



BITS AND BYTES

The Newsletter of the Midland Computer Club

May 2009

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: May 27th

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: Investing Websites demonstrated by Bill Tower

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The President's Corner

I thought I'd take a few minutes this month to unload one of my biggest pet peeves – that is those who think they have to be continuously connected to the Internet and share the most arcane details of their lives. I got a real kick out of a comic strip in the newspaper on May 6. I don't know if you read *Pickles* in the daily newspaper or not, but I got a big kick out of Opal's comments. Opal says, "You've got bloggers blogging, Googlers googling, and twitters tweeting," and in the next pane, she says, "Those aren't serious journalist. Those are sound effects." There is a time and a place for blogging, googling, and tweeting (need I include cell phones, pdas, e-mail, etc.?). But most of what I see and hear is just that... sound effects. I haven't succumbed (and don't expect to) to the urge to share all of the things that I do (tooth brushing, hair combing, etc.) with my life. I do spend a fair amount of time with e-mail, but that is mostly newsletters keeping me up-to-date on technology. At this point in time, I still don't have a cell phone! When I travel, I don't pull out the laptop at each rest area to check up on the world. The world will do just fine without me. How about you? What are your impressions of technology today?

— Howard Lewis

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



What you missed!

In **April**, Larry Piper gave a very informative presentation on "Free & Open Source Software." During the presentation, Larry gave some very good examples of replacement software for some of the big name commercial packages along with a list of sites where these packages could be downloaded.

Upcoming Activities

The **May** meeting will have Bill Tower giving a presentation on "Investing Websites." He will demonstrate ways to investigate funds and stocks so that you may find the options best suited for you.

June will have Laura Hammel giving a presentation on "Where do I look for news now?" With many newspapers curtailing publication, people are increasingly turning to the Internet as the source of their information. The presentation will cover local, national and international news long with how to find items that satisfy your interest.

There will be no meeting in July, and August will feature our annual club picnic at the Community Center.

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Shadow 4

NewTech Infosystems, Inc.
Review by Howard Lewis

It's been 2-1/2 years since I last reviewed *Shadow* by NewTech Infosystems, Inc. At that time, I reviewed *Shadow* for use on my Windows XP machine and I am still using it on that system to make sure that I don't lose any data. *Shadow 4* has since been released and I am running it on my Windows Vista Ultimate machine and find it to be a very good file backup system.

I was happy when I installed my copy of *Windows Vista Ultimate* and discovered that it had something called "shadow" versions which allows Windows to make backup copies of your user files as necessary. It didn't take me long to discover that this "shadow" versioning only worked with the high-end version of *Windows Vista* and wasn't an option with *Vista Home Premium*. Needless to say it did save me several times when I inadvertently over-wrote an older document when I meant to save the document with a new name. Recently I learned that the *Vista* "shadowing" is not truly dynamic in that it does not save the previous version after each save of a document and it is possible to lose a version that has been saved earlier in the same day.

However, *Shadow 4* from NTI now allows me to keep dynamic backups of my documents so that I can recall a version that I created earlier in the day, but have subsequently over-written. My earlier

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Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be 7 p.m., June 9th, 2009, at Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church, 5501 Jefferson Ave., Midland.

Membership Enrollment form

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

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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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write-up on NTI *Shadow* listed many of the positive virtues of the package: 1 – the data is backed up in “raw” format (i.e., a *Word* document is backed up as a doc file, not some compressed format); 2 – individual files can be restored very easily simply doing a copy; and 3 – it is dynamic in that it backs up your documents each time you save your document. Another feature that I had not tried out at that time of the previous review is the “versioning” feature. I’ve used this feature with *Shadow 4* and have found it very useful as I can now keep two versions (or more) of each of my documents.

I have been very satisfied with *Shadow 4* and have now made it part of my standard recommendations for any Windows system. At \$39.99, *Shadow 4* is a good deal and gives you great confidence that if you overwrite one of your documents, you can recover the original.

