



Midland Michigan

BITS AND BYTES

September 2014

<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:
September 24, 2014

This month's topic:
Windows 8.1

What you missed!
August - Club Picnic

Program Coordinators
Howard Lewis lewis3ha@chartermi.net
Bill Tower tower.w@gmail.com

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

President Piper's Ponderings



We are going to talk about Windows 8 at the September meeting. A couple members will be sharing what they know about this current Microsoft operating system. While many of our membership are not using Win 8, it still is good to know your way around this OS.

In October Carol will be telling us how to get free books from O'Reilly, and I will be doing a survey on how our Club members use (or don't use) 15 social media sites.

November we will talk about the Chromebook. We will also have another topic, perhaps tablets.

I continue to have good experiences when I staff the Computer Lab each month. I learn as much as I teach because people bring in devices with which I am not familiar. Also, their problems are unique, so it forces my brain to think in new ways. Sign up with Howard at our next General meeting to staff one of our four labs.

Think about who we might have as an outside speaker. Perhaps another Club you belong to is using some form of technology that our Club might like to hear about.

Our picnic meeting had some program suggestions that I have checked out. Ron Picardi mentioned Space Engine, Bill Tower Search Everything and Larry Piper Minitool.

We have lost three members this month. Think about whom among your daily contacts might be interested in our Club. Invite them to attend a meeting.

See you on September 24.

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

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

<http://tinyurl.com/mn4upww>

I guess if you're a bear and have an itch on your back, what are you going to do — I guess find a good tree. Some Alberta Park rangers planted a camera in the woods.

<http://safeweb.norton.com/>

If you want to check to see if a website has any malware installed on it, Norton provides a way to check it out. Simply type the URL into the box and Norton will check it out.

<http://tinyurl.com/l2mynmn>

There is another trojan out there call GameOverZeus. F-secure has an online scanner to check out your computer to see if you may have it installed on your computer. The malware works by intercepting your web browsing and, if you surf to any sites which contain the word Amazon, Ebay banks, etc. inject some additional code into the page which captures your password and sends it to the hackers' server.

<http://you.regettingold.com/>

Simply type a birthdate into this site and it will show you all sorts of interesting (mostly useless, but entertaining) information about the world and what has happened since that date.

Board Meeting

First Thursday of the month
 7:00 PM

Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church,
 5501 Jefferson Ave., Midland MI

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 Carol Picard)**Calls from Windows Support**

You've heard this before but it bears repeating, since it appears it is making the rounds again. A couple people have called me recently stating that they have received calls from someone claiming to be a Windows Support person. One person received three calls and another received five calls, all in the space of a few minutes, so they don't give up easily. One of the people who called me has been having problems with his computer so briefly considered this might be a legitimate call but, fortunately, did not proceed with the call. On the main page of the APCUG website (<http://www.apcug2.org/>) there is a video of a call and what the caller does if you let them access your computer. The first seven minutes are a discussion of the setup used to record the call. The entire video is 1-1/2 hours long as the person receiving the call is purposely extending the call. The video is also available on YouTube <http://youtu.be/GVQoAlQrnSg>

Windows 8.1

When connecting a Windows computer to a new network, if you indicate it is a private network, it will automatically locate and add any other devices on the network, including printers. This only adds basic printer drivers. If you want to use other features of the printer, e.g., scan to computer, OCR functions, you will need to install the additional features from the printer disc, or download the latest full feature package from the printer website.

Routers

Do you own your own router? If so, have you ever logged onto the router to check for firmware updates. Some routers use the open source security package that was recently discovered to have an error. Chances of someone targeting your particular router are probably slim but some firmware upgrades address performance issues as well. Firmware upgrades have also been known to render the router unusable, so make sure to follow the instructions carefully, if you chose to upgrade.

My Netgear router has a Guest network which allows me to set up a second SSID with its own passphrase/security key so when people are visiting and want to access the Internet from their phones, tablets, computers, they use the Guest network which limits access to Internet only, they can't access my computers, printers, etc. that are on the router's primary network. I use WEP security on the Guest network so the security key is considerably shorter than when using WPA2. I recently discovered/enabled an option under the Guest network setup that isolates each device so wireless devices connected to the Guest network cannot communicate with each other.

I think ISPs have gotten better at password protecting the routers that people rent from them but I still find people who own their own router who use the default SSID, have not enabled security on the router, and have not set a password for directly accessing the router (this is different from the security key/passphrase for connecting devices). They don't seem concerned that someone could connect to their network and potentially access the information on their computer(s). With Windows 8.1 being so helpful in finding devices, if the person connecting to the router is using Windows 8.1 and, when connecting, indicates it is a private network, it makes access even easier.

