BITS AND BYTES

October 2015

http://mcc.apcug.org/

Midland Michigan

President Piper's Ponderings….

Our October General Meeting is titled Managing Personal Risk by Joe Lykowski. Joe assures me that we will all learn something new from his presentation. On a related note, PBS ran a 53 minute show titled Cyberwar Threat on Oct 14, 2015. You can watch the show at this link. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/military/cyberwar-threat.html. Blackhat.com (http://www.blackhat.com/) is another security site that informs us what is happening on a global basis.

Carol Picard will tell us about all her gadgets in November. I am looking forward to getting unbiased reviews on some cool items I might want to buy. Think about bringing your own gadgets to this meeting, especially any of the "wearables" that are so popular.

The scariest thing this Halloween season, to me, is the constant fears I hear expressed by my friends of some spam or phishing offer that has shown up on their computer. I hope your response to similar inquiries has always been: "Ignore it, don't respond, and run your anti-virus, anti-spam software if that makes you sleep better. Never pay someone to "fix" this imaginary threat."

The Club will be addressing our annual issue of reproduction, better known as election of officers. Please consider helping us "procreate" for another year by becoming an officer.

Bring your questions and problems so we can share the solutions. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself."

See you Wednesday, October 28 at our General Meeting.

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

GENERAL CLUB MEETING
Midland Community Center, 2001 George St., Midland MI
Room K111, Barstow Shipps Wing

Wednesday, October 28, 2015
7:00 P.M.
Topic: Managing Personal Risk
presented by Joe Lykowski

2015 BOARD MEMBERS

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

PUBLICITY
Al Adams   aladams12@yahoo.com

Board Meeting
First Thursday of the month
No Board meeting in November
7:00 PM
Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church,
5501 Jefferson Ave., Midland MI

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

http://tinyurl.com/q632rl9
Sperling's List Builder allows you to generate list of states, counties, or cities based on a number of criteria (population, air quality, commute time, etc.). With over 60 different criteria available, you should be able to generate a list of potential places that might meet your needs, if you are thinking about moving.

http://foodinjars.com/
Do you can food (at least some of it)? If you don't, you have probably forgotten how good home canned food tastes compared to the food found in supermarkets. Learn the proper techniques for doing your own home canning.

http://www.avam.org/
Learn about "visionary arts" from the American Visionary Art Museum.

http://tinyurl.com/kkskte5
If you've never been to London take a look at this 320 gigapixel panoramic view of the city.

http://tinyurl.com/kc4tk4l
This article help you see everything that Google Search knows about you from your searches and also shows you how to delete that information.

Membership Enrollment Form

NAME _____   PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____   ZIP _____

EMAIL ADDRESS _____

Membership dues   FAMILY ($20)   STUDENT ($15)   New Member ____   Renewal ____

Please fill out the above form and mail it along with payment of check or money order to :

MIDLAND COMPUTER CLUB   **Attn: Membership Chairman**
   1816 Bauss Ct
   Midland, MI 48642-4023

You may also pay for membership at a regular club meeting

Tips, Tricks & Techniques (contributed by Carol Picard)
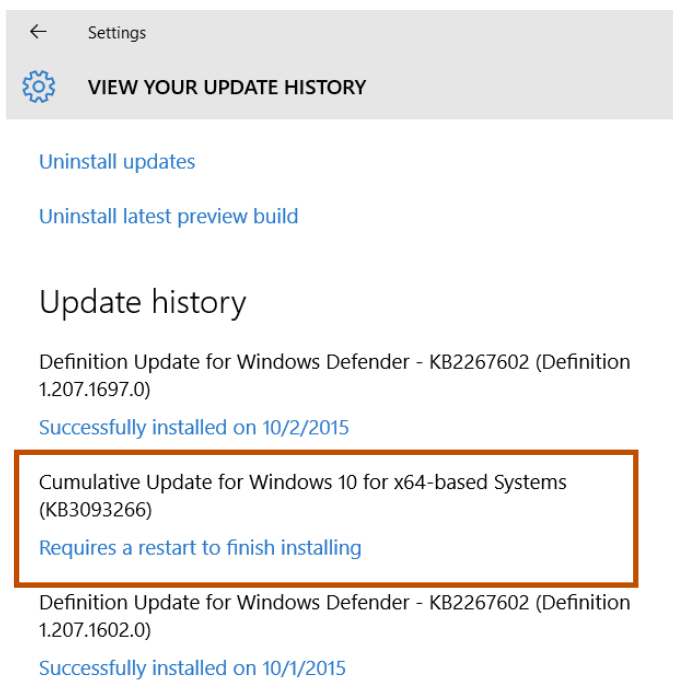
Windows 10

System Restore is a feature that has been in several versions of Windows and can be used to recover the system to a previous time/date in case of a bad install, bad driver, and sometimes even to get rid of spyware. In Windows 10 it has been renamed **System Protection**, although you can still find it by searching for System Restore. System Protection may be turned off in Windows 10. To turn it on, search for either System Restore or System Protection, or, through Control Panel > System and Security > System > System Protection. You will see a list of drives on your system with an indication whether System Protection is off or on. You don't need to turn system protection on for Recovery Partition but should turn it on for the C:\ drive and any drive partitions you created on the primary drive, as well as any other hard drives installed on the computer. To turn System Protection on, single click the drive letter to select it, single click Configure, and click in the circle to the left of "Turn on system protection". It should automatically set aside 10% of the drive space for restore points, but, if it doesn't, or if you want a different amount of space allocated, move the slider to the appropriate percentage. Click *Okay*. If it doesn't create an initial restore point, you can manually create one by single clicking on *Create.*

Windows Updates Requiring Restart
A feature introduced in Windows 8, which is also in Windows 10, is called Fast Startup. When the computer is shut down, instead of shutting down completely, it goes into deep hibernation mode so it starts up faster. One of the impacts of this feature is that Windows updates that require a restart will not be installed when you chose the option to *Shut Down* the computer.

An advantage of having Fast startup enabled is that when shutting down the computer, you won't get the "Windows is installing updates. Do not turn off your computer" notification. This often seemed to happen when I was shutting down the computer to take it somewhere and had to wait for it to finish shutting down, knowing when the computer was restarted, would also have to wait while the update process completed.