Useful, useless and strange (in no particular order)

Web Sites:

<http://whatshouldireadnext.com>

Looking for a good book to read? This site asks for a book that you like and then suggests others that you might find interesting.

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/>

National Geographic has one of the best online jigsaw puzzle games on the Internet. Select a picture from their hundreds of options and time yourself while setting it.

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/yc09tl>

I’m sure you’ve never been frustrated with your computer! If you’ve never been frustrated with your computer, this video is for you.

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/lg4dt>

Here’s a fun mind game that will give you something interesting to do when you are bored. Try to fill all of the blank squares.

www.garden.org

Are you planting a garden this year? Here’s a site with some information you might find useful.

Tips, Tricks & Techniques

Convert A Row To A Column or Vice Versa (Microsoft Excel)

If you have data in a row (or a column) that you want to change to a column (or row), you can manually move the data one item at a time. To speed up the process, you can use the **Paste Special** command.

To accomplish this:

1. Copy the data in the row (or column)
2. Next, right-click in the cell where you wish to data to begin and select *Paste Special*
3. In the **Paste Special** dialog box, click on *Transpose*.

The data will now be pasted into the column beginning with the cell selected. One special note: the column and the row areas cannot overlap. If it does, you will receive an error message.

Quickly Create a Photo Album Using PowerPoint

You can use Microsoft PowerPoint to quickly create a photo album of your digital pictures. To create a photo album:

1. On the **Insert** tab, click *Photo Album*
2. In the **Photo Album** dialog box, click *File/Disk* under the **Insert picture from** section
3. Select the pictures to be included in the photo album
4. When finished, click *Create* to generate the photo album

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From the **Photo Album** dialog box, you can edit the pictures, add captions and customize the picture layout and framing format if desired. When the album is created, it will use the standard Office theme. After it has been created, you can change the theme to any theme you wish.

Import Photos From A Camera Into Photo Gallery (Microsoft Windows Vista)

One of the new features in Microsoft Vista is **Photo Gallery**. This simplifies the organization and tracking of your photos on the computer. To import photos from you camera is very easy:

1. Connect your camera to your computer
2. Turn on the camera
3. Within **Photo Gallery**, click the *File* menu
4. Click *Import from Scanner or Camera*
5. Select your camera from the device list and click the *Import* button

Your photos will now be added to Vista's Photo Gallery.

Dozens of PC Utilities Free for the Taking

Written by Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio Talk Show Host
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WEBSITES:

<http://tinyurl.com/95free-utilities>
<http://openoffice.org>
<http://www.iobit.com>
<http://www.defraggler.com>
<http://www.recuva.com>

I read a lot of online computer magazines. Most of them are American, but some are foreign, including from such diverse places as England, Germany, and Australia. Recently the Australian magazine PCWorld Australia published an article

titled (sic) "95 great free sites and downloads you've probably never heard of" (tinyurl.com/95free-utilities). From the feedback I have received from readers of this column, there is great interest in totally free computer utilities, especially in these pressing economic times.

The article categorizes the free software into 12 categories including productivity software, music utilities, security tools, web enhancers, phone utilities, photo and video managers, social networking, PC performance enhancements, file synchronization, and business applications. In the productivity software category, the first recommendation is one of my personal favorites, OpenOffice. OpenOffice (OpenOffice.org), which was reviewed in this column last year, is a full featured free office suite that can read and write Microsoft Office files such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, as well as many other formats. With its frequent updates and enhancements, OpenOffice would be a wise choice for anyone who wants an office suite with "all the bells and whistles" totally free. The menu hierarchy and appearance are nearly identical to Word, Excel, and other Microsoft Office products providing for a "near zero" learning curve for anyone familiar with Microsoft Office products. Other productivity utilities are displayed including: Flowgram, which can create web-based multimedia presentations; Gubb, which is a personal time manager; [PrimoOnline](#), which helps you create PDFs without software; and "Remember the Milk" which helps you to remember to do anything, and integrates many platforms, including BlackBerry, iPhone, Gmail, and Windows Mobile.