Misc.

If you're tired of your computer room, living room, bedroom, etc., looking like cockpit controls of a jet plane, because of all the led lights, you might want to check out Lightdims®. While you may have tried electrical tape or duct tape, or sticky notes, they have to be cut to size and may completely block the light. Lightdims® are sticky dots and squares of various sizes, in different versions and colors. They have black and silver that dim the lights so they are still visible but not so glaring. They also have a black black out version that completely blocks the light. Lightdims® are available at lightdims.com or through Amazon.com. I ordered a set of Lightdims® Get All Four Minimal Packaging from Amazon and, even though it indicates four, actually received five sheets, black blackout, black dim, white dim, silver dim, and a full sheet black dim (3.5 x 8.75) that can be cut to size. The white dim doesn't appear to be available as an individual purchase from either Amazon.com or lightdims.com. Can't imagine anyone having enough devices to even use one sheet but nice to have color option to match different devices and share with family and friends.

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When You Want to Learn How - Learning about Computers

By Richard Durand, President, Wisconsin All-computer User Club, WI
February 2014 issue, WAUCtalk, www.wauc.us, [rgdurand \(at\) yahoo.com](mailto:rgdurand@yahoo.com)

One thing I have found out the hard way is that sometimes knowledge just has to be demanded. On a number of occasions, I have paid good money for educational classes, showed up and patiently waited to be filled up with the useful knowledge I was seeking, and when the class was over, I had more questions than when I started.

Or, don't you just love how this happens? Software companies provide pages and pages of printed safety and warranty information and then for instructions one gets something like, "When the Install screen appears, follow the prompts." What do the prompts mean? How does one decide which of the offered alternatives to select? Blank out. Or has anyone ever said to you as a new computer user, "Oh, just download such and such a program for that"? I have heard this myself and managed to download what was suggested and then found myself flummoxed. Why isn't anything happening? Oh, you're saying the downloaded program has to be installed first. Now, how do I find what I downloaded, which downloaded file is for installing, what drive and folder should the program be installed to, how is the installation carried out, how should it be set up, how does the program work, etc.? The questions can just cascade.

These are probably the most extreme examples that can be cited but the point is that one must be aware that this can happen and when it does, one must be prepared, however tedious and frustrating it may become, to obtain step-by-step detailed instructions. The answers may be in manuals or computer books or in the "Help" file or from telephone tech support, and sometimes from another computer user or club member.

And if the answers are things you already know and/or are not helping, make sure you identify exactly what you are trying to find out and keep looking and asking questions. In the search for knowledge, be demanding both of your sources and of yourself.

And if you are the one helping someone else with a computer situation, try to find out how much he already knows and then give step-by-step instructions as detailed as seems necessary. As I've written in

these pages before, there is much technical background knowledge that is just not worth pursuing for the average computer user.

But if you pick your battles and can narrow down what you really need to know, usually in the way of detailed instructions, you can concentrate your efforts and go all out to get what you need to know.

Network Debugging

By Dick Maybach, member, Brookdale Computer Users' Group, NJ
August 2013 issue, BUG Bytes, www.bcug.com, [n2nd \(at\) charter.net](mailto:n2nd@charter.net)

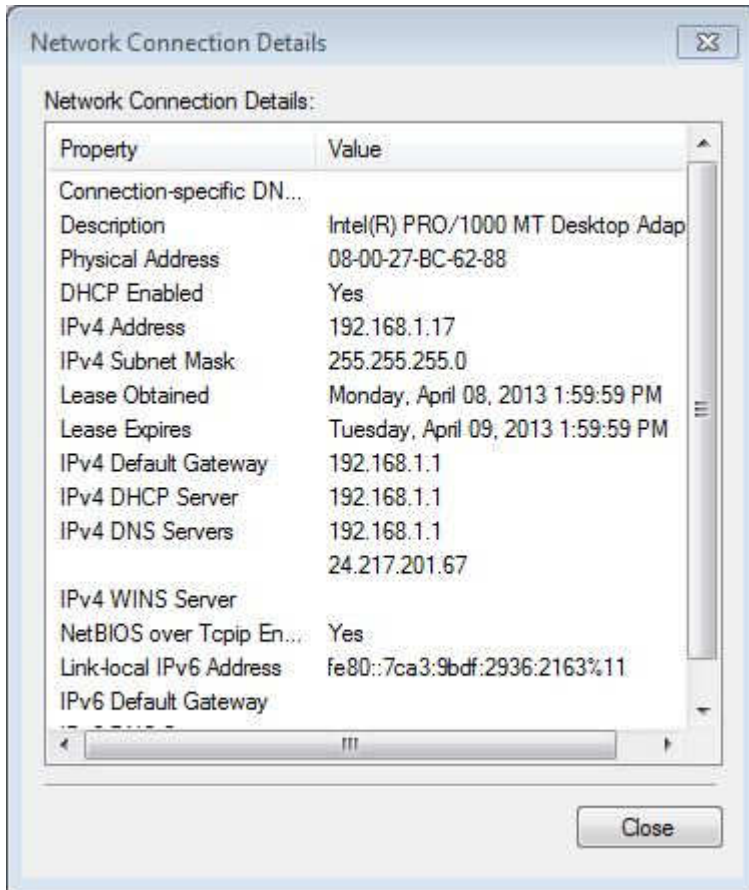
When your network acts up, the first issue you must resolve is whether this is your problem or belongs to your Internet Service Provider (ISP). If it's yours and you have an ISP technician come to your house, you'll pay a non-trivial service charge. Conversely, if it's your ISP's problem, you don't want to spend time chasing non-existent problems and perhaps replacing perfectly good network components.