If you view update history, you may see that not all updates have been installed. You can manually restart the computer to install the updates. Expect that, at some point, if there are updates that require a restart, Windows will nag you to restart.
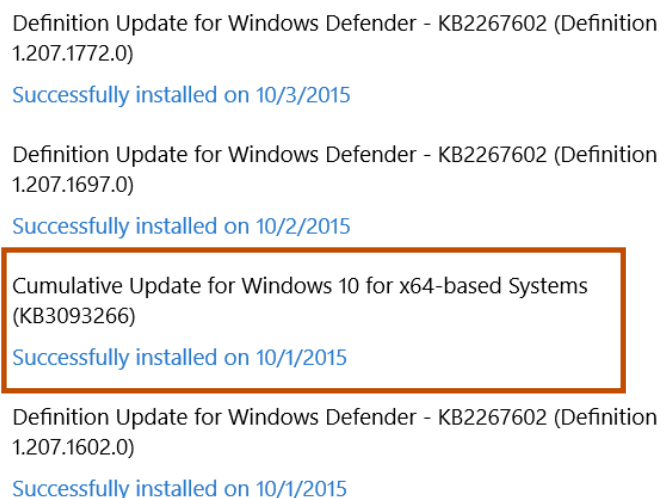

Restart Needed   After Restart

If there is a restart pending, Windows should schedule it for a time when your computer is idle, but this might also be a time when the computer would normally be turned off. You can change the scheduled time, or chose to restart immediately (*Restart now)* by going to Settings > Update & Security > Windows Update. The section "A restart has been scheduled" is only displayed when restart is needed.
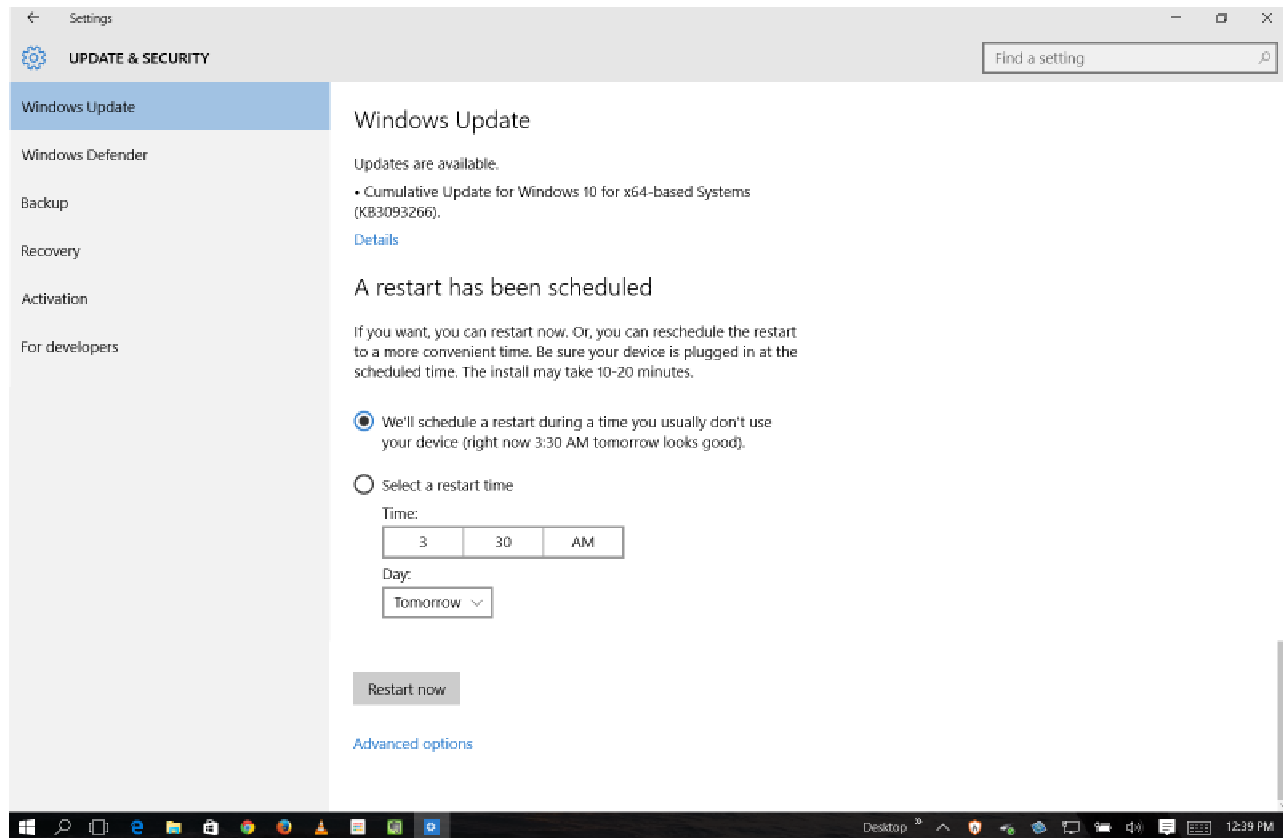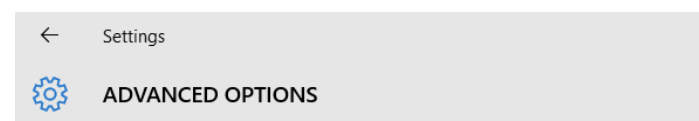
Fast Startup can be disabled through Settings > System > Power and Sleep > Additional power settings > Choose what the power buttons do. Scroll to Shutdown Settings. Click in the box to the left of "Turn on fast startup" to remove the checkmark. If the options are grayed out, scroll up and click Change settings that are currently unavailable. Setting can also be changed through Control Panel > System and Security > Power Options > Choose what the power buttons do. Scroll to Shutdown Settings.

Another option is to change Windows Updates from "Automatic" to "Notify to schedule restart".

This setting can be changed through Settings > Update and Security > Windows Update > Advanced Options.

I selected this setting and am waiting to see how it works and expect there will be some notification when a restart has been scheduled and options provided to schedule a time for the restart.

Logging into Windows Store from local account
I prefer to use a local account with Windows 10 but installing or purchasing apps from the Microsoft Store requires signing in with a Microsoft Account. When you first sign in to the Store, the default process will change your account from a local account to a Microsoft account, and you will no longer be able to log in to your computer with your local account username/password but will have to use your Microsoft Account.

The following website offers a quick summary of how to log into the Store without converting your local account to a Microsoft Account.

http://lifehacker.com/install-windows-10-store-apps-without-switching-to-a-mi-1723075610

This website provides detailed screenshots of the procedure. (There are a lot of links and ads on this page but it is not necessary to click on any of them to read the entire article.)

http://www.intowindows.com/how-to-install-store-apps-without-switching-to-microsoft-account-in-windows-10/

Switching from local account to Microsoft account or Microsoft account to local account
The following websites have instructions for switching between local account and Microsoft account. I did this successfully in Windows 8.1. In Windows 10 the switch from local account to Microsoft account appeared to go okay. When I tried to switch the account back to local account, after shutting down and restarting the computer, several apps were corrupt, primarily built-in apps, e.g., Store, Mail, Calendar, GroveMusic. There were some issues in Windows 10 causing corruption with built-in apps so that might have been a factor. If you want to try this, recommend creating a new account to experiment with. If you have need to do this on an account you use regularly, make sure to back up your data. Since I was working on a secondary computer, I deleted the account and added a new local account and everything works. On Windows 8.1 there was a limit to how many times you could switch from one to the other, but doesn't indicate a limit in Windows 10.