The music utilities category has several programs that I am not familiar with, but appear to be very attractive, and since they are totally free, there is no downside risk in trying them. The one rated as a "BEST BET" by the magazine is Songbird, an open-source downloadable media player that's completely customizable and packed with innovative features. Songbird is both a music player and a Web browser that enables the quick downloading of music. Other utilities listed include "SharePod", which enabled iPod users to change, backup, or share music between iPod users.

The security category includes some utilities that I have written about in the past. The one top rated by PCWorld Australia is the excellent and free Avast Antivirus, which utilizes seven different "shields" to protect the computer from attack from different sources and vectors. Avast is one of the most popular free security utilities with tens of millions of devoted users, and would be a good choice for anyone want-

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ing a free antivirus product that is equal to or superior than many of the expensive commercial competitors. Other free security utilities listed are from “a-squared” (previously discussed in this column); “Attack Trace”, which can detect if a website is under attack; Comodo EasyVPN Home, which allows the user to create a virtual private network (also recently discussed in my column); a firewall, and a pair of excellent anti-spyware utilities. These utilities would all be worthy of consideration as their quality is generally excellent, and often better than their commercial counterparts.

Most of us use our internet browsers directly as they come from the publisher, unaware that there are tweaks that are available to improve our online experience. There are thousands of plug-ins and add-on's for Firefox, and unknown to many there are also many similar improvements for Internet Explorer. These plug-ins listed in the magazine article include a note taker for Firefox, a news reader which is an improvement over the one integrated with Internet Explorer, a FTP (file transfer) utility for Firefox, a nifty utility “Google Preview” that displays thumbnail images of web pages that appear in Google search results, IE7Pro which adds Firefox-like features to IE7, a mapping utility that automatically displays street maps by clicking on an address, and “Video Download Helper” which is a Firefox plug-in that I use to download videos from the major video sites such as YouTube. The 11 browser enhancements listed may add a lot of enjoyment to the web browsing experience.

Being a typical geek, I like to try and tweak the best performance that my computer is capable of delivering. PCWorld Australia editors and I think alike as we have both written about some the same free performance enhancement utilities. At the top of the magazine's list is one of my personal favorites that I use regularly, Advanced System Care Free, available from www.iobit.com. This is a full featured performance utility that has dozens of tools to enhance PC performance, including a registry cleaner, anti-spyware, internet speed-up tools, and many others. I routinely put this program on almost every computer that I use. Just a few weeks ago I wrote about free utilities from Piriform, including a unique defragmentation utility called Defraggler (www.defraggler.com). This utility, which is on my computer, can quickly defragment files, folders, or an entire hard drive. Recuva (www.recuva.com), also from Piriform, is a file recovery utility that can undelete files on hard drives, flash drives, and other forms of media. I have per-

sonally used Recuva to restore some photos accidentally deleted from my digital camera, and it worked fine!

This article can be read online at tinyurl.com/95freeutilities, where dozens more free utilities can be found. The actual URL of the magazine was much longer (138 characters), so I used the free online utility TinyURL (www.tinyurl.com) to create a much smaller URL that would be easier to enter. I hope that the readers of this column will be more aware that there are some fine free programs out there that are worthy of a chance. I suggest that you try some of them.

Panda Introduces Totally New Antivirus Technology – FREE

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WEBSITES:

<http://www.cloudantivirus.com>

Most antivirus software has become bloated and a drag on system performance. One major issue with most antivirus products is the time delay between the detection of a new threat, and the time it takes to push updates to users of the software. Thousands of new viruses and variants appear every day, and it is a major burden on the purveyors of antivirus software to keep their respective products up to date.