Perform some preventive maintenance. This is your most important step, and it consists of recording the network connection information. If you have a router, download its manual from the manufacturer's Web site, and print it. Log into the router, access the screen that shows the Internet connection information, either record the parameters or print a screen-shot. The screen-shot below shows an example.

The screenshot displays the ASUS RT-N16 router's web management interface. The top navigation bar includes the ASUS logo, the model number RT-N16, and system information: Time: 14:27:42, SSID: louise, and Firmware Version: 1.0.2.3. There are buttons for Language (set to English), Logout, and Reboot. The left sidebar contains a menu with options like Network Map, UPnP Media Server, AiDisk, EzQoS Bandwidth Management, and Advanced Setting. The main content area is titled 'Internet Connection' and has sub-tabs for QoS, Port Trigger, Virtual Server, DMZ, and DDNS. The 'WAN - Internet Connection' section is active, showing instructions and configuration fields. The WAN Connection Type is set to 'Dynamic IP'. The 'WAN IP Setting' section has 'Get the WAN IP automatically?' set to 'Yes', with fields for IP Address, Subnet Mask, and Default Gateway. The 'WAN DNS Setting' section has 'Connect to DNS Server automatically?' set to 'Yes', with fields for DNS Server1 and DNS Server2.

In this case, all the parameters are the defaults and are restored if you press the router's reset button. (Don't do this if you don't have to, as you will have to enter your Wi-Fi name and password.) Most ISPs are set up so that home customers can use their router default settings, but this is not true for commercial customers. If you maintain a business network, be careful to examine all the set-up pages and record everything. Repeat this for any other routers, Wireless Access Points (WAPs), and switches on your network. If you have no router, record the same information from the Network Manager of the PC connected to the ISP's Wide Area Network (WAN) modem. For Windows 7, click the Windows button,

type "net", and select the *Network Sharing Center*. Select *Local Area Connection* and click the *Details* button. The next screen-shot is for a PC connected to the ISP's WAN modem through a router.



If your network does include a router, you should record this information for at least one of your PCs and keep it with the other material. Finally, power on all the computers in your network and use Zenmap (discussed in my July article, available at www.bcug.com) to record your internal network connections. (Since all you need is the connection information, a ping scan is sufficient.) Put all this material into a folder and save it someplace where you can find it.

If a problem develops, you'll do one or more of the following, depending on the symptoms.

Check the PC's network connection. If the Ethernet cable is disconnected or if you lose the wireless signal, there will usually be a notice to that effect on your desktop. To be sure, move the pointer over the network icon, although some operating systems require that you make a left- or right-click on it. These of course are your problems. Correct them before you try to continue.

