



BITS AND BYTES

The Newsletter of the Midland Computer Club

January 2007

GENERAL CLUB MEETING 7:00 P.M.
 Meets 4th Wednesday of the month at the
 Midland Community Center
 2001 George St., Midland, MI
<http://mcc.apcug.org/>

This month's date: February 28th

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: Bob Miller will present a program on Quicken - home accounting tools.

PROGRAM COORDINATORS
Contact :
 Frank Koenig frankkoenig@charter.net
 Co-Chairman Larry Piper larryP56@chartermi.net

What you missed!
 Frank Koenig talked about wireless network safety for your home network. He talked about the importance of changing the passwords and enabling encryption on your wireless router.

Upcoming Activities
February, Bob Miller will be talking about using Quicken to do your own home accounting. Using an accounting tool like Quicken (or Microsoft Money), you can easily track your income versus expenditures. The tools included may surprise you on how you are really spending your money.
March will have Howard Lewis giving a brief overview of the new Microsoft Office 2007. The user interface and file structures have changed significantly with this new release of Office and, while it has made the learning curve quite steep for some people, it has significantly improved the user friendliness of the applications. The update will give you a glimpse of some of the changes Microsoft has made to Office.

The President's Corner



Recently I was asked to put together a display on "fun things to do on a computer." Being a born geek, I thought everything regarding computers was fun! (Except when I encounter one of those unsolvable problems that seem to crop up about every three minutes.)

Sure, I play games. But that is just to lower my blood pressure. But most people don't really use their computers for playing games (except solitaire). I do a lot of finances on my computer and I use it to keep in touch with the kids. The more I thought I came up with quite a list of things that certain people might think of as fun using a computer. Some of the things include: genealogy, doing floor plans for furniture, landscaping, converting my old LPs into CDs, tracking various hobbies (such as coins, stamps, etc.) and collecting and editing photos. What do you do that is fun on your computer? There are tons of "fun" things for which you can use your computer. Let me know what is on your list.

— Howard Lewis

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

Strange, useful, and useless (in no particular order) Web Sites:

- <http://www.cookingbynumbers.com/> – If you like cooking unique meals, you should try this site. By entering what food you have available, the site recommends some menu options that you might not have thought about. Get cooking and try some new things!
- <http://rk86.com/frolov/calcolle.htm> – For those who have an interest in the historical aspect of the Soviet Union, this site offers a look at some of the pocket calculators that were developed and used in that country.

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MCC OFFICERS

POSITION

President	Howard Lewis	lewis3ha@chartermi.net
Vice Pres.	Bill Tower	stressed@tir.com
Treasurer	Bob Miller	barloshelties@sbcglobal.net
Membership	Gary Ensing	gensing@juno.com
Editor	Jan Ensing	btiger6@juno.com

EMAIL:

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

Special Interest Groups:

CLUB PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Co-Chairman	Frank Koenig	frankkoenig@charter.net
Co-Chairman	Larry Piper	larryP56@chartermi.net

BOARD MEMBER

Mary Branson	molly688@chartermi.net
Robert Hughes	MIDItunez@yahoo.com

INTERNET SIG

Terry Brown	t_bbrown@yahoo.com
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PUBLICITY

Kathy Bohl	kbohl30265@aol.com
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(Continued from page 1) **Websites continued...**

<http://www.pompousasswords.com/> – Now here is a site that should be read by all of those who use certain words when simpler ones will do. These words are called “pompous ass words” and are frequently used by people to try to convey superiority. For some laughs on the usage of the English language, you will want to visit this site.

<http://www.flixxy.com/dilbert-the-knack.htm> – If you are a Dilbert fan, you won't want to miss this video of Dilbert as a child.

unique to you. For instance, you could create a new folder in *All Programs* named Stamp Collecting to hold shortcuts to all of your utility programs that you use to track your stamp collecting. To create a folder of any name you chose, perform the following steps:

Right-click the *Start* menu and click *Explore All Users*.

Open the *Programs* sub-folder.

Create new folders and move existing program folders or shortcut icons into them to sort your programs in a manner that is more meaningful to you.