Regrettably, many users update their antivirus software daily, which is woefully inadequate, as most publishers of the antivirus software now send out updates several times a day, and in some cases, several times an hour! It often takes hours for updates to be created by the software companies and ready for users to update their software. This still leaves the users' computers unprotected from the newest threats during the lengthy time that it takes for new threats to be detected, analyzed, neutralized, and distributed to the users of the software. An analogy would be reading the printed daily newspaper you may have found in your driveway this morning; it may be today's newspaper, but it is really yesterday's news. That is the same way that antivirus updates work; the updates that you download and install right now, are viruses that were first detected hours ago, leaving your computer vulnerable to those threats during those hours. You may also have no protection from new viruses and other malware that have been detected in the wild, but not yet included in the latest

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updates. In the past, when many new viruses spread slowly, this time lag was not serious, but with the rapidly spreading threats of today, that delay can be deadly in a cyber context. We blissfully traverse the internet safe in the knowledge that our just updated antivirus will protect us from whatever we may come across, but this blissful ignorance may fail to consider the new threats in circulation. Philosophically, if our antivirus and anti-malware software was so good, why do millions of computers that have updated antivirus software still get infected?

Another issue with the bloated antivirus that many of us use is the large amount of system resources consumed by our antivirus software when running, and the degradation of performance that inevitably occurs. Many of us are unaware that the antivirus and anti-malware software that we may be using may be causing a significant slowdown in our computers' ability to process data, which is a frequent cause of degraded computer performance. Some of the more progressive publishers of antivirus software have addressed this predicament by releasing software that is easy on system resources, and does not significantly degrade performance, but these companies are in the minority; most antivirus software currently in use, including several of the most popular titles, are a drag on the system.

Panda Software, a well respected Spanish publisher of excellent quality system security software, recently released a free new product that is claimed to resolve the problems mentioned above. Using the concept of "cloud computing", Panda is now distributing its new product "Cloud Antivirus". In its simplest form, cloud computing takes advantage of the combined knowledge and processing power of large sectors of the internet, where networks synergistically and instantly work together to intelligently solve problems. Panda's Cloud Antivirus claims to capitalize on that power by using Panda's servers in the cloud, and is currently a free download at www.cloudantivirus.com. By utilizing the power of the cloud, Panda claims that new virus and malware signatures can be available to users of Cloud Antivirus in as little as six minutes, closing much of the window of vulnerability from new threats. What makes Panda Cloud Antivirus such an interesting product is that it is very easy on system resources, as all of the work of protecting your computer is done in the cloud, rather than by the CPU in your computer, which does not degrade system performance while providing the maximum in protection. In addition to not degrading performance, it is designed as an "install and forget" product that removes the user from the loop of updates, system configuration, and decisions about threats encountered. Simply stated, Panda Cloud Antivirus can be downloaded and installed, and no further intervention or updates are necessary in order to have comprehensive antivirus and anti-malware protection.

It should be noted that as I type this, the version of Panda Cloud Antivirus that is available for download is described by Panda as a "beta" or pre-release version, but by entering an email address when downloading the software, Panda states that it will provide a free activation key for the final version when released, and that Cloud Antivirus will remain a free product.

Cloud Antivirus works by using a small, resource sparing dashboard on the user's desktop. This dashboard connects your computer to Panda's data center, which tracks anything that may be even slightly suspicious, with Panda's data center stopping the threat before it can become active on the computer. By instantly combining the real-time threat "intelligence" from thousands of computers, Panda can better detect and react to threats than more traditional antivirus software. Panda's CEO Juan Santana says that Panda's cloud, "harnesses the knowledge of Panda's global community of more than 10 million users to automatically identify and classify new malware strains in real-time." In terms of the rapid growth of cyber threats, "PandaLabs detected more malware in 2008 than the previous 17 years combined, representing a major tipping point for both consumers and the antivirus industry as a whole," said Santana.

In addition to being reactive, this intelligence can also be proactive, allowing Panda to predict evolving threats, and be ready to deal with them before they become an active threat. By using the power of the cloud, rather than the power of the user's computer, there is no drag on system resources, while the computer is protected from the latest threats with minimal lag time.

Panda's Cloud Antivirus is a fascinating new technology that holds great promise. It may take a paradigm shift not to download frequent updates, and scan everything opened and run on the computer, which consumes great amounts of processing power and slows the loading and execution of programs and data. If this new technology is proven as reliable as I hope it initially appears to be, Panda may be a bigger threat to its competitors than malware will be to us.