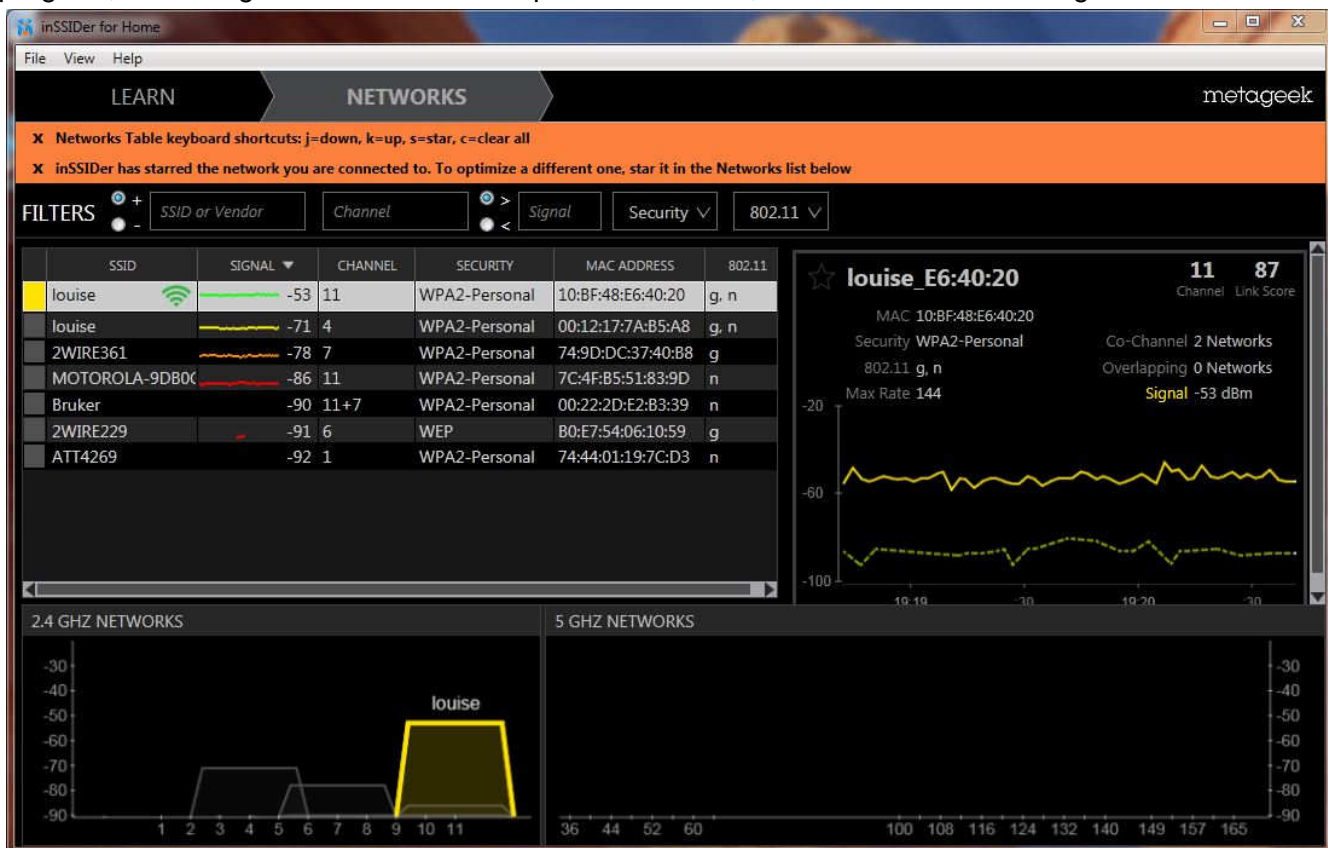
Reset the ISP's modem and your router. If every computer in your network loses Internet access, check whether a transient problem on the ISP's network has confused the WAN modem. In my experience, this is by far the most common Internet access problem. Unplug the power cord from it and, if you have one, from your router. (It would be prudent to tag these cords before you unplug them to be sure you plug them back into the right box. Otherwise, you may find yourself down among the dust-bunnies trying to decide which wall-wart belongs to the modem.) Wait about half a minute, and then restore power to the WAN modem. After a minute or so, the indicator lamps will settle down, and when they do, restore power to your router. If this doesn't help, your ISP may be experiencing a longer outage. Find something else to do for an hour or so, and give their technicians a chance to restore service.

Connect a PC directly to the ISP's modem. If the above doesn't help, consult your network records and connect a PC directly to the ISP's WAN modem. If you normally connect with a router, the PC should be

set up the same way the router was. If you can now access the Internet, the problem is in your home network; if you can't, it's time to call the ISP's help line.

Test the local network. Reconnect the network and boot all the computers on it. As each one comes up, check that it reports a normal network connection, either wired or wireless as appropriate. Probe the network with Zenmap, or a similar tool, and check the results with your records. The IP addresses of each computer will most likely be different, but they should all be present. If Zenmap shows no network, suspect the PC running Zenmap or the router or switch to which it's connected. If just one PC is missing, its connection is a problem. This could be a disconnected cable, a malfunctioning network or Wi-Fi card, or an incorrect configuration. Pull the entire length of the cable out where you can see it and look at it closely. Most Ethernet cables have flimsy plastic locking tabs, and these are easily broken. Unless you have a crimping tool to replace connectors, the only reliable repair is to replace the problem cable. Check the network configuration against the records you took above.