Switch to local account from Microsoft account
http://www.tenforums.com/tutorials/5374-local-account-switch-windows-10-a.html

Switch to Microsoft account from local account
http://www.tenforums.com/tutorials/5375-microsoft-account-switch-windows-10-a.html

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ARTICLE INDEX

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Playlists – Tips on how to build one, or many

By Phil Sorrentino, Member of The Computer Club, Florida
September 2014, http://scccomputerclub.org   Philsorr.wordpress.com   philsorr (at) yahoo.com

Playlists are pretty basic. They are just a group of the tunes that you would like to listen to, in a sequenced list. (Yes, I know you can check "shuffle" and get them played in a random sequence.) And, the mechanics of creating the playlist are pretty straightforward because the music player guides you through the process; and after all, it is just a list of tune titles. The real difficulty, in my experience, has been to decide what to include in a particular playlist. Here is where a well-organized music collection really helps. But how many of us have a really well organized music collection? Well, maybe there are more of you than I thought; but there is still the problem of remembering titles, and in my case, remembering the artist. It is not much of a problem for the very well-known titles and/or artists like the Beatles, Simon & Garfunkle, Frank Sinatra, Chicago, or Neil Diamond, but how about the tune "Always something there to remind me", by… Do you remember the group? It was "Naked Eyes". Well, I guess you have a better memory than I thought. But for those of you who sometimes have a lapse of memory, here are a few things to do to help the memory situation.

The first tool you need a memory jogger. I have found that music playing on the radio is a good memory jogger, so you have to know of a station that plays the type of music you enjoy. (Alternately, a friend might be a good memory jogger, but then, they may also share your problem.) It would be nice to have your memory jogged while you are sitting right in front of your computer where you could immediately research the tune, but it seems that most of the time, when you hear a song you want to put on a playlist, you are in the car. So for this situation, you need the ability to record the title and/or artist if (by some stroke of luck) you remember them while hearing the tune. But since you may not remember the title or artist, the next best thing is the station you were listening to, and the time you heard the tune. The time will be used with the second tool.

The second tool is the radio station's website. Many stations will refer to their website in between commercials, and it is usually their call letters, dot com. The page on the website that you will want will typically be called something like "Last Song Played", or "Recent Tracks". This page will usually give a listing of the songs that were played at a particular time on a particular day. Some may only have a simple music list indexed by time, but some have fairly elaborate lists with navigation capabilities, and even a minimal archive, like what was played yesterday. So now with the memory jogger and the ability to get the tune's name and artist, all you need is the MP3 file for that tune. If it is in your music collection, you are ready to go to the player and put the tune into the playlist. If you don't own the tune, you can typically purchase it from iTunes ("iTunes songs are available at one of three price points. In the U.S. the pricing is 0.69 USD, 0.99 USD, or 1.29 USD each. Other countries have similar song price points."), or you can still buy a CD with the tune on it, and about fifteen or so other tunes (some you might like and some, not so much). Most music players will accept MP3 music files. iTunes can provide the tune in MP3 format; however, if you buy the CD, you will have to "rip" the tune from the CD. Ripping tunes from CDs that you own is legal, and can be done with Windows Media Player. Ripping a CD typically produces MP3 files for each of the tunes on the CD.

(Music on a CD is typically not used in a music player, because it is formatted as a WAV music file. WAV files are typically 10 times the size of MP3 files. WAV files are perfect replications of the original music, whereas MP3 files are slightly limited. The MP3 files are typically termed "CD quality" but I suspect a very educated ear might be able to hear a difference. However, I know I cannot hear the difference. I spent 10 years riding the New York City subways.)

So now that you have a tune that you want to include in a playlist, which playlist is appropriate? Creating appropriate playlists is even more difficult than deciding on a useful picture folder organization. At least with pictures you can quickly decide on "chronological" or "event" folders. But with music it seems less

obvious. Should you put tunes in a list based on artist, genre, time period, or emotion type (love, happy, sad, lonesome, or uplifting). The emotion playlists can be very effective. Actually, many if not all of these groupings seem good to me and I have used many of them. I have playlists for each artist I enjoy, one for happy times, one for Rock & Roll, one for Pre-Rock & Roll, one for Country, one for Folksongs, one for Fun songs, one for Love songs, one for The Big Band Era, many for Specific Holidays, one for Upbeat songs, and many for Special times. I don't feel you have to limit the number of playlists, and I find that many songs end up in multiple playlists.

Just as an example of this "name that tune" technique, for those of you in the Tampa, FL area, try the radio station WDUV (it says it plays lite favorites), 105.5 on the FM dial. It may or may not play music to your liking, but it will illustrate the technique. Their website is at www.wduv.com and the recently played tunes list is called "Last Songs Played". By the way, you can also stream audio from the website, but that will have to be the subject of a future article.

Tablets for Mobile Computing – New to some; Useful for most

By Phil Sorrentino, Member, The Computer Club, Florida
November 2014, http://scccomputerclub.org   Philsorr.wordpress.com   philsorr (at) yahoo.com

When most of us think about Mobile Computing, we probably think of Laptops. Laptops are relatively light making them fairly portable, and are battery operated, making them just right for mobile computing or computing "on-the-go". Now that Tablets have come on the scene, it appears that they may be ready to take over some of the computing tasks previously done by laptops. Why, you may ask. Well, tablets are lighter than laptops, and they typically have a battery that allows for operation two to three times that of a laptop, usually enough for a full days work. If you are new to the thought of using a tablet for some of your "on-the-go" computing tasks, let's take a look at how a tablet might contribute. It is true, that the tablet does not have a Hard Disk Drive or an Optical Disk Drive, so the computing tasks for a tablet have to be able to be accomplished without these two resources. But, as it turns out, there are quite a few tasks that can easily be done with only the resources of a tablet, for example, checking your email, checking your calendar, Googling something, viewing pictures and videos, reviewing spreadsheets or documents, playing music, checking the weather report, checking your stock portfolio, reading the news, shopping on the internet, sharing comments and pictures on Facebook, and sending a tweet on Twitter. All of these things can easily be accomplished using an Apple iPad, an Android tablet, or a Microsoft Windows 8 tablet.

If you think a tablet might be the way to accomplish some or all of these "computing on the go" tasks, let's look at how to get started with your tablet. All the three aforementioned tablets can do the job, but there are differences and the differences are in the details. Android tablets have over 65% of the market, so I'll use an Android tablet for the details. Tablets, on the surface, are pretty simple devices. There is a screen, and a few basic controls. The first thing to do is to become familiar with these very few controls. Most of them are around the rim of the device. The power On-Off button is used to both turn the power on and off and also to turn off the display when you don't want to drain the battery. With the tablet on, a short press of this button will turn the screen off; a long press (approx. 4 sec.) will allow you to turn the tablet off. If the screen ever goes off when you are using the tablet, just touch the power button and the screen will immediately come back on. The other control is a Volume Up-Down rocker button, used for volume control and sometimes other functions depending on the App that is running. We'll get to Apps in a moment. You might find another button or so, possibly a "back" button, but the tendency is to have fewer hardware buttons and to make do with buttons that show up on the screen; software buttons. Two software buttons will show up on the screen (after the tablet has been turned on), usually at the bottom. These are the Home and the Back buttons. The Home button will bring you back to the home screen you started with, and the Back button will bring you back one step in whatever App you are running. (Yes, we are going to get to Apps.) The Home and back buttons typically look like this:

1. Press and Hold Power Button

2. Press and Hold Voume Down Button

3. Press and Hold Home Button
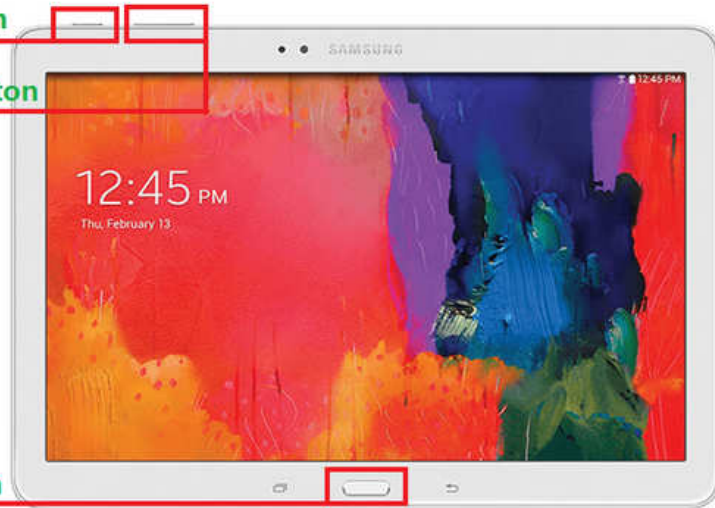
Once you have found all the controls, turn on the device and wait for the home screen. There will probably be 3 or 5 screens available, but typically the one in the center will be the home screen (the screen that comes up on initial power-on). This screen may have only a few or it may have many icons, depending on the manufacturer. Each icon is a short-cut to an App. The term "App", which is short for application, is used for most of the software programs that you will run on your tablet. (Don't complain to me, I'm only the messenger. Apple coined the term and it seems to have stuck.) Actually, you may also see the term "widget". Widgets are like Apps only they show changing data in their Icon. (Think about a "Weather Widget", which constantly shows the temperature and weather outlook for a given location, or a "Finance Widget" that constantly shows the Dow Jones average.) But, most of your interaction with the tablet will be through Apps.

Now, there are a few Icons that are extremely important. The most important icon, in my opinion, is the icon that lets you get to the store to acquire new Apps (most are free but some come at a cost). Most Android tablets will have the Google Play Store icon. Amazon tablets, like the kindle fire HDX, will have the Amazon Store icon (even though they use the Android Operating System). These two different icons take you to two very different locations on the internet. Shown here are the Google Play Store and
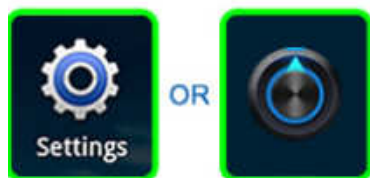

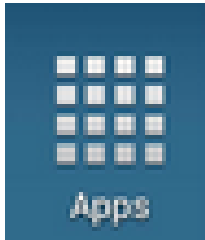Amazon Store Icons:
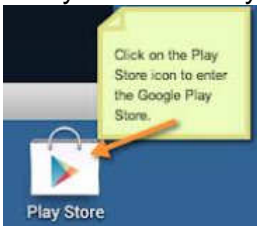
Google Play Store   Amazon Store

Another very important icon is "Settings". The Settings Icon gets you to the settings App which provides information about the tablet and provides controls to set the general operations of the tablet. Settings icons may be different on different tablets, but shown here are two popular Settings icons:

The next most important Icon is the "All Apps" Icon. This Icon will typically be on the home screen, and possibly show up on all screens, and is usually in the upper right corner, or at least somewhere on the right side of the screen. This Icon gets you to the "All Apps" collection. This is where you can find all of the Apps that have been installed on your tablet. Touch this Icon for an alphabetically listed view of all of your apps. There are also a few different "All Apps" Icons. Shown here are a few examples:

Tablets are useful and fun to use, once you have set them up with the Apps that you want to use. The only way to get Apps on to your tablet, beyond the Apps that come with the device, is to download them from the Google (or Amazon) store, (which is somewhere out there on the Internet). On most tablets, the only way to get on to the internet is via Wi-Fi. (A few, more expensive, tablets also have the capability to get on to the internet via the cell phone system. This allows them to get on to the internet wherever their cell provider has coverage.) Without a connection to the internet the tablet would just be an old fashioned Personal Digital Assistant. In order to get on to the Internet we have to set up the Wi-Fi. In order to set up the Wi-Fi we need to get into the Settings. (Now you see why Settings is a very important Icon.) So, find the Settings Icon and touch it. The settings screen is split in two. The left side is for navigation, and the right side expands whatever was selected on the left side. Usually, Wi-Fi is the first entry on the left under "Wireless & Networks". If Wi-Fi is not on, touch the switch and turn it on. With Wi-Fi selected on the left, the possible Wi-Fi networks will be shown on the right. Select the network you plan to use and then provide the password if needed. (If the little icon next to the network name has a lock on or near it, a password will be needed. If there isn't a lock on or near it, the network is open and does not need a password.)

Once you are connected to a network you should see "Connected" under the name of the network you are using. Touch the "Home" software button to get back to the home screen.

Now that you are connected to a network, the internet is your oyster. You can use a browser to generally browse the internet or you can use your Apps to get specific kinds of information from specific websites. One of the first things to do is to go to your store and download something you want or just something for practice. When you get to your store, look for an App that sounds interesting and try to download it. Maybe an email App, or a game like Candy Crush, or Sudoku, it will be good practice and maybe even fun. Basically, touch your "Store" icon, then touch the "Search" icon (usually at the top on the right) and type in the App name. Select the Apps icon and then "Accept" the permissions and watch it install.

Once the App is installed, you can start to take advantage of some of the benefits of having a tablet, like checking your email, or reading the news, on the go. This might just make you feel that your tablet is useful for mobile, on-the-go computing.

Thunderbird Saved My Bacon
Bob Woods, Webmaster, Under the Computer Hood User Group, CA
January 2015 issue, Drive Light, www.uchug.org   webmasters@uchug.org

We recently needed to execute a factory restore to prove one of our touch screen laptop computers had a hardware failure in the touch screen. We knew it had failed, but you've got to jump through all the hoops to convince first-tier warranty repair technicians (sigh). Once the laptop was back from repair, successful I

may add, we needed to reinstall all the applications and redo settings. Along this week long process, we discovered my wife's favorite email client, Incredimail, was no longer a viable solution. Upon trying to download and install the client our antivirus program, ESET, threw a fit. ESET not only found possible malware, a scan with Malware Bytes found two variants of Conduit which we removed. Upon checking the internet we found that the company that produces Incredimail, Perion Network, merged with the company that produces Conduit. The Incredimail client will now install a number of poorly written tracking and hijacking programs. So, what to do?

My wife liked the ease of use that Incredimail afforded. Adding stationary, emoticons and graphics was very simple. Our first attempt at a replacement was to try Microsoft Outlook. It is supposed to have emoticons and stationary. Upon installation and use we found a number of issues. Changing some of the menu font sizes was very challenging (we never did get the left side column right). We were able to set up a toolbar button for some default emoticons, but stationary required a multi-step through menus process. Since I had set up the accounts to use IMAP vice POP, deleting only did a strike through of the email titles. Instead of deleting it required a multi step select and purge to delete. There was also no way to easily work with spam and junk. After a few days my wife was cursing Outlook and I could see I was next in line for suggesting it. Back to the drawing board.

