



Midland Michigan

BITS AND BYTES

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GENERAL CLUB MEETING

Midland Public Schools Administration Building
600 E Carpenter Street - Room D

Wednesday, June 26, 2019

6:00 P.M.

Luci by MPOWERD

By George Harding, Treasurer, Tucson Computer Society, AZ
Tucson Computer Society -- March 2019 -- www.aztcs.org

Luci is a light powered by the sun. It has a solar cell on top that accumulates charge sufficient to power the light.

When you first get the Luci unit, it needs to be inflated. It's pretty much flat and although the solar cell will still charge, the light does not have any space to shine. Inflation is mouth-powered. You blow up the unit until it is a cylinder.

Then you can set the unit on a window sill or outside to charge. It doesn't take long. There is a recessed button on the top which turns the light on. There are three levels: normal, bright and flash.



There is enough light to brighten a small room or allow you to read a book. It lasts for 24 hours or so, depending on the illumination level chosen.

The original goal for developing Luci, according to its founders, is:

With Luci, we were aiming for something much bigger than convenience. We want to empower the three billion people around the world who still live without reliable access to electricity. So we made a light that's clean and safe – pretty much the opposite of the toxic and expensive kerosene lamps so many depend on – because life doesn't stop after the sun goes down.

MPOWERD has several Luci models, varying by the range of colors that can be displayed and length of battery life. They are all modestly priced, easy to use and very helpful when you don't have electricity available. Some versions are not only charged by sunlight, but also alternatively by using a cable.

The company has a program of giving Luci units to those for whom electricity is unavailable. You donate \$10, which sends a Luci unit to Africa or other similar location.

I received two Luci units for review. The first is the original Luci, which only has white light, but works to illuminate your room for reading or doing homework. The second is a more complex unit with external charging capability and multiple colors available. Both do the job of giving you light when you need it and don't have it.

Luci by MPOWERD www.mpowerd.com
Prices vary by unit from \$15 to \$65

Kretchmar's Korner**Mistakes We Make When Buying a Computer**

By David Kretchmar, Computer Technician, Sun City Summerlin Computer Club NV
March 2019 issue, Gigabyte Gazette -- www.scscc.club/ -- [tomburt89134 \(at\) cox.net](mailto:tomburt89134@cox.net)

For many of us, computers have become an integral part of our daily lives. Computers have become almost as important as a car to some of us. Fortunately, computers are pretty easy to acquire. They are no longer a major investment (my first computer system, 20 years ago, cost \$3000) but still can be a significant purchase and something we will live with for years.

For the less tech-savvy, buying a computer can be difficult. There is a lot of tech jargon flying around, and all of it is competing to get your money. Because of that, mistakes are easy to make, and they can easily result in your money going to waste. When you're spending hundreds of dollars, you don't want to get a machine that's going to break down in a year, fail to work as expected or cost any more than it ought to. We are going to take a look at a number of computer shopping mistakes so that you can avoid them and get a great computer without spending any more than you have to.

Always Buying Whatever's Cheapest

If you have very minimal computer demands and hardly browse the Internet, you might be able to get away with only ever getting a cheap computer. Cheap and/or old hardware is going to wear out more quickly and fail to meet the ever-increasing demands of new software. A \$200 machine could last you a couple of years, but that time may be filled with headaches as it begins to struggle more and more on its way to the computer graveyard. A \$400 computer should last longer, and that time should be less filled with headaches. It is impossible to be entirely sure what you're going to get for your money, but you'll probably have a good chance of finding a more reliable, longer-lasting PC if you spend more. You don't need to buy a \$2,000 computer, but just keep an eye out for good deals on brands and models that have proven to have a good lifespan, and you should be safe.

Not Buying Based on Your Needs

If you think a computer seems awesome because you've heard media hype about it, it's the latest thing, or it just looks awesome, you're probably shopping for a computer incorrectly.

Sure, if you want to prioritize a certain feature such as appearance or power, you can, but most of us should just think about what we need from the computer and buy a machine that will enable us to do the job. If you're going to just do light Internet browsing, some word processing, and watch a movie here and there, you can probably do without 32GB of RAM, that 8-core CPU, or 12 USB 3.0 ports. Whatever you get with a computer, you pay for, so try not to go for something you know you don't need.

Not Knowing What You're Getting with an Operating System

About 10 years ago my nephew camped outside of Best Buy to get a dirt-cheap laptop. The laptop was inexpensive, but it came without a permanent operating system! Fortunately he had a geeky uncle who was able to help him, but not all were so fortunate.

Today you are unlikely to be sold a computer without an operating system (OS). There are plenty of different computer OS out there — Windows, Apple OS X, various flavors of Linux, including the Chrome OS. Each OS functions differently. Most importantly for users, each OS handles software differently (if at all). If you have an old computer running one OS and want to bring software you purchased to a new computer, don't expect to succeed if you switch operating systems. For example, Skype may have versions working for Mac and Windows, but you won't be able to Skype with your friends and family if you switch over to Chrome OS. Remember the first step in buying a computer: you need to decide what you need to do with a computer and ensure the OS will support it.