Things That You Can Do With That Flash Drive

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WEBSITES:

<http://portableapps.com>

http://u3.sandisk.com/download/Download_no.asp

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-vista/features/readyboost.aspx>

With the demise of the floppy disk, and the approaching demise of the CD disc for data purposes, the USB flash drive has become the defacto method of saving and transporting files between computers. These small USB drives are known by a variety of monikers, such as flash drive, pen drive, pin drive, and thumb drive. Since their introduction a few years ago, their capacity has increased, and their prices have plunged. They are readily available in the big box stores, discount stores, club stores, and online. The most recent ones I purchased for the holidays were 8 gig size (almost the equivalent of the data stored on 2 standard DVD discs, about a dozen CD discs, or about 5700 floppy disks), and cost under \$15 each. In the after-Christmas sales, some 8 gig flash drives were advertised for \$9 each (after rebate). This amount of non-volatile storage for the price was inconceivable just a few years ago. I thought I was getting a bargain a few years ago when I bought my first flash drive, a 64mb Lexar, for \$49, and now a drive with about 64 times that capacity is about one-fourth the price! I have co-workers and students who wear their flash drives on cords around their necks, where they are referred to as "geek beads".

Most of us use the drive simply for portable storage, the ability to carry files around with us, but in reality these flash drives can do much more than to simply be used for storage. Most of the USB flash drives on the market today comply with the USB 2.0 standard for high speed transfer, while there still are a few inexpensive, low capacity drives that are of the slower USB 1.1 speed standard, or only about 3% of the speed of the USB 2.0 drives. From a practical viewpoint, the user will not notice any significant difference in speed if small files are saved and read, but will notice a difference if large files are used.

There are some other standards for USB flash drives that many users may find beneficial, if their flash drives have the capabilities. Users of Microsoft Vista (Home Basic, Home Premium, Business, and Ultimate versions) may find it advantageous to purchase flash drives that are labeled as "ReadyBoost". According to Microsoft, "Windows Vista introduces Windows ReadyBoost, a new concept in adding memory to a system. You can use non-volatile flash memory, such as that on a universal serial bus (USB) flash drive, to improve performance without having to add additional memory "under the hood." If the drive is compatible with the ReadyBoost standard, some of the flash memory in the drive can effectively and temporarily be added to the RAM (memory) installed in the computer, with an improvement on performance. If the Vista user with a compatible flash drive right clicks on the flash drive letter displayed under "My Computer" or Windows Explorer, and then left clicks on Properties – ReadyBoost, Vista will recommend how much of the available memory on the drive can be effectively and safely utilized by Vista. Other data stored on the ReadyBoost drive is protected from damage, and will not be harmed if the drive is used as a ReadyBoost drive. Because of the higher performance requirements, ReadyBoost compatible flash drives are slightly more expensive than standard drives, but are often the least expensive way to add memory to a Vista computer.

Another useful feature often found on a USB flash drive is known as "U3". Drives that are U3 compatible are labeled as such. A U3 powered flash drive allows the user to carry special versions of hundreds of programs on the flash drive that can be run directly from the flash drive without being installed on the computer. This is an effective way to carry the actual software the user is familiar with, and run it on other computers. When unplugged from the computer, U3 leaves no data or other information left on the computer that was used. Some of the popular programs that come in U3 formats are the Firefox browser, Skype telephone, McAfee Antivirus (about \$15), RoboForm Password Manager, OpenOffice (the comprehensive suite of office software including a Microsoft compatible word processor, spreadsheet, presentation program, database, and more, free), Thunderbird email client, and dozens of games. Most U3 drives come preinstalled with password protection and a "U3 Launchpad" which is a menu driven directory of the software on the U3 drive.