I use Thunderbird for my email client. When my wife looked at my plain vanilla Thunderbird setup she initially didn't like it. I do not bother with themes, stationary or emoticons so I didn't know if Thunderbird would allow them. A quick check on the internet uncovered the fact that Thunderbird does indeed work with them and there are add-on extensions and plugins to handle the extras. So, to ease her transition to Thunderbird, I initially set up all the additional features on my laptop. Along the way I found out a couple of bits of info that helped me.

Font size - To change font size and family globally as well as theme there is an add-on called Theme Font & Size Changer.
    Open Thunderbird
    Click on the three horizontal bars at the upper right to open the Thunderbird Menu
    Click on Add-ons
    In the Search all add-ons box type Fonts
    Click the install button for Theme & Font Size Changer
    There is now a Theme Font Size Changer button at the upper right and if you have the menu bar
        turned on another at the bottom of the drop down menu for Tools

Add Themes - Themes are the colorful banners at the top and bottom of the Thunderbird window and emails you create. This is the same setup as they use in the Firefox browser.
    Open Thunderbird
    Click on the three horizontal bars at the upper right to open the Thunderbird Menu
    Click on Add-ons
    Scroll to the bottom of the Get Add-ons screen
    On the Featured Themes title click on See All
    Select a category
   As you hover the mouse over a theme it will show at the top and bottom of the Thunderbird window.
    Clicking the Add button will set the theme and add it to your Appearance menu.
    To change between already installed themes just enable the one you want

Add Stationery - Thunderbird was not originally set up to use stationery, as such, like Outlook or Outlook Express does. However, it does have templates. A savvy programmer has been kind enough to have created an add-on extension that mimics Outlook Express Stationery. There are excellent step by step instructions for installation and setup at http://thundercloud.net/help/tbird-new.htm. The Thunderbird for stationery add-on at this site is the same one as on the Mozilla site at https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/thunderbird/addon/stationery/. After the stationary add-on is installed and you have followed the instructions for using Cloudeight stationery you can download additional stationery through Cloudeight at

http://thundercloud.net/stationery/. When you get to the download area, some of the stationery is listed for Thunderbird. Others will be listed for Windows Mail or Vista with no mention of Thunderbird. These are in the correct format for Thunderbird. Just do not download the Windows Live Mail version as it is not the correct format for Thunderbird.

Emoticons – Thunderbird comes configured with some basic emoticons built in. When you write an email the emoticon icon will be displayed on the formatting toolbar. The formatting toolbar looks like the following:
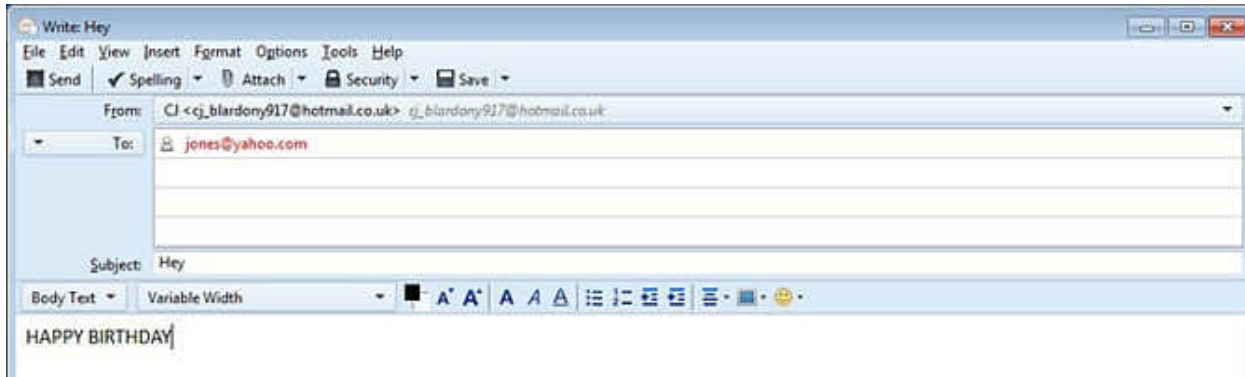
If you do not see the formatting toolbar (has the font size, type, etc.) you can turn it on by clicking on View, Toolbars and Formatting Toolbar. However, the default emoticons are pretty boring. I also found there is an alternate term for emoticons called Smileys. There are many add-ons and ways to add animated emoticons, but the one I settled on is from Smiley Central at http://emoticons.smileycentral.com/outlook-smileys.html. There are hundreds of Smileys built into the free version and they are ad free. The Smileys application is stand alone in that it has its own interface window rather than a button within Thunderbird. All you need to do to add a Smiley is:

> Click to write a new email in Thunderbird.
> Place the cursor in the new email where you want the Smiley.
> If the Smiley window is not already open click the Smiley icon located down in the tool tray at the lower right located next to date and time (you will probably have to click the up arrow to see the icon). To insert the Smiley, browse to the one of your choice and click on it.
> The Smiley will be inserted into the email at the location of the cursor.

Spam and Junk email – Thunderbird has a built in adaptive junk filter. Anything you tag as Junk ends up in the junk filter log. The next time an email arrives from the same source it will be automatically marked as junk. To set the junk filter follow the instructions at:
https://support.mozilla.org/en-US/kb/thunderbird-and-junk-spam-messages#w_general-settings

The document also explains how to tag an email as "junk" or "not junk". I unchecked the box to "mark messages determined to be junk as read". That gives me a count of the number of junk messages that are in the junk folder. It is a good reminder to review and empty it. Also, you can set the junk to automatically delete when tagged as junk. I recommend you initially do not do that. The filter needs to learn your email info so may make a few mistakes at first. If you find a valid email in the junk folder you can mark it as "not junk". That will remove it from the filter list and put it back in your inbox.

There is probably a lot more you will want to know about Thunderbird from time to time. The program is so well documented you will easily find info on how to set up or fix a problem out on the internet. Oh, and, by the way, the Concierge service at Costco was excellent. Everyone we talked to was in country and English speaking. You do need to get past the first tier helpdesk personnel and to the actual repair depot

but all were extremely helpful. At every step, from sending the packing box to receiving the laptop back, they phoned us. They told us when the packing box was sent, when received, when the laptop went onto repair, what they found, how long to get the new part, when the repair was complete and the laptop sent back to us and verified it arrived and we were satisfied the problem was resolved. This was done via second year Costco extended warranty at no cost to us.

Travel Routers
By Dick Maybach, Member, Brookdale Computer Users' Group, NJ
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A travel router is a small, inexpensive wireless router that provides the following functions.
- It connects to a wired Ethernet port and provides secure local wireless service. If your hotel provides it, wired Ethernet service is faster and more secure than wireless service.
- It connects to a wireless network and provides local secure wireless service to several devices. Since the wireless network sees only one device (the router) this will lower your costs if the hotel charges per device. Even if there is no charge, hotels often require that you register each device connected; using the router means you have to do this only once.
- If you use 3G/4G wire area wireless Internet service, the router accepts a 3G/4G USB dongle and provides service to a local secure wireless network.
- It connects to a wireless network to provide local wired Ethernet service.