Assuming a Feature is Included

Whether you're shopping for a laptop or a desktop, don't make any assumptions about the features that are included.

Computers come in all configurations

You should never take anything for granted. If you want a computer with a CD/DVD drive, look and see if there is one, and if you're shopping on line or in a store, make sure you know with 100% certainty it's there. Optical drives seem to be slowly going the way of the old floppy drives – away.

Software can usually be downloaded online rather than installed from an optical disk. More and more new computers don't include an optical drive, especially laptops, since the optical drive on a laptop adds considerably to the bulk of the system. External optical drives are available for \$25 - \$30 and this is often the solution if an optical drive is required.

Also make sure there are plenty of USB ports, and importantly at least 1 high speed (3.0 or 3.1) USB port.

Some new computers are sold with HDMI video output only.

If you plan to utilize an older monitor with only the old standard 15-pin sub-D input, you are out of luck without a special adapter.

Not Finding a Problem with a Computer While You Can Still Return It.

Just because you've spent your money for a new computer already doesn't mean the buying process is over. You have a time window where you can return the computer if you're not satisfied. Test everything. See how far the Bluetooth signal reaches. Ensure it can connect to your Wi-Fi network and maintain a connection. Test out all of the drives and ports. Try out headphones and microphones. Install all of the programs you want to use and try them out. Run Prime95 or your most demanding video game for hours. You basically want to make sure that the computer will easily meet your needs. If it's falling short or not working how you expect, you want to find that out while you can still return it. (Personal story: I once bought a high-end Dell desktop computer that seemed great, but it would not shut down without cutting off the power. I returned it quickly for a replacement. If I hadn't tested out those features early on, I would have learned the hard way what it felt like to waste \$3000.)

Not Shopping Around Enough

You do need to shop around - that is, if you want to get the best deal. Don't just go into Best Buy and assume your options are limited to those devices at those prices. Shopping at a single retailer (especially a brick-and-mortar shop) will guarantee that you'll miss out. Every big retailer is going to have some deal going at any given time, so you've just got to hunt for the right one, which means checking way more than one place. I suggest you look at Newegg.com, TigerDirect.com, Amazon.com, and BestBuy.com. If you're brave and knowledgeable you can see what you can find on eBay.com. Check the manufacturers' websites. Check Costco and other retailers. If you shop around and are patient, you'll get a good deal on a new computer.

Setup and Warranty

Finally, there's the matter of setup services and warranties. Choosing to get a warranty is an extra cost, which I do not recommend, but it adds some security. If you're concerned about physical damage to the computer, an accidental damage warranty isn't a bad idea. As far as setup services, if you know your way around a computer, or know someone who does and is willing to help, you can likely pass on having a professional set it up — most of what's done is pretty simple. If everything about computers is like a foreign language to you and no one you know tolerates your technological deficiencies, it may be worth the money to have a pro come set up your new computer and get you up and running.

President's Corner

My Meshed-Up Wi-Fi

By Greg Skalka, President, Under the Computer Hood User Group, CA
March 2019 issue, Drive Light --www.uchug.org -- president (at) uchug.org

Our modern electronic devices are all about connectedness. It seems everything we have now is connected, and that connection is integral to the capabilities that are provided for us. Before they were connected, computers were just big boxes that made calculating and writing easier; now with the Internet, they provide communications, information and entertainment. Thermostats, cameras and lights used to be just things to turn on your furnace, capture pictures and video and illuminate your surroundings. Now, when you connect them to your home network, they become the start of a smart home. All that connectedness is great, but to be useful it needs to be reliable, secure, easy to use and available where you need it.

The methods used to connect our devices have evolved and improved over time, going from wired phone and Ethernet cables to wireless communications, with cellular phone networks, Bluetooth and Wi-Fi.

Cables perform well, but limit mobility and can be unsightly or difficult to conceal. Cellular data connections can have great range but can have spotty coverage and require additional costs for data service. They can work fine on your phone or tablet but are harder to utilize for computers or small household devices. Bluetooth is useful for low data rate connections between devices at close range.

Wireless keyboard and mouse connections work great over Bluetooth, but it wouldn't work well for surfing the web. The best wireless method for medium range (in a house or building) and high bandwidth (web surfing and streaming) is Wi-Fi.

Wi-Fi provides wireless connections based on the IEEE 802.11 standards, which were originally established in the late 1990's. The standards and the capabilities they provide have evolved over the years.

Wi-Fi now utilizes a number of RF bands, mostly in the GHz frequency range (typically 2.4 GHz to 60 GHz), and can support over 1 Gbit/s.