Now when you click the *Start* menu and select *All Programs*, you'll see your new customized menu, making it much easier to locate your most-used programs.

View other details in Windows Explorer

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Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be 7 p.m., March 13, 2007, at Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church, 5501 Jefferson Ave., Midland.



Tips, Tricks & Techniques

Personalize the All Programs menu

The icons on the *All Programs* menu are shortcuts to your applications. You can rename, move, or even delete them without harming the program. To find your applications, it might make more sense to organize them in a manner that is

Membership Enrollment form

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Membership dues FAMILY (\$20) STUDENT (\$15) NEW Member ____ renewal ____

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

MIDLAND COMPUTER CLUB Attn: membership chairman
P.O. box 132
Midland, MI 48640-0132

you may also pay for membership at a regular club meeting

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If you have your default view in *Windows Explorer* showing Detail (file name, size, type, date modified), you can show many other details about a file. (To display Details use *View/Details*.) Here's how to add additional columns:

1. Right-click a column heading.
2. Click an available detail that you want to display.

The new details column will automatically be appended to the end of the existing columns.

Rearrange Windows Explorer Detail Columns

If you display file Details in your Windows Explorer window, you can rearrange the columns to meet your needs. To accomplish this, simply click a column heading and drag to the position desired. (I.e., you can move the Date Modified column right before the Size by clicking on the Date Modified header and dropping it before the Size column header.

Changing Your Home Page

When you use *Internet Explorer*, it automatically opens up to a page referred to as your *Home Page*. Most installations will default this home page to the MSN web site or the home site of the vendor of your computer. If you visit a particular web site frequently, you may want to make that your Home Page.

To change the home page in *Internet Explorer 6*, navigate to the page you want to use and then choose *Tools/Internet Options*. When the dialog box opens, click the *General* tab (if necessary). Now, under "Home page," click the *Use Current* button and then click *OK*.

If you are using *Internet Explorer 7*, go to the page you want to use, click the down arrow beside *Tools* and click *Internet Options*. Then on the *General tab* click the *Use Current* button.

You can return your home page at any time in Internet Explorer by clicking the icon on the tool bar that resembles a house.

If you are using a dialup Internet connection, you might want to speed up the launching of Internet Explorer by selecting *Use Blank* instead of *Use Current*. This will cause Internet Explorer to start up with a blank page which can be much faster on a dialup connection.

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Moving to Vista – What Not to Do

By Sandy Berger, CompuKISS

<http://www.computkiss.com>

[sandy\(at\)computkiss.com](mailto:sandy(at)computkiss.com)

Microsoft's long-anticipated new operating system, Windows Vista, is finally here. After months of testing I can say that it is a stable program and is more secure than any previous version of Windows. It also has a great new look and some wonderful new features. Just remember that there are always gotchas with a new operating system. Here are a few of the "don'ts" when moving to Vista.

First, five different flavors of Vista are available in the US: Home Basic, Home Premium, Ultimate, Business, and Enterprise. Don't bother with Home Basic. It doesn't have "Aero", the rich new visual interface. It doesn't have the advanced multi-media features for photos, movies, and television. It doesn't even have the cool new chess or mahjong games. All of this is missing, but Microsoft is still selling the Home Basic upgrade for \$99. The full version of Home Basic is \$199. If you buy a new computer with Vista, make sure that you get at least the Home Premium version. You can get a comparison of the different versions of Vista and what they offer at the Microsoft website.

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Another don't....don't try to upgrade without a large hard drive and at least one gigabyte of memory. You can use the Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor to determine if your computer is ready for Vista. Most older computers will come up lacking. So, you may not want to upgrade at all. Although Vista's better security is enticing, if you are happy with your Windows XP machine you may want to keep using it a bit longer because it may be not be economically beneficial to upgrade. The Vista product upgrade can cost several hundred dollars. That plus the cost of extra memory and/or other hardware upgrades may make it wiser to just purchase a new computer with Vista preinstalled.