The photo shows a typical unit, a TP-Link TL-MR3020, which costs less than $40.
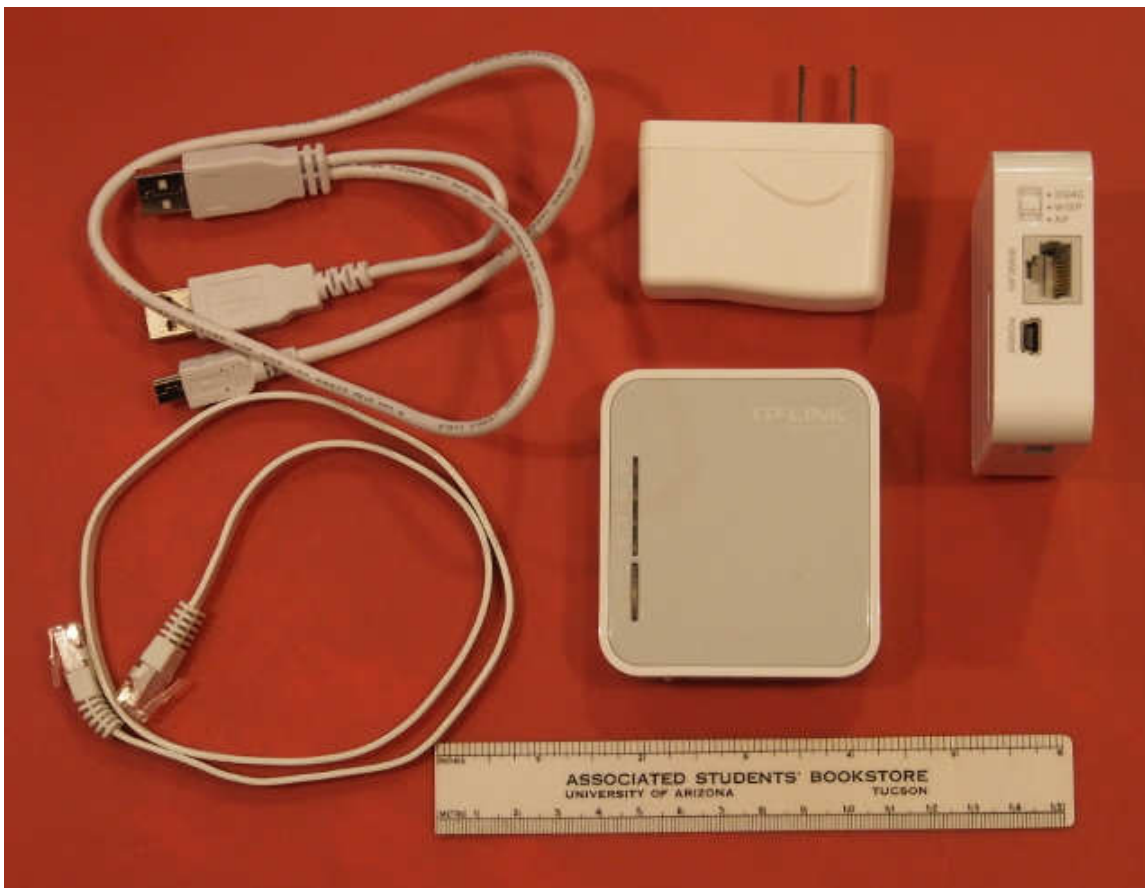
This unit includes the 3 by 3 1/2" router, a power supply, and short Ethernet and USB cables (the latter to power the device). There are two routers in the picture; the one on the right is on its side to show the connections and mode switch. Note that the USB power cable has a Y configuration, which allows you to power the router from two USB connectors on your PC. (Two are needed to supply enough current as not enough is available from just one standard USB port. When using the power supply, one of these will dangle.) The TP-Link power supply accommodates both 110- and 220-volt AC power, which is important for foreign travel. The total weight is just 5.5 ounces, so you can probably find room for it in your suitcase.

The devices small size results in some limitations.
- Its internal antenna and limited radio power limit its wireless range compared to a full-sized router. Expect good performance only over a range of a few meters, plenty for a hotel room but don't expect to access it from poolside.
- This unit has only one Ethernet connector. If it's connected to a wired network, it can provide only wireless service; if it's connected to a wireless network, it can provide service to only one wired device.
- The cables are short; if the AC power receptacle is more than four feet from the wired Ethernet one, you'll need an extension cord.

Different manufacturers provide travel routers with different feature sets: some have two Ethernet connectors; some have none; some combine the power supply and router; some have higher power and external antennas to improve the range; and some have internal batteries. You will have to do some research to get a unit that suits your particular needs.

Modes of Operation

A router connected to a wired Ethernet port and providing local wireless service is operating in wireless access point (AP) mode.


Here, the wired network assigns network addresses to all the devices. Usually, the local wireless network is secured using WPA encryption so only your devices can see the traffic on it, and the router includes a firewall, which further protects you.

A router connected to an external wireless network and providing local wireless (and perhaps wired) service is operating in wireless Internet service provider (WISP) mode.

In the figure the external network has an SSID of "abc" and the local one has "123". Although the network shown has four devices, the external one sees only the router. The local traffic is encrypted, and the router has a firewall; however, all the data on the external network is visible to every device connected to it. If you set the local SSID to be the same as that of the external network and use the same password (which you would never do at a hotel), the router acts as a range extender. But the device's low power and internal antenna will limit its effectiveness here. Finally, in this mode the device can provide wireless access to a PC lacking a working wireless adapter.
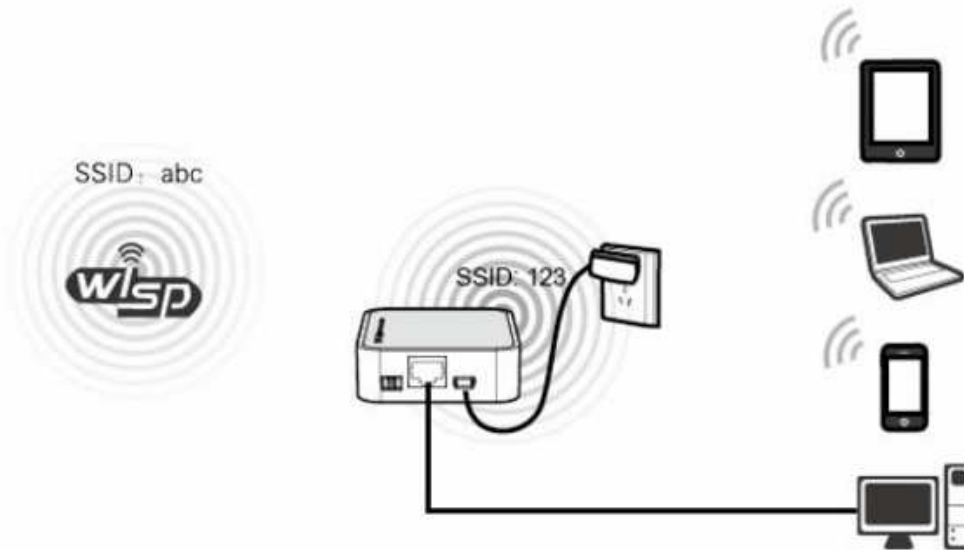
If you subscribe to wide-area 3G/4G wireless service and have a USB dongle for your PC, you can plug the dongle into a travel router to provide such service to several devices, as shown in the figure below.
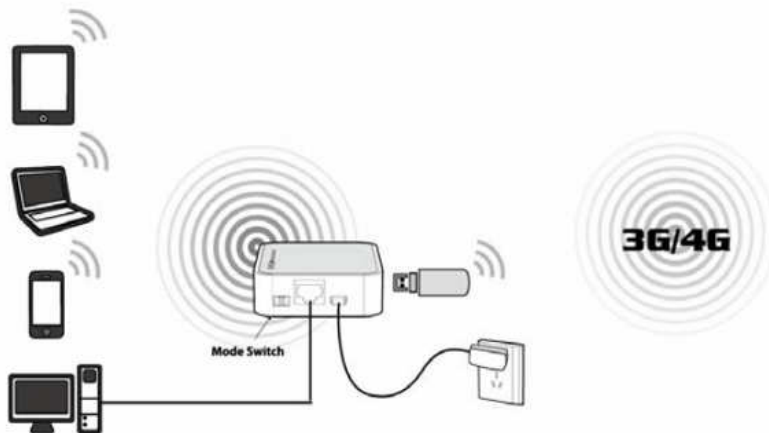