My first computer (early 1980's) was a stand-alone device, as there were no popular networking standards at the time. When we got married in 1985, my wife and I shared one computer. Computers didn't get "personal" for us until probably the late 1990's, when my wife wanted her own, and we started to think about separate computers for our two children. When we moved into our present house in 1987, it came brand-new with all the networking connections we needed - phone jacks and coax cables in a couple of the rooms for the dial-up modem and cable TV.

By the early 2000's, we had at least four computers in the house, one for each occupant. Around this time we unfortunately had a leak in our plastic house water lines and had to repipe the house with copper. I took this opportunity to use the holes in the walls to pull Cat5e Ethernet, phone and coax cables into all bedrooms except the master (I never considered having a computer there). This allowed us to have a good wired home network, with Internet at every computer. My "office" was in the upstairs bedroom in the front corner of the house; this is where I located the router for our home network. From that room I had cable connections that provided network and Internet to the kids' bedrooms and my wife's "office" downstairs in the center of the house.

This network worked well for us for many years. Even though early-version Wi-Fi was available, I preferred the superior security of my wired network, and even installed some wired Ethernet network cameras (this did take some work, as my wife hates visible cords and cables). We had laptops that had Wi-Fi capability, however, so I bought a wireless access point to connect to the wired network in my wife's office. I was still so worried about Wi-Fi's security that I plugged the access point into a separate power strip with switch, so it could be easily powered off and disabled when not in use.

It was either my wife's iPhone or our first Amazon Echo Dot that forced me to finally leave the Wi-Fi access point on all the time. I also bought a Chromebook, which required a wireless Internet connection to do most anything. I later added a second Dot, as well as three Samsung Wi-Fi network cameras. These cameras really pointed out the poor Wi-Fi coverage provided by the access point, as I could not place them far from the center of the house. I wanted to put one up in my office to replace one of the wired cameras, but the signal could not reach that far through the structure. One problem with the GHz frequencies used by Wi-Fi is that they are easily attenuated by the material in the walls and furnishings of a house. I tried using the Wi-Fi capability in my router (located in the front of the house) instead of the access point, which provided good signal strength there, but poor Wi-Fi in the middle and back parts of the house.

My poor Wi-Fi capabilities soon became a bigger issue, as I continued finding more and more smart home devices that I would like to have, including more voice-operated assistants (Amazon Echo and Google Home), more network cameras (video doorbells and outdoor cameras), smart light bulbs, smart outlets and smart thermostats. All these devices require a Wi-Fi connection to allow them to be used or controlled through smart phone apps. I needed to find a way to have good Wi-Fi coverage from my front yard all the way to my back yard.

One handy tool for evaluating Wi-Fi signals and diagnosing coverage issues is a free Android app called "WiFi Analyzer" (by farproc). It can display a real-time graphical indication of the signal strengths of the Wi-Fi signals (networks identified by their SSIDs) that your phone sees. It allowed me to move around the house with my phone and see just how poor the coverage was with my access point. It can also be useful to determine if you are getting interference from a neighbor's Wi-Fi, or if you have other signals in your house that you don't know about. I found that our two HP all-in-one network printers, which have both wired and wireless interfaces, were broadcasting a Wi-Fi signal even though I was only using their wired Ethernet interfaces.

There are several ways to provide better Wi-Fi signal coverage; most involve adding additional Wi-Fi networks (with separate SSIDs). There are Wi-Fi repeaters (or extenders) that can extend your Wi-Fi coverage by receiving your existing Wi-Fi signals and repeating them, though on a separate wireless network (as if you had two wireless routers operating in your home). I could effectively do this with the wireless equipment I already have. If I turned on both my router's Wi-Fi and my access point, then I could have reasonable coverage over most of my house. This still would not cover the rear part of the house or back yard; I would need another Wi-Fi repeater for that and would wind up with multiple wireless networks to manage.

A new device for extending Wi-Fi, the mesh router, has recently become a popular option for providing whole-house Wi-Fi. Mesh routers use multiple devices or nodes to provide Wi-Fi from multiple locations in your home. They differ from Wi-Fi repeaters in that these nodes are connected to each other and coordinate between each other to provide the best signal for your device to connect to and present a single network and SSID. Mesh routers consist of a master device and one or more auxiliary or satellite devices.

There are now many mesh router systems available, including the Linksys Velop, Netgear Orbi, Asus Lyra, Google Wi-Fi, Samsung Connect Home and D-Link Covr; their prices range from \$66 to \$500. Since I felt I'd need three sources to cover my home's area, I chose the Netgear Orbi AC3000 three-unit mesh router. It claims to be able to cover up to 7500 square feet with three components - one router and two satellite units. The Orbi router would be placed in the center of the house (in my wife's office), where it would connect to my home network with an Ethernet cable. One satellite would be placed in a front bedroom upstairs and the other in our dining room in the back of the house. The satellites need only be located near a power outlet; they connect to the Orbi router through dedicated tri-band RF links (one 2.4 GHz and two 5 GHz connections).