Don't expect every software program to work with Windows Vista. Intuit, the makers of the popular Quickbooks program have notified their users that no older versions of Quickbooks will run on Vista. Only an upgrade to Quickbooks 2007 will let Quickbooks users run the program on a Vista computer.

Because of the major security changes in Vista, most antivirus programs will also need an update to be able to run on Windows Vista. If you purchase a new computer it may come with a trial subscription to Symantec or McAfee that will get you started but you will have to purchase a new version in the future or move to a free antivirus program. Again upgrading an old computer may be problematic because the old antivirus software will need to be removed before the new version is installed. Experience has taught me that it is often difficult to remove all the various pieces of an existing antivirus program. This is one experience you may want to avoid.

Some programs will also have trouble with Windows Vista new user controls which make it more difficult to make changes to your computer. This bolsters the operating system against hackers, but can confuse some existing programs. Simple changes or work arounds for these types of problems can easily be found on the Web. For instance, I couldn't run Adobe Photoshop CS2 upon installation on my Vista machine, but a few simple changes which I found documented on the Web, solved the problem quite easily.

Also any specially written or high-end software programs may not work with Vista. This will not affect the average user, but if you have any unusual or specialty programs you will want to check out compatibility.

Much of today's current hardware will work with Windows Vista. Of course, you may want to check the manufacturer's website to be sure before you make that assumption. You may need to update a hardware driver or two. If you have older hardware, some may not work with Vista. So check it out before you move to Vista.

Of all the hardware problems, you can expect the most problems with audio equipment. Windows Vista has a new audio stack which means that it handles the audio data structure differently than older versions of Windows. Also this audio change was made quite late in the Vista development process, so audio manufacturers may not have caught up yet. While this will probably not impact the average computer user, if you have any high-end audio equipment, make sure you check our compatibility before you migrate to Vista.

One last don't....don't worry about the 64-bit version of Vista. If you have a 64-bit processor on your new computer like the Intel Core2 Duo or AMD 64-bit processors you may be thinking about trying out the 64-bit version of Vista. Don't do it unless you want to be on the "bleeding" edge of technology. Most hardware does not currently have 64-bit drivers and the 64-bit version of Vista does not support the widely used 32-bit drivers. Also there is currently very little software that actually takes advantage of the 64-bit system. So leave the 64-bit version as something to dream about. It will be more secure and faster, but it is not yet ready for prime time.

However the 32-bit version of Vista is ready for immediate use. The best way to move to Vista is to buy a new computer with Vista preloaded. Just be sure you check out these gotchas before you put your money on the counter.

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THINGS, THINGLETS & THINGASSOS
 Written by S. Jack Lewtschuk, Monterey Bay Users' Group-PC Columnist
www.mbug.org/
[blacklion\(at\)royal.net](mailto:blacklion@royal.net)

WORDS OF WISDOM

If builders built houses the way programmers build computer programs, the first woodpecker to come along would destroy civilization!

KEEPING TRACK OF MULTIPLE PASSWORDS

Passwords are a part of our everyday life: we use them for e-mail, online banking, stock trading, shopping, blogging, etc. For good security, you should have a different password for each website you enter. But how can you remember so many passwords?

A password manager is a great way to consolidate all your passwords without compromising security. Generally, a password manager is a program that stores all of your passwords for you. All of your passwords are kept secure with—you guessed it—a password.

The key advantage to using a password manager is that you only have to remember one password. That's not too bad. Then you can retain unique passwords for each of your various accounts without taxing your memory.

There are several pay programs that work this way. Before buying one, try KeePass (<http://keepass.sourceforge.net/>), a simple, *free* password manager. It can help you organize your passwords and also enter them into log-in forms.

How does KeePass work? After you download and install it, there are several easy steps to setting it up. The first time you open it, you have to create the file that will store your passwords. Click the "New" button at the top left of the window which will prompt you for a "Master Key." Make it one that you can easily remember, but which someone else can't easily guess (e.g., your birth date, your spouse/child's/pet's name), because it's the password you'll use from now on to unlock all your other passwords.