Conduct a Wi-Fi survey. If you lose Wi-Fi connectivity, you must check that. All operating systems have wireless managers that display the available wireless signals and a crude estimate of their signal strengths. If you can see your signal, and it is the strongest one, you should be able to establish a circuit. If you are getting continuous requests for a password, check that your PC hasn't locked onto a neighbor's encrypted signal. If the PC is a laptop, move it near the wireless access point, and try to establish a link there, but this isn't practical with a desktop. Free Wi-Fi analysis software is available for all platforms, and the screen-shot below shows one of these, *inSSIDer for Home*, available for Windows, Android, and the Mac at <http://www.metageek.net/products/inssider/>. Please note that Microsoft has **not** approved this program, but Metageek has other similar products for sale, so I think the risk is not great.



Our own Wi-Fi has the name or Service Set Identifier (SSID) louise, and we have two wireless access points, one operating on channel 11 and the other on channel 4. Although there is another channel-11 signal, it is 33 dB lower. (That is, it's power is 1/2000 that of louise. At the location where I made this measurement, the power of channel-4 louise is adequate, but this isn't true throughout the house, which is why we added the second WAP. (Some of the signal powers in the list are below -90 dBm, and hence

don't appear on the plot.) As the plot suggests, wifi signals spread two channels above and below their assigned channel, so moving your signal by just one channel number may not change anything. With this information, you can pick a good channel, and perhaps reduce the interference to your signal. Other possible solutions are a directional antenna, a second WAP (or perhaps a better location for the present one), or running a cable. In the example here, there are no 5-GHz signals, so that too offers a possibility.

Check Internet speed. If you can connect to the Internet but it seems slow, use your browser to search for "internet speed test". You will find many sites; www.speedtest.net seems to be good. Our own ISP's speed varies greatly with the time of day, sometimes by a factor of 1000 or more. (Tonight, it's 41 Mbits/s download and a tenth of that for uploads. You will seldom approach these in actual use, since the limiting factor is usually the site with which you're communicating.) The most effective solution to this rush-hour traffic problem is to find something else to do for a few hours.

Again, your most important diagnostic tool is preparation. It's difficult to repair an ailing network if you don't know how it operates when it's healthy. You should download the test software now and become familiar with it, because once your network chokes, downloading may not be possible, and staring at the terse diagnostics provided by your operating system usually provides few clues about where to begin.

Twitter for Seniors

By Larry McJunkin

The Retired Geek, Technical Tips for the Non-Technical "Over 50" Crowd

<http://retiredgeek.net/> <http://retiredgeek.net/contact-me/>

You've never used Twitter. You say you're too old for Twitter...it's only for kids, and you could care less about reading what Lady Gaga had for lunch today. So obviously, Twitter is not for you. Wrong! If these are your thoughts about Twitter, I can say with authority that Twitter is not what you think.

Twitter does not exist to tell you what a celebrity had for lunch, or what the thoughts are of the singer who was just voted this year's American Idol (though they might tweet this information). Twitter is a handy way to break news, share knowledge, and refer people to longer forms of communication.

Here's some great examples of how I use Twitter. Where we live, in Tellico Village (a golfing and boating community in East Tennessee), the demographic is very much retired and very much over the age of 60, and some of the most important information we receive each day comes via Twitter. Updates from our three golf courses regarding whether carts are on the path or not; what the flag positions are; are any holes under repair; status of last night's storm damage...and the list goes on. The golf course superintendents post these tweets very early in the morning so the hundreds of golfers here know what to expect as they start their day on the links.

Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as tweets. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the followers. That's why information on Twitter is short, to the point and effective.

More than half the people I talk to about Twitter think they have to have a smartphone to use it. Not so! You can access Twitter via Web, Desktop Applications and smartphones. It costs nothing to use and it's just one more social media source, like Facebook, that you won't know how much you needed it until you try it.

Twitter also has a built-in function for you to befriend and track the messages of other users. This is a simple way for you connect with like-minded people outside of your usual circle. A Twitter association can be developed into a long term acquaintance (if you desire).

If you do happen to have some famous folks you like (singers, actors, golfers, etc.), Twitter is a wonderful way to unobtrusively follow what they're up to. One of my personal favorites is Brandt Snedeker, the professional golfer from Nashville. His life is comedy of tweets that make me laugh almost every day. Recently, he's been trying to figure out how to win a war with raccoons and his garbage can...and so far the raccoons are winning!