Setting up the Orbi system was easy. I plugged in the Orbi router in place of my old access point (it requires only AC power and the network Ethernet cable in its yellow WAN port) and turned it on. Each Orbi component has a light ring at the top; the router's light ring starts green and then turns white when ready. I next placed each satellite where I wanted it, plugged it in and turned it on. The light ring on the

satellites start white, and then after a few minutes indicate their connection status with the Orbi router through the light ring color. A blue ring on the satellite indicates a good connection with the Orbi router, while amber indicates a fair connection and moving the satellite closer to the router should be considered.

If the ring winds up magenta, the satellite could not connect, and should be moved closer. Both of my satellites lit up blue.

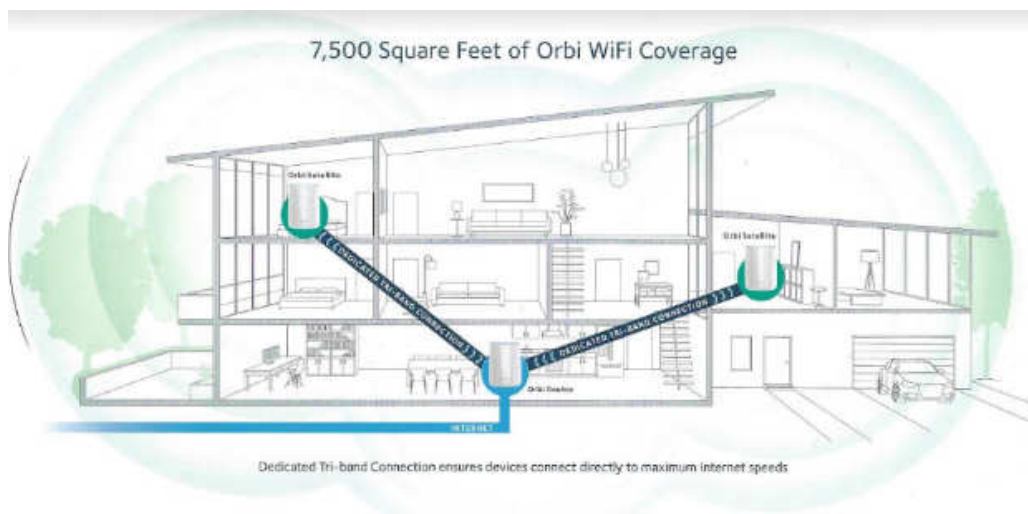
My next step was to access the Orbi router and configure it and the Orbi network. This can be done through a wired connection (the Orbi router has three RJ-45 jacks on the back for the Orbi network, while each satellite has four) or wirelessly. I decided to connect to the Orbi Wi-Fi with my Chromebook, using the default SSID and security password provided in the documentation. Using the specified URL in a browser to connect to the router's setup pages, I logged in with the default admin account settings, and then immediately changed them. I also changed the SSID, made sure the Wi-Fi security was the most robust allowed (WPA2+AES) and lengthened the Wi-Fi security password. The Orbi router has all the typical setup pages you would find in any modern router; I left the majority of them set to the defaults. I did note that the Orbi can be set to be a router (providing network translation between its Ethernet input and its Wi-Fi and wired outputs) or an access point (it would use the same IP subnet as on its input); I left it as the former.

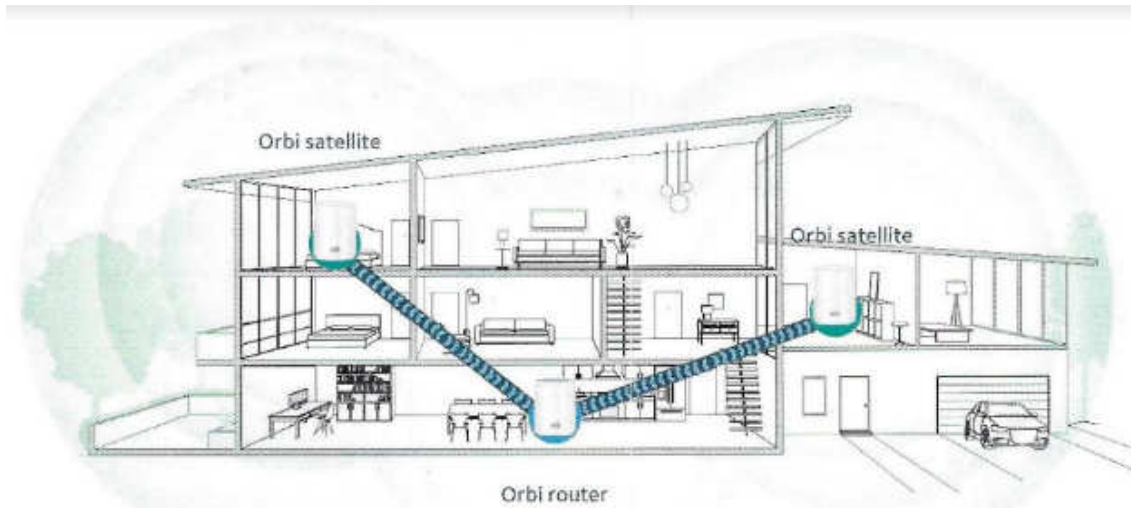
I used my smart phone and the WiFi Analyzer app to check out my new Orbi wireless network. I found excellent signal strength throughout my house, and a reasonable signal in my front and back yards. I noticed that three signals were shown, one for each Orbi device, with all using the same SSID. I could tell which graph color in the app went with which Orbi by moving next to each and seeing which had the strongest signal. From this I could see at any point in the house which Orbi a Wi-Fi device would likely connect to. I installed the Orbi app on my smart phone so that I could easily and remotely make changes to my Wi-Fi, including adding a guest Wi-Fi network.