KeePass includes categories for online functions such as e-mail, home banking and others. To put a password into KeePass, select a category and then click the "Add Entry" button. You'll be able to enter a title for the password, which will help you easily identify where the password is used.

Let's take Hotmail as an example—an effective title for a Hotmail password could be simply "Hotmail." You could also enter the web address where the password is required. KeePass automatically fills the password box with a random password. Chances are that it's stronger than the password you already use for Hotmail, but to make it work, you have to log into your account and change it to match KeePass.

If you want to keep things simple, erase the pre-filled box and put in the password that you already use and click "OK". Do the same steps for all of your everyday passwords and take a load off your memory. You can drag and drop passwords directly from KeePass. Click the password you need from KeePass and move it to the blank form on a Web page. The password will appear in the blank.

KeePass keeps your entire password file encrypted. The only way to open or read it is with your master password, so don't lose it!

In addition to Windows, "switch-hitters" can download versions of KeePass for Macintosh, PocketPC, Palm and Linux. You can also take KeePass with you on a thumb drive by copying two files onto your thumb drive. One is the KeePass program (KeePass.exe), and the other is the file containing your passwords (the default is called Database.kdb).

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BACKING UP *OUTLOOK* CONTACTS

Outlook stores all data in a single file called a “.PST file”. This file contains your contacts, e-mail, calendar items and tasks. It’s easy to back up your entire Outlook .PST file—just locate it and copy it as you would any other file. Backing up individual folders within Outlook is also easy, so you can export your entire “Contacts” list. Simply highlight “Contacts” in your Outlook folders list. Then click “File,” and “Import and Export” to open the “Import and Export Wizard.” Select “Export to a file” and click “Next,” to choose from a list of options (I recommend Microsoft Excel as the best one to choose in order to export all your contacts into a nicely ordered spreadsheet). After making your selection, click “Next.” You’ll be given the option again to select the folder you want to export. Highlight it, click “Next,” and specify the name and location where you would like to save your file (use the “Browse” button if needed), click “Next” and then click “Finish.”

You can use the same procedure with other items in the Outlook folder list. This is handy if you only want to export certain parts of your Outlook data file. You can use the files with other programs such as a “Database.” You can also use it to share information with other people. Say you want to share your contacts with friends or coworkers: just export them, and others can import your list into their Outlook program.

To import a file, click “File,” and “Import and Export.” Select “Import from another program or file,” click “Next,” and select the type of file from which you’re importing. In this case, select “Microsoft Excel” and click “Next.” Click “Browse” to locate the file you wish to import, and then select your import options. You may want to allow duplicates, or you may wish to replace duplicates with imported items. You can also specify that duplicates not be imported. Click “Next,” select the destination folder, click “Next” again, and finally, click “Finish.”

NOVICE CORNER

Starting Your Computer in “Safe Mode”

At some point in time you may need to start your computer in “safe mode.” You should print these instructions before continuing as they will not be available after you shut your computer down in step two.

Click “Start,” click “Shut Down,” and then in the drop-down list click “Shut down.” In the shut down window dialog box, click “Restart,” and then click “OK.” When you see the message “Please select the operating system to start” or “Windows” appears on the screen, press the “F8” key several times. Use your arrow keys to highlight the appropriate “safe mode” option, and then press “ENTER.” If you have a dual-boot or multiple-boot system, choose the installation that you need to access using the arrow keys, and then press “ENTER.”

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New Security Products Shown at APCUG Annual Conference

Written by Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, Texas; Radio and TV Show Host [lwilsker\(at\)apcug.net](mailto:lwilsker(at)apcug.net)

WEBSITES:

- <http://www.apcug.net>
- <http://www.pandasoftware.com>
- <http://www.grisoft.com>
- <http://www.trendmicro.com>

I recently had the opportunity to attend the annual meeting and convention of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG) in Las Vegas. Even though I have attended APCUG annual events since 1991, it always amazes me how quickly technology changes, and how those changes are rapidly introduced to us consumers. Every year participants are astounded by what we see, but every year has also demonstrated technologies dwarfing those shown the previous year. The APCUG events were all on topics related to personal computers, including security, applications, operating systems, hardware, CPU, and other technological services and components. Three of the presenters were companies in the computer security software sector.