For those of us who have standard non-U3 drives, there is now an alternative that provides for the same functionality. This alternative to U3 that will run on almost all contemporary flash drives is called "PortableApps", and can be found online at portableapps.com. According to the PortableApp website, "A portable app is a computer program that you can carry around with you on a portable device and use on any Windows computer. When your USB flash drive, port-

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able hard drive, iPod or other portable device is plugged in, you have access to your software and personal data just as you would on your own PC. And when you unplug the device, none of your personal data is left behind." Dozens of portable apps are available, including the Firefox browser, OpenOffice office suite, antivirus software, games, password managers, and many other pieces of software. The PortableApp Suite is totally free, and does not contain any spyware or adware. In addition to the bundled suite, there are many other programs available, almost all free, which will run as portable apps. The PortableApp website keeps a running tally of new software that is available, including new releases and versions, as well as beta (pre-release) software. A simple click will install the selected software on the flash drive.

Now that many of us are routinely carrying flash drives, it is nice to know that they may be capable of doing much more for us than just transport data.

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Twitter – What You Are Doing Right Now

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WEBSITES:

<http://www.twitter.com>

Several of the readers of this column asked me, "What is Twitter?" following the media reports that senators and congress people were "Twittering" during recent presidential speeches. Twitter (the internet service and the person who does the posting) and Twittering or Tweeting (the posting of personal activities on Twitter) has become one of the most popular ways of communicating one's activities so that others can follow what is going on in the life of a Twitter. The service is self-described as, "Twitter is a service for friends, family, and co-workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing?" According to some of the national media quoted by Twitter.com, "The New York Times calls Twitter "one of the fastest-growing phenomena on the Internet." TIME Magazine says, "Twitter is on its way to becoming the next killer app," and Newsweek noted that "Suddenly, it seems as though all the world's a-twitter." One may wonder why a Twitter user would post his daily activities as they occur; Twitter explains it this way, "Why? Because even basic updates are meaningful to family members, friends, or colleagues—especially when they're timely."

Just to experience the life of a Twitter, I went to www.twitter.com and signed up for a free account. The signup process was very fast and easy, only asking for me to create my user name, create a secure password, and entering my email address. After creating my account, I was given the opportunity to upload a photo of myself for display to anyone that views my Twitter page, and allow me to customize my page to control the way others view it. I entered my first short message that I was using Twitter, and it appeared on my now personalized webpage. Since messages and other postings are intended to appear as text messages on cell phones as well as on a webpage, individual postings are limited to 140 characters, the maximum length of a text message (SMS) allowed on most cell phone systems. As I was typing this column, I posted a Twitter (message) that I was typing this column; if anyone is following my activities at this instant, he would receive this news as a text message on his cell phone, as an RSS feed on his computer, and email, or by simply viewing my Twitter webpage. On my view of my webpage is a text box where I can type my current activity, as long as I keep it under 140 characters, as shown by the counter adjacent to the text box. Postings can be made or received by computer, cell phone text message, Blackberry, or other communications device. Postings can also be received on any newsreader that uses the RSS format news feed.

Twitter makes it very easy to find friends who also Twitter. By clicking on the "Find People" icon, a window is opened that says "Find people". Follow them". To locate friends on Twitter, I chose to allow Twitter to access my email address book to determine if any of my current correspondents are on Twitter. Twitter can access (but only with your express permission) address books on Yahoo, Gmail, AOL, Hotmail, and MSN. It will quickly scan the online address book, and match any email addresses in the address book against the millions already in the Twitter database. Twitter states that it does not save the email addresses and passwords, and does not send out emails to those located without express permission to do so. I also used the "Find on Twitter" feature to enter my last name to see if any of my relatives are on Twitter, and add them to my friends list. Just as a lark, I entered the names of some of our elected officials, and found that several of them do have Twitter accounts. If I want to invite friends by personal email, I can enter their email addresses in the "Invite by Email" box, and Twitter will send them an invitation.