With the mesh network effectively configured, I was ready for the hardest and most time-consuming part of the Wi-Fi upgrade - moving all my Wi-Fi devices to my new Orbi Wi-Fi network. It took several hours to switch all my network cameras, Amazon Echo Dots and smart lights to the Orbi network, as I had to go into the app for each device to change its settings. Once everything was switched over, it all worked great.

I used to have to reset (cycle power) my old access point periodically as it would sometimes lock up and lose connections; now with Orbi, everything is rock solid. I guess it is time to go shopping for new Wi-Fi gadgets.

With my old access point, our home Wi-Fi was rather messy. Now with Orbi, we are much happier with our Wi-Fi being meshy.





Personalize your Desktop – With Pictures and/or Slideshows

By Phil Sorrentino, Contributing Writer, The Computer Club, FL
April 2019 -- www.sccccomputerclub.org -- [Philsorr \(at\) yahoo.com](mailto:Philsorr@yahoo.com)

All desktops are not created equal. Just look at the differences the next time you go to a class where you bring and use your own laptop. I bet none of those other desktops will look like your own desktop. Probably the biggest differences will be in the desktop background. These differences come about from the choices in the "Personalize window" in "Settings." You can get to the Personalize window by at least two ways. Personalize is a selection in Settings so just click on the Start button and then the Settings button (the gear like icon). Or, you can get to the Personalize window by just right clicking an empty space on the desktop. Either way, you get to the Personalize window where you can set up things like the Background, the Lock screen, the Start screen, and the Taskbar.

The Background can be set to three different possibilities; a picture, a color, or a slideshow. The picture can be one of the pictures that you get to select by browsing your Pictures folder. When you find one you like, select it and it will become one of your selections and it will also become your background. (If you have multiple monitors, you can select Monitor 1 or 2 or both, by right clicking the picture and then left clicking your choice.) After you've chosen a picture you can determine how it will show on your monitor by making a selection in "Choose a fit." Pull down the down facing arrow at the right-hand end of the selection box and make your selection among the choices, Fill, Fit, Stretch, Tile, Center, or Span. Pictures from different sources will show up slightly differently depending on this choice. Once you've chosen a picture, you'll just have to experiment with the choices. Don't worry, you can't really break anything here.

The second background choice, "Solid color," is maybe a little less exciting. When you select Solid color, you get to choose from a palette of colors to be the background. Just click on the color you like in the "Choose your background color" grouping of colors. You can even add a custom color by just clicking on the "Custom color button" and then in the "Pick a background color" area, click the color you would like and then click "Done." If you don't quite like the new custom color, just re-do the selection process and the custom color will change to your new choice.

The last background choice is "Slideshow," which is probably the most fun. When you choose slideshow, you get to choose the source of your slideshow pictures. Maybe you have a folder of grandchildren, or a folder of puppies or kittens, or a folder of your family vacations. Whatever you like can be the source of your slideshow pictures. Just click the Browse button, under "DesktopBackground," and you'll get a navigation window to use to find the folder that contains the pictures you would like to use as a slideshow. If you don't have a folder with all the pictures you want to use in your slideshow, now is the time to create it. Just make a new folder, using File Explorer, and put it in an easy place to find, like under the Pictures folder, under "This PC." After you've created this folder and maybe named it "SlideshowPictures," put all the pictures that you want to be in the slideshow into it, and then go back to Settings-Personalize-Background, browse for your new folder, and make it the source of your slideshow. Next decide how often you want the pictures to change; choices go from 1 minute to one day. The pictures will show in the sequence that they are in the folder. (Remember, files in a folder will be in alpha-numeric order, numbers first, then letters.) If you don't want this sequence and would rather have them shown in random order, just slide the "Shuffle" slide switch to "On." Again, you can make a "Choose a fit" choice just as before in the "Picture" background choice.