Grisoft (www.grisoft.com) is a computer security software publisher headquartered in the Czech Republic, and best known in the U.S. for its very popular free version of AVG antivirus software. I was very surprised to learn

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that the more sophisticated and comprehensive commercial versions of AVG are among the most widely used computer security utilities in Europe. AVG has a professional staff of engineers in Europe, but also has sales, and more importantly technical support services, located in the U.S. I have to admit that until I saw the AVG-Grisoft presentation, I was unaware of the degree of sophistication and quality features built in and backing up the AVG products. My opinion of AVG was positively changed, as I had always thought of it as an excellent free antivirus product; now I know it as a technological leader providing enhanced features and functionality in its products. While I will still recommend the free version of AVG antivirus software to those who may not be able to afford commercial software, I would also hope that those who use AVG free version and are satisfied with it would eventually upgrade to the more comprehensive and feature rich commercial products. AVG offers a comprehensive selection of security software ranging from antivirus software to complete security suites. AVG has been certified as among the most effective antivirus products by several independent testing and rating services.

Panda Software (www.pandasoftware.com) is a publisher of computer security software headquartered in Spain, but with a strong American presence. I first became acquainted with Panda several years ago when I purchased a copy of Panda Antivirus at one of the big-box office supply stores. I had read some amazing reviews of it in a computer magazine, so I decided to try it on my Windows 98 computer to replace an expired competing big-named American product. My "98" computer continued to have Panda protect it for the remainder of its lifetime, and Panda never failed me. At APCUG Panda amazed me with its degree of technical sophistication in dealing with the changing threats facing the computing public. According to Panda, over 90,000 new malware threats appeared in 2006, with some individual months in 2006 having as many new threats as in all of 2005. Panda explained how the threat scenario for computer users changed from the old-fashioned viruses intended to damage computer files with random acts of vandalism, to the new threats that are almost all commercially driven. Panda Software offers technology security solutions ranging from its free online "Active Scan", to free-standing antivirus software, to comprehensive security suites complete with antivirus, firewall, anti-spyware, anti-spam, wi-fi protection, and other protective features. Panda has its own proprietary "TruPrevent Technologies" which is designed to protect computers from attack by new and unknown viruses even before the virus signatures can be updated. Most Panda Software packages can be installed on multiple computers under a single license, and should be considered as a very strong and capable competitor to other better known security products on the market.

Trend Micro (www.trendmicro.com) explained the degree and types of security threats facing computer users. Identity theft of various types was discussed as well as the means to detect, protect, and neutralize a wide variety of other computer threats. Threats can come via email, malicious code on websites, from file sharing services, and countless other places. In order to deal with and protect from a wide variety of threats, Trend Micro demonstrated its flagship product Trend Micro Internet Security 2007 with its integral TrendSecure online services. Previously known under the moniker PC-Cillin, Trend Micro Internet Security 2007 provides protection from viruses, spyware, spam, phishing, and other forms of attack. Features also include a "fraud defense" to explicitly help protect credit card and other sensitive personal information from being compromised while online. The 2007 version includes a single license that can be installed on three computers which make it both a qualitative and economical good choice when compared to the other name brand security software titles widely available at retail.

I am a firm believer in good competition and the free enterprise system. As was clearly demonstrated at APCUG and CES, competition drives innovation which in turn provides valuable and tangible benefits to the consumer. We all need antivirus and other flavors of security software on our computers and any of the feisty competitors above can provide a quality product and service at very competitive prices. If more computer users could have seen what those of us at the APCUG event saw, the security "biggies" would have a lot to fear, because these aggressive "little guys" are providing excellence by innovation and superior service and support at a fair price. Those big guys on the block should be looking over their shoulders, as these little guys are growing stronger by capitalizing on the weaknesses of their larger competitors. Security software should not just be purchased based on the familiarity of the name or brand, but on the quality of the services and support offered. Any of the three products mentioned above would be a good choice for virtually all PC users.

