buy a Blu-ray player and 3D movies on disks.

As far as Internet connectivity, it can be a plus if you plan on using Netflix, Amazon videos, or other content from the Web, but don't pay too much of a premium for Internet connectivity because you can always add a device like Roku, Apple TV or others to it later fairly inexpensively.

Okay Betsy that brings us to your TV cabinet, your choice of manufacturer, and sound. Building a cabinet around the TV is a bit old fashioned and not really necessary with the new TVs. They are so thin and light that you might be better off to simply buy a small stand or hang your new TV on the wall.

Many of you mention to me that Samsung and Sony are the two brands that you feel are highly rated. Yes. They are both good brands but even good brands are not perfect. I have a smaller Samsung that has been going without a glitch for about eight years. The 42" Samsung that I purchased a few years ago, however, has had two repairs that would have each cost more than the TV. Luckily I took out a five year service policy when I purchased the TV. A friend of mine has already had to replace the Sony that he purchased three years ago.

Bottom line is that if you pay more than \$700 for an HDTV, you may want to see if a service policy is cost effective.

As far as brands go, if you want to save some money, I also like Visio, which is a less expensive brand. My Black Friday purchase was a 26" Insignia LED 1080p 60 Hz TV for \$99. Insignia is a value-brand from Best Buy. I don't expect this TV to be perfect, but for \$100 I won't feel bad if I have to throw it away in three or four years.

Look Back Tech

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No matter how modern your technology may be, you usually can't escape your past. The introduction of the personal computer 30 years ago started a revolution in how we deal with correspondence, communications, photography and music. This revolution resulted in an evolution of capabilities over three decades, culminating in the Ultrabooks, tablet computers, personal music players and digital and video cameras we have today. In the fast-paced and ever-changing world of computers and consumer electronics, the past, as defined by different features and capabilities, can be as recent as yesterday. And unfortunately, something new and improved usually means something else just became obsolete, sometimes before its time.

Unless you just came out of a 30-year coma, you probably have computer files, media and devices that are not fully compatible with the latest in computers and electronics. For those of us that have been using computers and technology for even a short time, moving to the next, newest, latest and greatest will involve change. How do we bring along the content we have created and used in the past? How can we continue to use our favorite old devices?

Fortunately, there are a number of devices available to address these issues. They are often called translators, converters or copiers, but I like to think of them as "look back" devices. They can help us look back to an earlier time, bridge the divide between technologies and bring our content, be it music, photos, video, documents or information, along with us as technology evolves. And boy, does it ever evolve.

Imagine archaeologists stumbling upon an undiscovered ancient library. Despite alphabet and language translation issues, they could probably eventually learn quite a lot about the time period in question, as ancient civilizations typically used information recording technologies we can still easily use today. Assuming they are in good condition, carved stone tablets are still as readable now as they were when carved thousands of years ago. Even the information in paper books preserved from a hundred years ago is still easily accessible. That may not be the case, however, with information stored from only ten or twenty years ago.

Imagine instead opening an unclaimed storage locker that has been closed for 10 to 20 years, and finding it contains lots of important and interesting information. Unfortunately, it is stored on Betamax, VHS and cassette tapes, LP records, 8 inch, 5.25 inch and 3.5 inch floppy disks, SmartMedia flash memory cards and bare Parallel ATA (PATA) hard drives. You might feel the archaeologists have an easier task in obtaining their information. Even if you could come up with functional hardware to read all these old media types, how could you provide the data to someone that wants to access it on an iPad?

Fortunately, there is look back technology available to access and translate a lot of that old media. Although current computers no longer have drives to read removable magnetic disks, and the latest Ultrabooks, Chromebooks and iPads don't even have optical disc drives, there are a lot of USB external drives available for these older media types. I have not seen (at least recently) any USB external drives for reading 8" or 5.25" floppy disks, so for those you might have to rely on an old working computer. USB external drives are readily available for 3.5" disks, however, and are great when you have older equipment (like electronic test equipment) that can only store to its built-in floppy drive. There are also plenty of USB external optical drives available to read and write CD, DVD and even Blu-ray discs.



There are a number of options when it comes to getting information off of older computer hard drives. If you don't have a computer that supports the older drive, there are plenty of hard drive external enclosure kits available to interface all sizes of PATA and SATA hard drives to USB. The Apricorn DriveWire Universal Hard Drive Adapter is one of several similar products that can easily connect any size or type of bare hard drive to USB for data transfer. It is great for transferring files you forgot you needed from those old computers that won't boot anymore, or have no removable media in common with your new computer. For bare SATA drives, there are also quick-change docks available to easily access them through USB or eSATA.