As an individual, you have a variety of interests that a single newspaper or magazine can't cover. With Twitter you create your own personal newsfeed. You can get small bites information on local events, celebrities, politicians, hobbies or interests, your favorite news sites, etc. Much like you read a newspaper by scanning the headlines, on Twitter you can see short headlines describing an article and you can decide if you want to click on the link to read the rest of the story.

News is published on Twitter the instant it happens and if something big happens you'll likely find out when someone you follow tweets about it. In fact, Twitter became more widely known after a user tweeted a link to a picture of the US Airways plane that successfully landed in the Hudson River.

Unlike traditional media where it is a one-way medium, you can be involved in Twitter. You can re-broadcast (re-tweet) the information you find valuable. You can comment on issues and share your own views (within the 140-character constraint, of course).

You can quickly and directly contact local politicians, celebrities and other people you don't know. You don't have to find out their address and compose a lengthy message, you can instantly let them know your opinion. These are people you will probably never meet in real life but now you can get daily updates on their lives and their interests.

Public figures tend to have hundreds of thousands, if not millions of followers and they may not respond to a tweet, but they often do read their (most important) messages because a 140 character tweet is easier to read quickly than a lengthy e-mail. Celebrities usually have an aide sift through tweets and pass on only the ones they think are worth reading.

You can also use Twitter to quickly inform friends and family about your daily life. You can tweet about things that aren't important enough for an e-mail but something you would mention to your friends if you bumped into them. You can also keep track of what they are up to by following them (if they're on Twitter, of course). You may also connect with other people with similar interests and strike-up an online friendship.

In any event, much like Facebook or Skype, don't be afraid to give Twitter a try. It's free, nothing tracks you or your actions, and you might just find that it's fun! If it isn't for you...that's what the DELETE key is for.

Two Factor Authentication — Proof of Identity

By Phil Sorrentino, Staff Writer, The Computer Club, Inc., Sun City Center, FL
March 2014 issue, The Journal, www.sccccomputerclub.org/, [philsorr \(at\) yahoo.com](mailto:philsorr@yahoo.com)

When you walk up to a teller in a bank and request information about your bank account, the teller may ask you to authenticate yourself by providing a picture form of identification. But if you have been going to this bank for many years and she is familiar with you, she may just give you the information. In truth, your face and her knowledge of you have provided the necessary authentication for her to respond to your requests. Authentication is much easier in the real world than it is in the software and computer-network world.

Authentication is the act of proving one is really who one says he or she is. In the computer world, we all experience this every time we sign on to one of our accounts or websites. Typically we are asked for a

User Name and a Password. The correct User Name and Password combination proves, to the software requesting these items, that we are who we say we are. Of course, we could give our User Name and Password to a friend, something we rarely want to do because then he would be able to authenticate himself as the owner of our account. “Hacking” occurs when someone or some software program attempts to guess your Password after acquiring your User Name: maybe from some public information source. (Remember, User Names are available all over the internet.) This is a form of brute force “hacking” of an account. And unfortunately, there are many other, more sophisticated, ways of hacking into an account.

So, more formally, “Authentication is the act of confirming the truth of an attribute of a datum or entity, which might involve confirming the identity of a person or software program, or ensuring that a product is what it’s packaging and labeling claims to be.”

In other words, Authentication involves verifying the validity of at least one form of identification. As it turns out, practically, there can be three forms of authentication, called factors. Now, two-factor authentication requires the use of two of the three authentication factors. These factors are:

- Something only the user knows (e.g., password, PIN, pattern);
- Something only the user has (e.g., ATM card, email account, mobile phone); and
- Something only the user is (e.g., biometric characteristic, such as a finger print).

(These factors are so important for authentication that they are identified in government documents in the standards and regulations for access to U.S. Federal Government systems.) Some security procedures now require *three-factor authentication*, which involves possession of a password, and a physical token, used in conjunction with biometric data, such as a fingerprint, or a voiceprint, or a retina scan.

Two-factor authentication is not a new concept. When a bank customer visits a local automated teller machine (ATM), one authentication factor is the physical ATM card that the customer slides into the machine (“something the user has”). The second factor is the PIN the customer enters through the keypad (“something the user knows”). Without the corroborating verification of both of these factors, authentication does not succeed. Another example is when you use your credit card for a gasoline purchase and you have to enter your ZIP code to confirm the charge. You must provide a physical factor (something you own), the card, and a knowledge factor (something you know), the ZIP code. These examples show the basic concept of a two-factor authentication system: the combination of something the user knows and something the user has.