As in WISP mode, you have both local wired and wireless service.

Configuration

Most travel routers are configured by using an Internet browser to access their administration page, usually at http://192.168.0.254 or http://192.168.1.254. A few require special software, at least for the initial set-up. This can be a serious limitation for Linux and OS X users if only a Windows version is available.

You should complete the configuration before you leave home. Expect to spend some time experimenting, especially because the manuals are frequently out of date. You don't want to be stuck in a hotel room, while your family is romping on the beach at Maui, or worse, you don't want to mis-configure your network so that it's not secure. At a minimum, you should change the administrator password, enable encryption of the local wireless network, and configure your devices to work with the router. You should also become familiar with the procedure to set up access to an external wireless network.

The screen-shot shows the administration page for my TP-Link TL-MR3020 router.
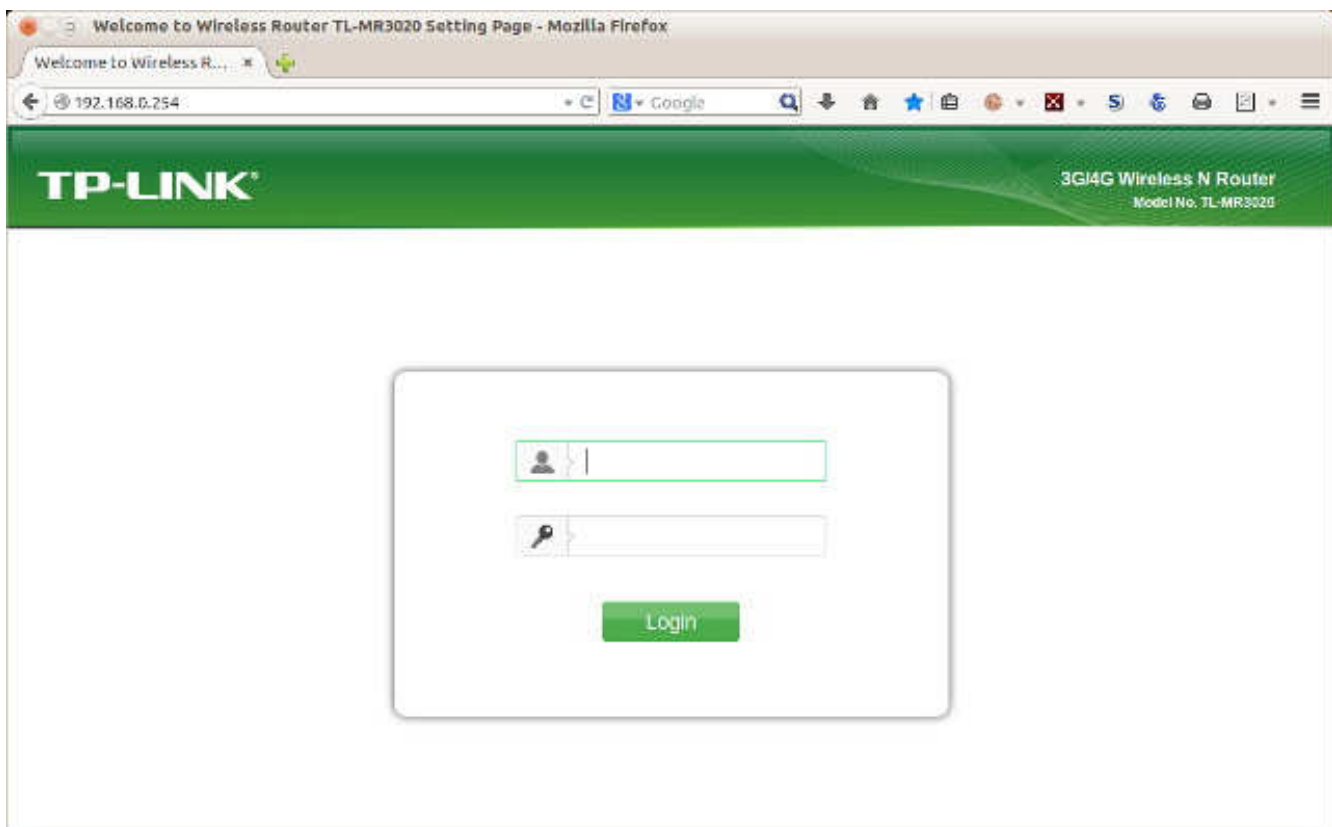
The default user-name is "admin" and the default password is also "admin"; of course, you'll change both before you leave home. Once you log in, you'll see the summary administration screen.
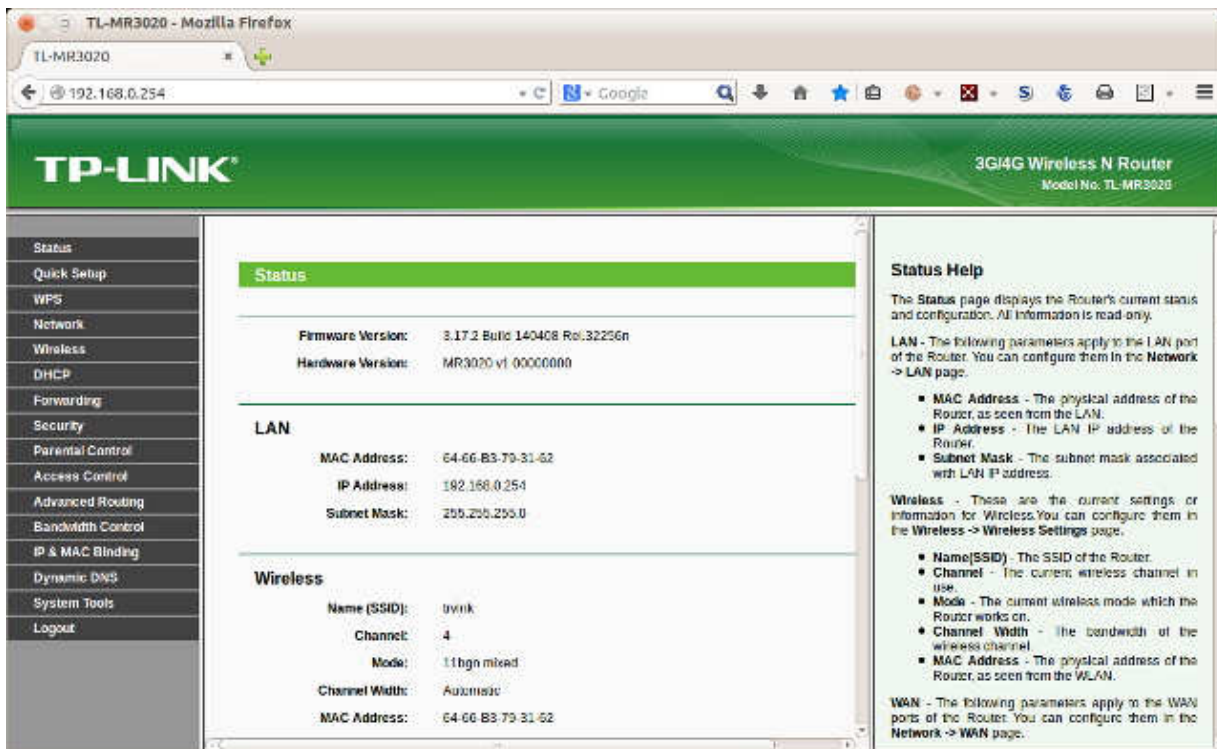
As you can see from the cursor bars, only a portion of the page is visible here. The left panel allows you to navigate among the various pages, and the right one provides help. The equivalent screen for your router probably has a different appearance, but the information will be similar. When you select a menu item in the left panel you will usually see sub-items, as shown in the screen-shot below for a menu accessed from the Wireless item.
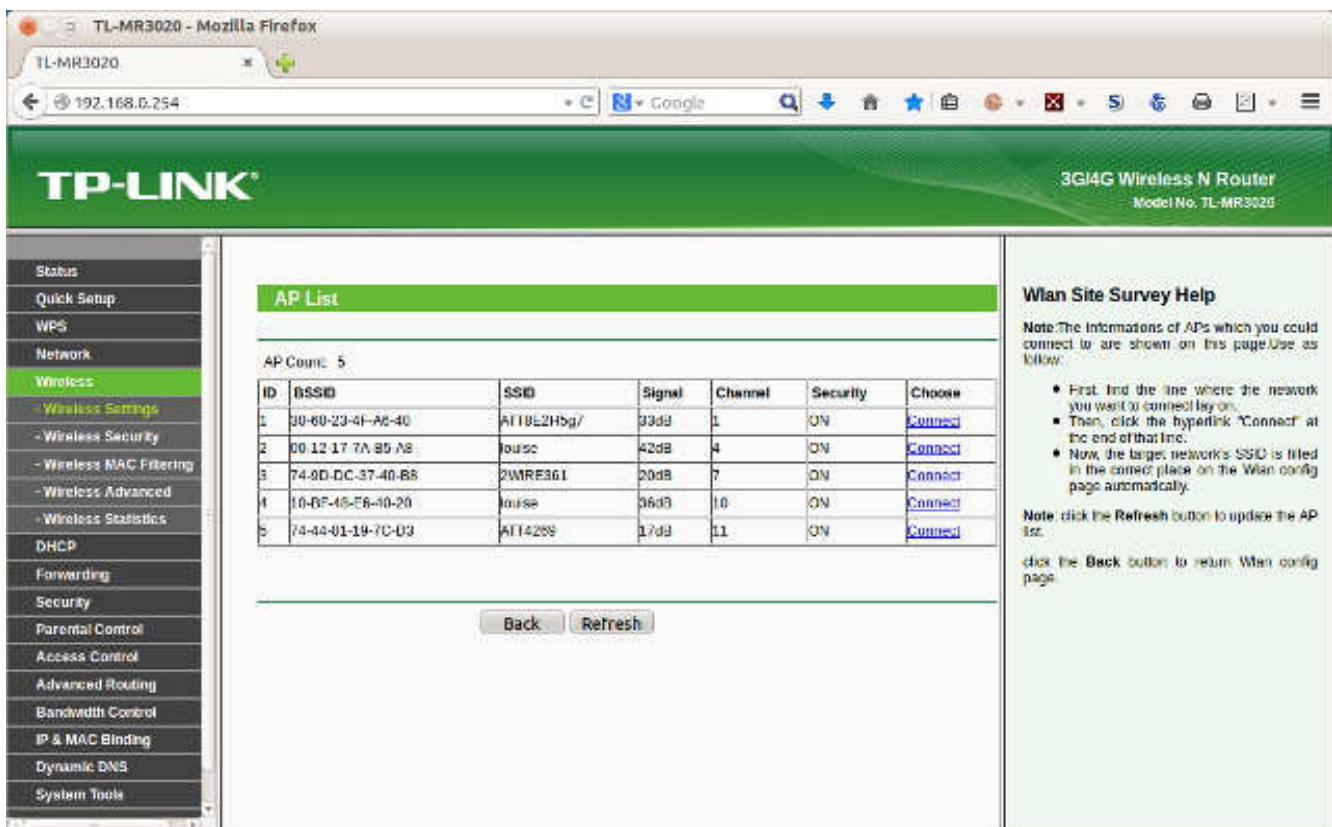
This is a very useful page, as it shows all the available external wireless networks and their signal strengths. (Note that two items have the SSID "louise". These show the two APs in our house, one with a relative power of 42 and the other with 36 dB. The 6 dB difference is equivalent to a factor of four in power.) You would use this page to select the proper external network.