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If I want to add celebrities to my friend's list, I can click on "Suggested Uses", and a list of celebrities who Twitter will be displayed. By checking the box adjacent to their names, we can exchange Twitter posts and monitor each others' activities. Some of the more interesting celebrities and online services that can be added to anyone's Twitter friends list are the Jodrell Bank observatory, the Dell Outlet Store, JetBlue Airways Customer Service (monitors Twitter 24/7), the New York Times, 10 Downing Street (the official residence of the British Prime Minister), rapper M. C. Hammer, CNN Breaking News, Al Gore, John McCain, Whole Foods Market (Fresh organic tweets from Whole Foods Market HQ in Austin), Lance Armstrong, Britney Spears (Yes! This is the real Britney Spears!), George Stephanopoulos (ABC News Chief Washington Correspondent and Host of "This Week"), Women's Wear Daily, the Nightline TV news show, Martha Stewart, comedian and magician Penn Jillette, rapper 50 cent, and many more. The business and news outlets listed post breaking news or special deals to their Twitter friends. One that I added, being the nascent bargain shopper, is Woot.com, which posts one deeply discounted bargain each day in each of its merchandise categories.

Twitter, the company, is headquartered in San Francisco, and was founded in 2006. It is a small company, with only a few dozen employees, but has millions of members. It has a marketing model to generate revenue, but the revenue model has not yet been implemented, leaving all of the posts and web pages currently free of advertising.

I am not sure how much I will be using Twitter on a regular basis by posting my personal activities and short commentaries, but I will check my page occasionally just to see who is following my activities. The main purpose of Twitter is to answer the question, "What are you doing?" For those who want others to be able to know the answer in real time, they can do so with Twitter.

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Linkscanner – Free Protection from Web Threats

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WEBSITES:

<http://linkscanner.avg.com>

Many of us have felt secure while surfing the web, safe in the knowledge that our PC security software will protect us from all of the threats out there. Initially, in the early days of PCs, we came to understand that a good antivirus program would give us all of the protection that we needed. Later, we learned the hard way that antivirus software by itself would not protect us from the then-current threats, so we needed a firewall and anti-spyware software. The major publishers of security software obliged us by producing and selling us better, and more comprehensive protective software, culminating in today's typical security suites. Sadly, the miscreants that create the threats to our computing safety are often a step ahead of the security software publishers, and manage to craft new categories of threats that are explicitly designed to penetrate our protective shields, or even bypass them altogether. This makes us vulnerable to attack, even though we blissfully surf the net, oblivious to these new threats, confident in the knowledge that our security software will forever protect us. Regrettably, many of us will find that our personal computing has been compromised by malware from which our security suites provide little or no protection, leaving us open and vulnerable to attack.

According to published reports, as many as 95% of the new online threats are now coming from the websites that we visit, and are often undetected by our existing security software. This means that the blind trust that many of us have in our security software, regardless of the brand, may be unfounded, as our computers may be substantially unprotected from this new vector of attack. According to a recent article on the subject on ZDNET, "The most dangerous page on the web may be the one you are about to click on." As many as 100,000 to 150,000 legitimate websites, often those of national brands and companies, are compromised every day, and are "poisoned" in such a way that innocent visitors to those web pages unknowingly load malware onto their computers, bypassing the antivirus and anti-spyware software installed on the computer to expressly protect against

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such malware. This malware, when loaded on the victim computer, can open the victim to identity theft or other damages to his privacy or the sanctity of his data. Traditional whitelists (directories of safe sites), and blacklists (directories of dangerous sites), while widely used by conventional protective products are ineffective, as 60% of the poisoned websites are dangerous for less than 24 hours, many of those malignant for only a few hours. This threat is real, and according to security vendor AVG, "One in eight web users will unknowingly come across a poisoned page at least once a month."

The European computer security company AVG (formerly known as Grisoft), has an excellent reputation in the industry, and currently has over 80 million registered users of its software. While the AVG Anti-virus software is among the most widely used free antivirus software in the world, AVG also publishes comprehensive commercial security suites that have a loyal following in the millions. AVG has always been considered as a leader in security technology, as demonstrated by a feature included in its top commercial security suite, Linkscanner. The Linkscanner technology has given AVG a strong competitive edge when compared against many of its commercial competitors, as it provides substantial protection from the web borne malware that would possibly slip by competitive products.