“Something only the user knows” is termed a Knowledge factor and is the most common form of authentication used. In this form, the user is required to prove knowledge of a secret in order to authenticate, typically, a password, PIN, or a Pattern. All of us are familiar with the password which is a secret word or string of characters. This is the most commonly used mechanism for authentication. Many two-factor authentication techniques rely on a password as one factor of authentication. A PIN (personal identification number), is a secret series of numbers and is typically used in ATMs. A Pattern is a sequence of things, like lines connecting the dots on the login screen of a cell phone or tablet.

“Something only the user has” is termed a Possession factor. A key to a lock is a good example. With today’s computer systems your email account or your phone or a swipe-card is used as a possession factor.

“Something only the user is” is termed an Inheritance factor. Historically, fingerprints, a biometric method, have been used as the most authoritative method of authentication. Other biometric methods such as retinal scans are possible, but have shown themselves to be easily fooled (spoofed) in practice. Two-factor authentication is sometimes confused with “strong authentication”, but these are fundamentally different processes. Soliciting multiple answers to challenge questions may be considered strong

authentication, but, unless the process also retrieves “something the user has” or “something the user is”, it would not be considered two-factor authentication.

Two-factor authentication seeks to decrease the probability that the requester is presenting false evidence of its identity. The more factors used, the higher the probability that the bearer of the identity evidence is truly that identity. These systems ask for more than just your password. They require both “something you know” (like a password) and “something you have” (like your phone or email account). After you enter your password, you’ll get a second code sent to your phone or email, and only after you enter it will you get into your account. It is a lot more secure than a password only, and helps keep unwanted snoopers out of your accounts.

Many well-known systems employ two-factor authentication. Some of these are: Amazon Web Services, Dropbox, Facebook, Google Accounts, Microsoft/Hotmail, Paypal/eBay, Twitter, and Evernote. The two factor authentication will typically be employed when you are using a different computer, or a computer from a different location, when trying to access one of your accounts.

Most of these two-factor implementations send you a 6 digit code via a text message for you to input when you receive it. This 6 digit code becomes the second factor to be used with the original password. This definitely adds an extra step to your log-in process, and depending on how the account vendor has implemented it, it can be a minor inconvenience or a major annoyance. (And it also depends on your patience and your willingness to spend the extra time to ensure the higher level of security.) But in the long run the use of a two-factor authentication improves the security of your private information, no doubt something we all want.

What is a 'CAPTCHA'?

by Phil Chenevert, member and instructor for Computer Lab Workshops
Cajun Clickers Computer Club, LA, December 2013 issue, Cajun Clickers Computer News
www.clickers.org, [ccnewsletter \(at\) cox.net](mailto:ccnewsletter@cox.net)

Have you ever found yourself grinding your teeth because you can't make out those weird words in something like this? All you want to do is get somewhere on the internet to do something and then, Wham! They hit you with this silliness!

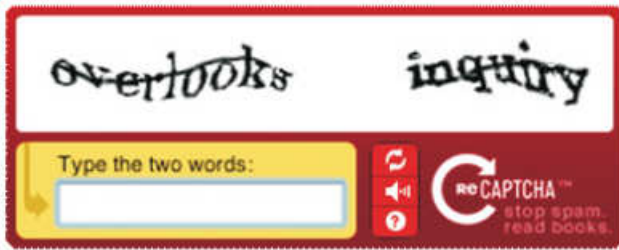
Well, they are not there just to annoy us or have fun at our expense. They are there to save everyone a lot of misery so be patient with them. CAPTCHAs, or Completely Automated Public Turing Tests to Tell Computers and Humans Apart, exist to ensure that user input has not been generated by a computer. These peculiar puzzles are commonly used on the Web to protect registration and comment forms from spam.

To understand the need for CAPTCHAs, we should understand spammers' incentives for creating and using automated input systems. For the sake of simplicity, we'll think of spam as any unwarranted interaction or input on a website, whether malicious or for the benefit of the spammer (and that differs from the purpose of the website). Incentives to spam include:

- Advertising on a massive scale;
- Manipulating online voting systems;
- Destabilizing a critical human equilibrium (i.e. creating an unfair advantage);
- Vandalizing or destroying the integrity of a website;
- Creating unnatural, unethical links to boost search engine rankings;
- Accessing private information;
- Spreading malicious code.

A captcha is a challenge-response test that determines whether a user is human or an automated bot. A typical captcha includes an image of distorted text and a form field for the user to enter the text. Captchas are commonly found at the end of website forms, and must be filled out in order for the form to be submitted. By requiring users to decipher and enter the captcha text, webmasters can prevent automated programs from sending spam or other unwanted data through online forms.