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The New, the Best, and the Worst—February 2007
Collected by Pim Borman, Webmaster, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.
<http://swipcug.apcug.org/>
[swipcug\(at\)sigecom.net](mailto:swipcug(at)sigecom.net)

Computer Globalization

University and industrial research laboratories in the United States can be proud of having spawned the computer revolution almost single-handedly. AT&T's Bell Laboratories invented the transistor and developed the Unix operating system that in turn formed the basis of DOS and Linux. The C and C++ programming languages originated at Bell Labs also. The basic configuration of desktop computers originated with the IBM PC which in turn was the seed for the current Intel and Microsoft dominance in desktop computers. The Internet grew out of a collaboration of mostly American researchers, sponsored by universities and government labs. Microsoft's near-monopoly created *de facto* software standards, including the Windows operating system, Web browser, Office programs, and related software. Not surprisingly, even though computers have spread out all over the world, the standards governing their behavior are still strongly American-dominated.

Increasingly, foreign governments are objecting to some of the US-based standards. One bone of contention is ICANN, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, a [California non-profit corporation](#) that manages the assignment of [domain names](#) and [IP addresses on the Internet](#). There is widespread feeling that this task should be taken over by an international committee. Also, *de facto* standards imposed by the dominant MS Windows operating systems and the proprietary nature of its Office software are being challenged with a world-wide move towards Open Source software, including the Linux operating system and notable software such as the OpenOffice suite of office programs.

The latest version of Microsoft Office, version 7, uses a different proprietary format, based on the XML hypertext markup language. It is not only incompatible with earlier MS Word and Excel formats, but also with the internationally established standard Open Document Format, equally based on XML. This is regrettable since much documentation generated since computers came in use is already inaccessible in electronic form because of obsolescence. General acceptance of the Open Document Format is an essential step to avoiding further loss of documentation due to changing technology. There is a growing trend amongst private and governmental organizations to abandon proprietary document formats in favor of international standards. Microsoft may be forced to accept the open Document Format for use with its Office programs sooner or later.

The computer revolution clearly originated in the USA, and we can be proud of that. But now that the technology has spread to the rest of the world, opposition is growing to the continuing domination of American companies and standards. Globalization may have to extend to the acceptance of internationally generated and approved standards.

Random Spam

Have you noticed that a lot of spam lately appears to be totally pointless? Instead of trying to sell pornography, get-rich-quick schemes or ED medication (aka Viagra), the subject lines and content appear to consist of random words and sentences. Its intent is to neutralize spam filters that depend on keywords such as Viagra to identify and intercept spam. Swamping the Web with these decoys makes it harder to distinguish spam carrying messages from random noise. Same trick as used by Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles. Most of these decoys are sent out by zombie computers, personal and institutional computers lacking adequate firewalls and virus protection, that have been hijacked by spammers and are transmitting spam unbeknownst to the owners. Are you sure yours is not one of them?

Free Software

As long as it has been available, I have been using tax preparation software for the annual IRS ritual. Mostly, I have been using the plain version of Tax Cut, because it has been the cheapest and done the job. Since my tax return is much the same from year to year I used to get irked by the roundabout way Tax Cut forces you to prepare your return. Last year Tax Cut sent free copies of its program around to previous users and as inserts in PC Magazines, so I just put up with it again. But this year I haven't seen any free copies and decided to try the free **Tax Act**. It has the reputation of being a solid program, but with less hand holding than Tax Cut and Turbo Tax provide – just what I wanted.

I downloaded the program from www.taxact.com and used it to prepare a provisional return. It worked just as I wanted, straightforward question-and-answer steps, or by directly filling in the forms as preferred. It told me about the tax credit for previously paid federal telephone taxes and otherwise took care of the calculations and printing the forms. It also offered to file electronically without charge, but I am still waiting for some 1099 forms, and the government still hasn't finalized some of the supporting forms for 2006. The only minor downside was that it didn't import my personal data from last year's Tax Cut-prepared return, but that was typed in quickly enough. If you really need more help (from J.K. Lasser) you can download the Deluxe version for 9.95, or for 15.95 if you also want it to do the state return.