Recently, AVG released a free version of its Linkscanner software which I immediately downloaded and installed on several computers. Linkscanner installed smoothly on each computer except one, that one computer having a security suite that was incompatible with Linkscanner (Trend Micro Internet Security Suite 2009 Pro). According to the AVG webpage, this conflict was unusual, as Linkscanner was tested and found to be compatible with almost all other security suites available.

Linkscanner, available for free download at linkscanner.avg.com, scans each webpage as it is downloaded to your browser, looking for dangerous content, and blocking the loading of the webpage if malware is found. This prevents the web borne malware from being installed on the computer as it is stopped before it is effectively downloaded. Linkscanner does this so quickly, and utilizes minimal system resources, such that there is no noticeable effect on the speed of websites loading and being displayed in the browser. Linkscanner works well with Internet Explorer and Firefox browsers, and will run on most current versions of Windows, including 32 and 64 bit operating systems. Except as mentioned above, Linkscanner will generally not interfere with other security software and runs in addition to it.

There are two components to Linkscanner, Search-Shield and Active Surf-Shield. Search-Shield works with the major search engines, such as Google, Yahoo, and MSN, and displays a safety rating for links displayed during a search. If a website is known as safe, and is free of malware, Search-Shield will display a green star with a checkmark adjacent to the site name. Websites known to harbor malware will be displayed with a red "X", warning the user not to go there. By knowing in advance which websites are safe to go to, or should be avoided, the user can search with a high degree of safety. While not a scientific study, I compared load times with and without Search-Shield running, and I could not notice any difference in the time to load and display Google and Yahoo search results.

The second key feature in Linkscanner is Active Surf-Shield, which scans the webpage behind any link click on, or web address typed into the browser. If Active Surf-Shield detects that the page has been "poisoned", the continued loading of the page is stopped, and a large red warning window is displayed. Again, in my non-scientific tests, I did not notice any difference in the load times of web pages with and without Active Surf-Shield running, and it appeared that the results were displayed almost instantaneously.

Linkscanner (linkscanner.avg.com) is listed as "free forever" when used on individual personal home computers, and provides a valuable and worthwhile adjunct to the security software that we already have on our computers. Since as much as 95% of the contemporary cyber threats are web borne, and Linkscanner explicitly protects against those threats that may slip through our antivirus and anti-spyware software, Linkscanner should be installed and used as appropriate.

While Wandering The Web



Xtranormal

Welcome to Xtranormal, a site that allows you to make movies. All you have to be able to do is type! You don't have to sign up to get started; you only have to sign up if you want to save your video.

This site is a lot of fun, but I'm going to warn you right away that it will suck you in and you'll lose track of time. I spent an hour just setting up my movie and then another hour fine tuning it! I didn't have any clue so much time had passed.

To get started, click the Try Now button. This will take you to a screen where you'll be able to select your actors. Right now there are four styles to choose from (3 of which are free during beta) - pick your actors and you'll be whisked away to the studio! I picked the cute little animals for my actors.

Now you're in your movie studio and you're ready to get started. I'd start by scrolling down the page to the Design the Scene section. This is where you'll pick your set, what your actors look and sound like, and add the soundtrack. Click apply, and you'll head back to the main part of studio.

Now you'll want to start adding dialogue. You can just type it in. Then click the + at the bottom of the dialogue block to add another. You can drag and drop animations, and expressions from the left onto the dialogue blocks to make your characters even more interesting.

If you get stuck click the Quick Tips button and it will walk you through some helpful tips that can get you back on track. When you're finished click action so that the characters can rehearse the scene, then when it's loaded you can click play to watch your movie. If it's perfect you can click the It's a Wrap button to save it.

If you haven't signed up for an account, it will ask you to do so now. It's the only way you can save your work. But don't worry, you can sign up for a Basic account for free!

It is just that easy to make a movie! Check it out today!

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