It is estimated that 80% of email is actually spam and captcha's protect us from most of 'em. Be patient, use the 'give me another one' symbol that looks like two arrows, or the little speaker symbol to have it pronounce the word if you continually fail to type it correctly. It is kind of like seatbelts, irritating to put on but for our own safety.



The Tip Corner – March 2014

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Google Tips

Many of us use Google as a search engine. Others use it for mail and many other neat programs, so here are a few tips you might not know about.

Definitions

Type define followed by the word you want the definition for. For example, typing: define mountain would display the definition of that word.

Local search

Go to Google Local and enter the area you want to search and the keyword of the place you want to find. For example, typing: shoe stores would display shoe stores in the area.

Phone number lookup

Enter the area code and the other seven numbers to display the name and address associated with that phone number.

Find weather and movies

Type "weather" or "movies" followed by a zip code or city and state to display current weather conditions or movie theaters in your area. You will get the weather for the next four days. When you type movies followed by the zip code will give you a link for show times for movies in that area.

Track airline flight and packages

Enter the airline and flight number to display the status of an airline flight and its arrival time. For example, typing United 2344 will display the flight information if available.

Google can also give a direct link to package tracking information if you enter a UPS, FedEx or USPS tracking number.

Translate

You can translate text that you type in as well as a web page. I have used this a few times to let renters in my condo know about a meeting. Use the Google Language Tools.

Pages linked to you

Type "link" followed by your URL to see what other web pages are linking to your website or blog.

Find PDF results only

Add fileType: to your search to display results that only match a certain file type. For example, if you wanted to display RTF results you would type for example "Windows short cuts" file type: RTF would show files that were in RTF. Searching for manuals? File Type: PDF would help you along.

Calculator

Use the Google Search engine as a calculator by typing a math problem in the search. For example, typing: 100 + 200 would display results as 300.

Stocks

Just type a stock symbol and get a stock quote.

OK! On to some other tips. This one comes up quite often, so here goes:

Speeding Up Your PC

We all experience times when the computer starts slowing down. Usually, the biggest culprits are the things that sneak into your computer such as spyware, adware and other computer threats that are unwittingly downloaded along with other content while online. It happens to us all.

A good place to start is to clean Your Computer's Windows Registry. Don't try and do it manually.

Use a program that is set up for that. One that many of us use is CCleaner. There is a free version and does a lot more than just the register. Errors, spyware and orphan file pointers build up over time. Some like to clean the registry daily, but I personally only use it about every other week. Go through the settings. For example, you can clean out your cookies, but before you do you can list the ones you want to keep such as cookies to special sites.

– you won't believe the difference that it makes.

CCleaner will also remove temporary files and other files that get added on and slowly clog your system. This program will also empty your Recycle Bin.

I don't know about you, but I collect programs like rocks rolling down the mountain side. It is very easy to download a program that sounds like the answer to a maiden's prayer, but after a month and you still don't use it, scrap it. Another way is to keep the install file on a separate external drive that you can then plug in to install a program you want to use, delete it after a while, but still have the install program.

Another tip. Reduce the number of icons on the windows screen. They do take up resources and can slow the machine down. Rather than just deleting them, you can segregate by type; such as audio/video, utilities, etc, and then put each category in its own folder. I don't know how much this will speed up your computer, but it certainly will clear a lot of clutter.

Defragging your hard drive is another speeder upper, however most newer machines automatically defrag on a periodic basis. But perhaps a couple of times a year go into Applications and do a defrag while you drink a cup of coffee.

Finally, Get rid of a virus

As stated above, not only viruses but Trojans, worms, and other malicious programs can also slow down a computer. Even if you uninstall a program or delete a malicious program sometimes something can remain in the registry, which can also affect the speed. Sometimes malicious software can install itself again after deletion. So:

1. Install a good registry cleaner or maintainer and run it. (CCleaner as mentioned above)
2. Install a good antivirus and perform a full scan. (Install AVG free or AVAST free and Malwarebytes)
3. Install a good fire wall.

Since the way a virus infects a computer is through subterfuge, as the virus is usually hidden in seemingly harmless files, documents or programs, it is imperative for you to remove the virus as soon as you discover that your computer is infected. If the virus is not quickly removed, it can cause incredible damage to your system. Microsoft has a tool (Microsoft Malicious Software Removal Tool) free for Windows users to remove virus threats and to disinfect the computer system.

To find some other possible software that you can use Google Virus removal, or malicious file removal and do some research.

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The Tip Corner

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