Before you leave home, you should update the router's firmware; on this unit, updating is one of the system tools. In my experience, the firmware supplied with a new unit is seldom the latest version. You depend on the router to provide security, and keeping it up to date is as important as for your anti-malware software, especially since you will often use it in a hostile environment.

Security

When you use a public wireless system, such as that in a hotel, all data packets are visible to everyone using that system. Each packet has an address, and normally, every station will ignore all the packets not addressed to it. However, software is available that captures every packet on the network, and when you use such a network you should behave as though someone is monitoring all your data, both sent and received.

Using a travel router in WISP mode prevents outsiders from seeing your PCs, but they still can access the data the router exchanges with the wireless base station. You should thus use Tor (see the article in the February 2011 Bytes, available at http://www.bcug.com) or a similar secure communication utility. On a wired network, the only station receiving your packets is the one to whom they are addressed; similarly, only you can see the packets addressed to you. Thus, if your hotel provides wired Ethernet service, you should use that. In addition, wired networks almost provide much higher throughput than do wireless ones. Despite the higher security of wired networks, I recommend you use Tor (or something similar) on them as well.

Remember that you are operating in a hostile environment, even though your local wireless network is secure. You should increase the security of your PCs above that when you are operating at home. For example, on a Windows 7 PC, navigate Control Panel > Network and Internet > Network and Sharing Center and select the network you will use when connected to the travel router ("Network" in the screen-shot below) and change this to "Public Network". Linux and OS X users may wish to tighten the settings of their firewalls.