If you are interested in protecting your computer with a firewall and anti-virus software you might look at the Comodo Group. They offer a
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completely free firewall program, **Comodo.firewall 2.4** that has received good reviews for effectiveness and ease-of-use. They also have **Comodo.antivirus** that is still in beta, but free for the downloading. Comodo Group is an organization providing commercial security software worldwide, making it likely that they know what they are doing. They provide this free software, as well as some other free security programs, to improve their name recognition. More power to them! Find out more at <http://www.comodo.com/news/>

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Review of Spin It Again

Written by Rod Rakes, APCUG Advisor; President & Editor, Gwinnett SeniorNet PC Users Group, Georgia; Editor & Webmaster, Huntsville PC User Group, Alabama

Convert vinyl records and cassette tapes to MP3's and CD's
<http://www.Acoustica.com>



What is it? Spin It Again by Acoustica is a software program that will make it easy to convert your collection of cassettes, 33's, 45's and even 78's to MP3/WMA/WAV files or directly to CDs. Some folks have even used the program to rip 8-Tracks. Remember those?

Cost? \$34.95 retail, but \$27.96 for User Group members. This 20% discount is available online from the link above. You must use the code "CLUB2007." You will receive a registration code via email. But, you can try it free for three times. (3 albums).

Where do I get it and/or read more? <http://www.Acoustica.com> The program is an 8+ MB download.

System Requirements: If you have a Windows computer with a soundcard you're ready to use the software!

Recommended? YES!

How good is it? REALLY GOOD! First off, I was impressed by the voice instructions when the program starts. There is a Hookup Wizard with photos of how to connect to your amplifier, cassette player or turntable. Songs are automatically divided into files based on the lull between songs. A Level Wizard sets the volume level automatically based on playing a portion of your loudest song in an album.

You can save the files as MP3, OGG, WMA or WAV files. A variety of choices are available to clean up the recordings, e.g., Damaged Record, Damaged Tape, Tape clean with Equalizer, Tape Noise Begone, Warped record, even a No-preamp blues setting, etc. Someone referred to this as a Mikey cereal eater that eats Snap, Crackle and Pop. Accept the defaults and it's very easy work.

I recorded three record albums and two cassette tapes of music using a stereo amplifier, cassette player and turntable. The result was free of any clicks, pops and hiss of the original recordings, at least to my ears. The only "problem" I had was a song by Judy Collins that had long silent passages which fooled the software into thinking there were several songs. But, it was easily fixed with the Merge options. (Be sure to read the tutorial.) I chose to save the songs in MP3 format and gave each a name in the chart before actually hitting the Save/Convert button. You can embed in the files the Artist, Title, Genre, Year and add comments. On the last test I chose to record an album directly to CD using the Spin It Again software. It worked like a charm with no need to make a later re-recording from the MP3's using Nero, Roxio, etc.

I had a priceless cassette tape of family nonsense that had been re-recorded from reel to reel tapes from long ago when my children were small. The volume varied greatly. I placed the cassette tape in a

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small inexpensive hand held player (Walkman type) and connected a cable between the speaker jack and the Line In jack in the back of my computer. This meant I could adjust the sound during the low and high volume sections of the tape by using the player's volume control. That worked satisfactorily since the tape was not perfection in the first place. The recording was even better than the original with little or no hiss and a more consistent volume level! There is an option for auto-leveling the volume for a given song to eliminate distortion on high peaks.

An MP3 file of LaPaloma had a loud click at the 51-second mark that could not be cleaned properly even with the special peak click filtering after manually isolating the click. I was finally able to eliminate the click but each side of the original click had a warble that was worse than the click. The Help file said if this happens, try to make a better recording somehow. Since it was only one click, I would guess there was a spot of something on the vinyl surface or a pin point gouge. You can't make a purse out of a sow's ear, huh?

One of the fun and useful features is the ability to adjust the speed of a recording. I recorded several old 78 RPM records using the 45 RPM speed of my turntable and increased the speed accordingly using the drop-down menu until it sounded normal. I'm trying to find my 78 RPM copy of Roy Acuff's "Sixteen Chickens in a Frying Pan." Everybody needs to hear that.