The Lock screen is the next item that can be "personalized" in the Personalize window. (The Lock screen is displayed when the computer is locked. You can lock the computer by using the keyboard combination of the "Windows Key" and the L key. Or you can lock the computer by pressing the Control-Alternate-Delete key combination and then choosing "Lock".) The choices for the Lock screen are similar to Background, but slightly different. The choices are "Windows Spotlight," "Picture," and "Slideshow." Windows Spotlight is a feature of Windows 10 that downloads pictures from "Bing" and displays them when the lock screen is being shown. So it's like a picture option, only Bing is choosing the picture. The "Picture" choice seems to work just like the Picture choice in Background. You could even choose the same picture for Background and Lock screen, but it would probably be more useful if a different picture were chosen for Background and Lock screen. (The picture you see would be a hint as to what was on the display.) And "Slideshow" seems to work just about the same here in Lock screen as it does in Background, though there are some "Advanced slideshow settings" that can further determine how Slideshow works on the Lock screen.

The "Start screen" can be personalized by selecting "Start screen" and then setting the slide switches to "on" or "off" based on your need for the specific feature. You can even choose which "well known" folders appear on the Start screen by selecting "Choose which folders appear on start" and then switching that particular folder on or off. The Start screen is the pop-up window displayed when you click the start button (down on the screen, at the lower left end of the Taskbar). On this screen you'll find an alphabetical list of all the software (or Apps) on this computer and any App that has been "pinned" to the Start screen. Items on the Start screen can be moved around the Start

screen by dragging and dropping them to other locations. Left-clicking an item on the Start screen will start that App. Right-clicking an item will provide the ability to “unpin” the item from the Start screen.

The Taskbar is the last item on the Personalize screen and is the bar at the bottom of the Windows display. It shows Apps that have been pinned to the Taskbar along with notification from Windows, Apps, or certain hardware such as the network you are connected to (and the amount of charge in your battery, if you are on a Laptop). The Taskbar can be personalized by selecting “Taskbar” and then setting the slide switches to on or off, based on your need for that specific feature. You can even move the Taskbar to the top or a side by selecting “Taskbar location on screen” and then choosing the desired location. “How do I customize Taskbars?” gives a good amount of helpful information for customizing the taskbar. The Notification area (at the right-hand end of the taskbar) can also be personalized by selecting “Select which Notification Icons appear on the taskbar.” This will provide a screen of Apps, the Icons of which could appear on the Taskbar. Each one can be turned on or off, depending on your need for this notification. You can also “Turn system Icons On or Off.” This selection will provide a list of system Icons along with on/off slide switches. The Clock, Volume, Network, Location, and Action center are system notification you might want to turn on, if they are not on already.

Personalization provides the ability to customize the way some very basic screens look and operate. The choices you make will make your computer look a little different from other computers and give it your particular customized look.

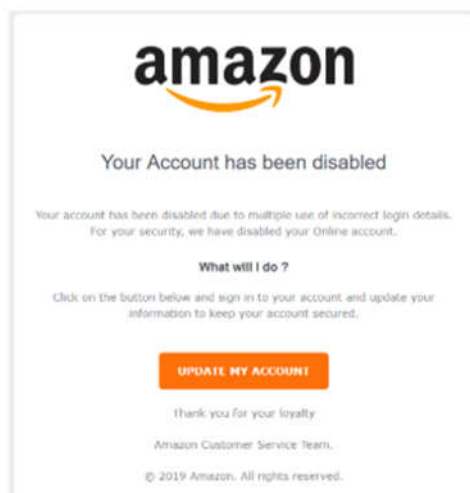
Phishing Expeditions

By Dorothy Fitch, Editor, Green Valley Resort Computer Club, AZ
April-August 2019 issue, Green Bytes -- www.ccgvaz.org -- Newsletter (at) ccgvaz.org

February's *Green Bytes* included an article about "Phishing" ([click here to read it](#)).

A "phishing" email is one that attempts to obtain your personal account information to use for unauthorized purposes. When I included that article in *Green Bytes*, I hadn't personally received a phishing email. But this month I did -- twice! Both appeared to be from familiar companies (Amazon and American Express), but there were several clues that they were attempts at phishing. Here is how I knew.

1. Both messages came to an email address I use for a non-profit organization. I know that the email address these messages came to have never had an account or been associated in any way with either Amazon or American Express.
2. Both messages looked as though they had come from the named company. The logo and color schemes were appropriate. They both were similar in that they said that my account had been disabled or



AMERICAN EXPRESS

This is a notification that you won't be able to use your account until you confirm your information. We've taken this step to ensure the security of your account.