A lot of laptops and tablets have slots for reading the removable flash memory cards commonly used in digital cameras, but most can only accommodate SD (Secure Digital) cards. Many of the older or less popular media formats, like CompactFlash or SmartMedia, are not supported in new devices. There are a lot of USB adapters available for almost any memory card format that has ever existed, allowing these cards to be read again. I have one USB media adapter that claims to accommodate 56 different types of memory cards.



Though almost everyone now captures and enjoys audio-visual entertainment through digital means and devices, including digital still and video cameras, personal digital music players and streaming audio and video, the all-digital era is at most only two decades old. Many of us still have music, pictures and video in an analog format, which makes them more difficult to enjoy in our digitally-oriented world and makes the originals more vulnerable to loss or degradation over time. Fortunately, there are many look back devices available to help bring these analog items into the digital world.

For printed materials like photographic prints, a good flatbed scanner can make excellent digital scans. For less critical material, a hand-held scanner can digitize much quicker with good results. Where the original is a film negative or slide, there are a lot of reasonably priced film and slide scanners available to allow those old memories to be more easily accessed and permanently preserved in digital form. At one end of the spectrum are precision film scanners that make high-resolution scans but require more time to scan. There are also lower-cost film scanners based on digital camera sensor technology that make very fast scans of reasonable quality. These scanners, such as ones made by Wolverine Data, make it possible to convert large collections of slides or negatives to digital files in a reasonable time. There are services available to perform these conversions for you for a fee as well.

For those that have large collections of vinyl audio records, cassette tapes or even 8-tracks, there are devices that can be connected to your computer through USB to digitize from almost any audio source. These devices take in right and left channel audio inputs, and so require that you still have an appropriate and working player available. There are also USB players for vinyl records and for cassette tapes, which allow those media to be played and digitized through your current PC or laptop. These are great when your record or tape collection was preserved, but you no longer have a turntable or cassette player that works. There are also many devices available for digitizing analog video, such as from camcorders or VCRs, but these all rely on you having a working player to provide the analog electrical signals.

The look back devices so far described allow legacy data storage to be accessed by current computers and analog media sources to be digitized. But what do you do when you have legacy hardware, like a parallel port printer or a hand-held GPS receiver with serial port interface, that you still want to use? There are USB to parallel converters, so that you can electrically connect that parallel port printer to your Chromebook. There are also USB to serial converters, which provide me a way to connect my old Magellan hand-held hiking GPS to my laptop (which has no serial port) and download tracks. Computer technology seems to advance much faster than some other electronics, and it seems a waste to have to buy a new GPS simply because your new PC doesn't support the interface it uses.

The last look back application is in telecommunications. Today all computers have either a wired Ethernet connection, a Wi-Fi capability, or both. It was not too long ago, however, that the only way to get on the Internet was through a dial-up connection with a modem. Unfortunately, there are still parts of the rural U.S. where dial-up may be the most reasonable option. Since modems disappeared from new computers many years ago, the best way to connect your Ultrabook to the Internet in these locations may be through an external USB modem.



The problem with advancing technology is that it makes everything obsolete eventually. This means there will be a bright future for these “look back” devices to handle the things we expect in our current computers at some point. While USB is pretty universal, I don't expect to find a cloud with a USB port on it.

Performance, Capacity, Ports...Tablet discriminators

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Performance, Capacity, and Ports - sounds like something you might think of when you are considering a Vacation Cruise. But Performance, Capacity, and Ports are the three technical things to consider when contemplating acquiring many new devices. These three things should be considered, especially when you are planning to buy a tablet, a computer, or even a TV. TVs and computers have been around for quite a while, so let's take a look at these considerations for the new kid on the block, the tablet. Usually, when it comes to choosing a tablet, the first thing that meets the eye is the tablet size. Today's tablets seem to be roughly 7 or 10 inch. Once the size has been decided, then the Operating System becomes a choice: Apple's iOS (iOS5, iOS6), Google's Android (and all of its versions, like FroYo, Ice Cream Sandwich and Jelly Bean), or Microsoft's Windows 8 (Pro or RT). And then, with the number of tablets and Operating Systems, the choice can really get difficult. But another way to help you make the final choice may be just to look at Performance, Capacity, and Ports.

Performance is a measure of how fast the device is and how well it accomplishes the desired task. Capacity is a measure of how much you can do with this device. And Ports is a measure of how well the device will interact (interface) with the outside world.