For the tinkering types out there, many tweaks are available including a change in sampling rates, sensitivity of track detection, recording levels, etc.

Highly recommended. *Rod Rakes*

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Pandora – a Free Music Resource
Written by Sandy Berger, CompuKISS
www.compukiss.com
sandy(at)compukiss.com

The Internet is filled with free resources, but some are better than others. Here is one of the best free music resources on the Web.

Pandora is one of my favorite music websites. Just surf over to www.pandora.com and type in a song or an artist that you like. Pandora analyses your choice and creates a music station with similar-sounding music. It will then play comparable songs that it thinks you will like. You can add more music and/or artists to the station to refine your choices. You can also tell Pandora whether or not you like the song that is playing. It uses your likes and dislikes to refine the songs it chooses. You can create up to 100 different stations with different types of music.

Pandora was created by the Music Genome Project, a group of musicians and music-loving technologists who have broken music into hundreds of music attributes or "genes" such as melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, orchestration, arrangement, lyrics, and harmony. They then use high-tech methodology to analyze the musical qualities of each song and rendition.

The results are uncanny. I created several music stations with different genres that I like and in almost every case I was presented with similar music that I found very pleasing. You can experiment with different combinations. For instance, putting James Taylor and Willie Nelson together gave me an interesting, but likable mix of music.

Pandora is pretty smart. Typing in The Christmas Song and choosing Diana Krall as the artist gave me a whole station of mellow Christmas music which is just what I was looking for. Typing in The Nylons and Take 6 gave me a nice selection of acappella and harmonistic music.

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Pandora also lets you bookmark songs or artists so you can remember what you liked. You can look up more information about artists and songs right on the site. Two clicks will lead you to iTunes or Amazon where you can purchase the music. You can also share your music by emailing your stations to friends.

Pandora is ad-supported so you will see ads for everything from gym shoes to cell service. I found the ads to be unobtrusive, but if you want to get rid of them, you can pay to eliminate them. For \$36, you get 12 months of unlimited use with services exactly the same as the free version, but without the ads.

Since the ads don't bother me, I'll continue to use the free version of Pandora. It's an entertaining website that provides much listening pleasure to keep me company when I am working on the computer.

If you are into music, you may also want to check out two other music resources. MusicIP Mixer and Goombah. Like Pandora, both of these sites provide intriguing music adventures.

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YouTube Revolutionizes the Internet!

Written by Linda Gonse, Editor & Webmaster, Orange Country IBM PC Users' Group, California

Editor(at)orcopug.org

www.ocropug.org

Just when I thought creative ideas were running out for ways to use the Internet, along comes YouTube, www.youtube.com. Its content includes movie and TV clips, music videos, and amateur works — such as video-blogging. The innovative site's popularity is staggering. Almost 20 million visitors browse YouTube each month, according to Nielsen/NetRatings. And, in confirmation of YouTube's originality, Time magazine named it the "Invention of the Year" in 2006.

Although I only discovered YouTube in December 2006, it was founded in February 2005. In about a year and a half, YouTube has been so successful Google sealed the deal to buy it in November 2006 for \$1.65-billion! Not bad for a site that was launched with a video of a co-founder's cat playing with a dangling string!

Now, "Users upload 6500 new videos to the site every day," according to a January 2007 Time magazine article. Many of the videos are taken with home camcorders and cell phones. In fact, videos that showed L.A. police repeatedly punching a suspect on the ground, a college student being tasered, and an outraged comedian yelling disparaging ethnic descriptions, were shown on television news after first being uploaded to YouTube. These homemade videos, which were a sensation on the news, initially prompted me to check out the site.

Incredibly, YouTube viewers watch 100 million videos each day — up from 10 million last year. The most-watched clip, with over 36+ million views is a compilation of head-butt animations inspired by the one Zinedine Zidane administered in the 2006 World Cup soccer game.

YouTube is free. You only need to sign up if you want to leave comments about the videos, rate them, or upload your own.

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