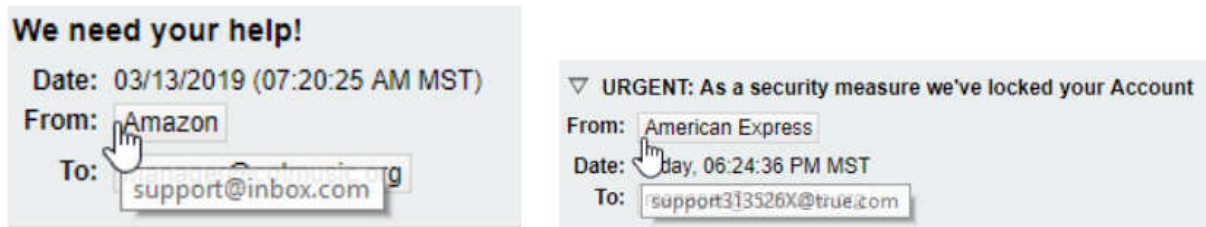
To unlock your account, simply follow the link below and you'll be taken to the American Express validation page.

<https://www.americanexpress.com/verify/index.jsp?>

Thank you for your loyalty,
American Express.

locked. They both wanted me to update or confirm my account information. (No way was I going to do that!)

3. Then I looked at the email address of the sender.



The Amazon email was sent from *support@inbox.com*.

The American Express email was sent from *support313526X@true.com*.

Neither of these email addresses appeared to have any connection to the companies they were supposedly from.

4. I looked at the link in the email from American Express (but I didn't click it!).

If you hover your mouse pointer over a link, you can see before you click where it will take you. Just look at the lower left of your computer screen to see the link information.

Although I didn't click on the link, I was brave [stupid?] enough to go to www.ahmetcaglar.com to see what was there (so you don't have to do it!). When I got there, Google suggested that it translate the website into English (it was in Turkish), so I did.

What did I find there? The bio of a Turkish computer science student! He used his name for his website. I guess he doesn't care about keeping under the radar. Perhaps he was just experimenting with a concept without any intention of causing harm, but we'll never know....

I found it very interesting to take a closer look at these phishing emails. The lessons for everyone are:

- Look at the sender's email address. Does it seem to really be from the individual or company you expect?
- Don't click on any links, if you aren't 100% sure who the email came from.
- Absolutely do not give out any account information to anyone who contacts you.
- If you want to verify if an email is for real, call the company; don't reply to the email. You can probably see if your account has been locked by going directly to the company's website, the way you normally would, and see if all is well.

Traveling with Electronics

By Dick Maybach, Member, Brookdale Computer User Group, NJ
www.bcug.com -- n2nd (at) att.net

When preparing for a trip, think carefully about what you really need. Every piece of gear you add is more weight to carry, another thing to protect, and another distraction from visiting and sightseeing. The goal should be to obtain the needed entertainment, communications, and navigation while minimizing your risk, inconvenience, and cost.

Begin by seeing what you can do with just a smart phone. If you are going overseas where roaming charges can be high, assume it's configured not to make calls. You can still use it for communications by using a Web communication service, such as Skype, when you are at a Wi-Fi hotspot. Its music player and e-book reader can entertain you en route, provided of course that you load the media before you leave home. It will also let you read your e-mail and surf the Web, although its small screen makes these less efficient than using a PC. You can also install apps to track your credit and debit card expenses, safeguard your passwords, and calculate currency conversions. Most cell phones include a GPS, but by

default they continually download maps from the network. If you want to use this feature where you don't have cell-phone service, you must first download and install maps into your mapping app, such as Locus Map for Android. (Be aware that mapping apps can be complex and configuring them may require some work; start this well before you leave.) Finally, it has a camera to save your memories. Of course, you must install and configure the needed apps and become comfortable with them before you leave home. Expect to spend considerable time to get this right.

Thus, with a properly configured smart phone you can send and receive messages, access the Internet, navigate, secure your sensitive data, and take photos. However, you may decide that you want additional equipment to escape the phone's limitations and are willing to accept the additional baggage, the extra delays at security checks, the added effort to safeguard the equipment, and the financial risk of losing it.

Small and light laptops are not expensive but try to make yours do jobs besides the obvious e-mail and Web surfing. For example, you can upload data from your camera, cell phone, and GPS, so that you retain the data if one is lost or damaged. You can also use its USB ports to charge your other devices and so avoid having to carry separate power converters. However, this will take more time than using a charger; check before you leave home.

If your hotel has wired Ethernet in the room you can use a travel router to provide better service than Wi-Fi__33. Some hotels limit the number of devices you can connect to their Wi-Fi__33 or charge separately for each one. If you connect your devices to Wi-Fi__33 through a travel router, shown in Figure 1, configured as a repeater, that is the only device registered, regardless of how many devices connect through it. See my article on travel routers on page 5 in the November 2014 Bytes, available at <http://bcug.mbyrne.com/newsletters/2014-11-Bytes.pdf>



Figure 1. Travel Router.