Tablet performance is very hard to measure and quantify, but you really know when you don't have enough. When you do have plenty of performance, it is hard to ascribe the quality to any one thing, specifically. But, usually we look at the speed of the CPU. However, performance is very closely tied to the memory features, so performance may involve the memory speed as well as the CPU speed. Performance of the tablet CPU is measured in GHz, and currently good performance tablets clock in at around 1GHz. Because tablets are typically touchscreen devices, the first thing we do, to ascertain performance, is to try to control the operation with our finger flicks and swipes. Objects should move when flicked and actions should take place when the screen is tapped. If there is any lag, it is immediately noticed.

There are many different CPU processors used in tablets. Some of the manufacturers are ARM, Nvidia, Apple, Intel, and AMD. Apple CPUs are found in the iPad and CPUs from the other manufacturers are

found in the Android and Windows 8 tablets. There are at least two high performance CPU chips being used in the latest tablets: the Nvidia quad-core Tegra 3 in Android tablets and the Apple A5X in the latest iPad. The performance of both of these tablets is breathtaking. But keep in mind, not all tablets have the latest processors.

CPU performance can be determined by running benchmark tests. Benchmark test data is rarely available, but sometimes it can be found in reviews done by a magazine or other organization. Benchmark tests attempt to measure performance by running typically very lengthy and very complicated programs to see how long it takes to complete the task. There are many different benchmarks and when many different benchmark tests are run on a group of processors, the results may not always be conclusive. CPUs are sometimes fast in certain computational areas and not so fast in other areas, like data transfer. To really evaluate a CPU with a benchmark test, the benchmark test should be as close to the eventual use of the processor as possible, but this is not always easy to specify. Benchmark tests that involve a user, such as testing a game on a tablet, are even more difficult to use, because playing and observing a game may be very subjective, especially if it involves the screen display and input from the game player. So, the best test for performance is to try out the tablet yourself, while doing some of the things that you intend for the tablet, like web surfing, displaying pictures and videos, or playing a game (try Angry Birds for fun). Many tablets can be taken for a “test drive” at the “big box” stores like Best Buy and Office Depot.

So much for Performance: now for Capacity. The Capacity of a tablet is typically the amount of solid state memory the tablet provides. It is basically the data storage component of the tablet, which currently ranges from about 1GB to 64GB. This storage is space that is available for your Apps (software programs), and data (used by the Apps). Today, capable tablets usually have from 8GB to 32GB of memory. Many Android tablets, and Microsoft's Surface, also include a microSD slot for extending the memory capacity. Currently, the SDHC standard has been implemented in the microSD hardware, allowing for up to 32GB of added memory capacity. (At this time, Apple, unfortunately, has not included a memory expansion slot on any of its iPad devices, although they do sell a model with 64GB of memory.)

Ports: refers to the availability of interface connections provided by the tablet. This is the way your tablet interacts with your other devices. Some tablets include a micro, mini, or standard size USB connector. The USB interface allows the tablet to be connected to a computer (desktop or laptop) in order to move files to and from the tablet. This is one method of getting your entertainment media (pictures and videos) on to, or off of, the tablet. This is how you can get the pictures or videos that you captured with your tablet's camera into your picture collection on your computer. (Again, at this time, Apple, unfortunately, has not included a USB connection on any of its iPad devices, although they do provide a 30-pin dock connector that may be used to connect to a computer.)

Another valuable port found on some tablets is a micro-HDMI port. With this interface, the tablet can directly show video (picture and sound) on any TV with an HDMI input, which is found on almost every new flat panel TV. (Again, at this time, Apple, unfortunately, has not included a micro-HDMI port on any of its iPad devices, although they do provide a 30-pin dock connector that may be used to output video.)

Two other interface connections should be considered as ports although they are not obvious when you look at the hardware. These are Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, neither of which has a hardware connection because both of these are wireless interfaces. These interfaces allow the tablet to interact with other devices that subscribe to the Wi-Fi and Bluetooth wireless standards. [And finally, although few tablets incorporate this, let's not forget about NFC (Near Field Communications). This wireless interface has many uses, but may only end up on smartphones. NFC will allow easy transfer of files between closely situated (within a few centimeters) devices. This interface may be instrumental in allowing you to use your device as a wallet, in the future.]

Once you've decided to buy a tablet, the next thing is to evaluate the Performance, Capacity, and Ports of the most interesting offerings in the market. Usually, there will be a few that meet most of your criteria. At that point it becomes a matter of value: capability for dollars. Good luck.