A pocket GPS with extra replaceable batteries will help you find your way longer than a smart phone and may provide more features and offer more choice of maps. (Use it before you leave so you can find how long it will operate on a set of batteries.) Many free maps of areas all over the world are available, although most require that your device use Garmin-compatible map files. The same files are usable by PC mapping applications when you are at home.

If you are fond of reading, those e-book readers that display only black-and-white print have very long battery lives, making them practical even on long trips, and they often weigh less than a couple of books. However, those that display in color and play movies have battery lives comparable to small laptops. Be careful of media encumbered with Digital Rights Management (DRM) as this “feature” may not allow you to access it outside the U.S.

Think seriously about power. Your hotel room will probably have few outlets, likely in inconvenient locations, they may not fit U.S. plugs, and outside the Americas are likely to carry 220-Volt, 50-Hz power. Light-weight, ten-foot, two-wire extension cords with three outlets are widely available. (Three-wire cords are far too heavy to be practical on trips, and few foreign outlets have three-wire connectors.) In many countries you will need a mechanical adapter to the local outlets; research this before you leave home. Take spare adapters; it’s easy to leave them plugged into the wall when you remove the cord. If any of your devices have three-wire plugs (laptops are the usual suspects) you will also need a U.S. three-to-two wire adapter. See Figure 2. Most electronic devices have power supplies that accommodate both 110- and 220-volt power, but CHECK BEFORE YOU GO. You will probably need bright light and a magnifier to read the tiny print, an example of which appears in Figure 3. Note the line “INPUT 100-240 V 3A 50-60 Hz.” The “3A” is the current drawn, which will vary among different devices; the important numbers are the power Voltage and frequency, “100-240 V” and “50-60Hz,” which in this case show that the unit can be used worldwide. While still at home, plug together everything you will take to be sure it fits. For example, I’ve found European-to-US power-plug adapters that had two narrow slots for the US connector, instead of one narrow and one wide slot, meaning that they couldn’t be used with almost all US plugs.



Figure 2. Power Adapters (left) and a U.S. 3-to-2 Wire Power Adapter (right).



Figure 3. Power Supply Label.

Your cell-phone can comfortably play music for many hours, but if you use it to read an e-book its backlight will deplete the battery on a long trip, leaving you with a dead phone when you arrive. A solution is an external battery pack with USB connectors, and one can also recharge other devices that have USB charging ports; see Figure 4. The one shown has two USB output connectors and is recharged through the mini-USB in the center.



Figure 4. External Battery Pack.

If you have several devices that are recharged through USB cables, you may wish to purchase a power converter with multiple USB outlets, rather than a separate charger for each device. They will charge faster than using a laptop's USB connectors.

Finally, take spare batteries, as a charge may not last for an entire day. You don't want to spend a sunny afternoon in Paris looking for that oddball battery your camera uses.

Tom's Tech-Notes

Windows 10 May Update - Coming Soon to Your PC

By Tom Burt, Vice President, Sun City Summerlin Computer Club, NV
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The technical pundits are in full rhapsody over the upcoming release of the "first-half" 2019 release of Windows 10. The official version number is V1903. Most of our Windows 10 Home users will get this release when Microsoft decides to push it out to their PCs via Windows Update. That will likely be sometime in April, possibly early May, especially for newer PCs.

As in the past, once it's available, if you just can't wait to get V1903, you can download and run the latest Windows Media Creation tool to update your Windows 10 PC or create installation media.

Chris Hoffman of **How-To-Geek** writes that Windows 10 will no longer automatically install those big feature updates every six months. Home users can pause smaller updates, too. In fact, Windows will even let you pause updates after checking for them! <http://bit.ly/2VvDJMh>

Ed Bott of **ZD-Net.com** has written an excellent article summarizing all of the important new features of the V1903 update, including screen shots and brief descriptions. You can read Ed's article at: <https://zd.net/2uUPSP9>

Mauro Huculak at **PureInfotech** has also written a comprehensive, illustrated review of V1903 new features at: <http://bit.ly/2G2RHOU>

I won't try to duplicate what Ed or Mauro have written, but I'll mention a few of the new features. Many of these new "features" are enhancements to the Settings interface to reduce lingering dependence on the old "Desktop Control Panel."

- The Start panel, by default, now has fewer tiles and has automatically grouped some into folders. This affords a less cluttered view and more room for adding your own tiles.
- The Windows Search has been nicely enhanced and also decoupled from Cortana. You can now use icons at the top of the search window to filter the scope of the search.
- Windows Hello (biometric sign-in) has been cleaned up and enhanced. To use this, your PC needs a camera or a USB security key. Laptop users may find this especially useful.
- The Settings system for preferences has an updated, improved font manager / installer that makes installing new fonts an easy drag and drop action.
- The Windows Print dialog has been enhanced and cleaned up.
- The Settings > System > Storage screen has been reworked to give more useful information for each drive known to the system.
- The Snip and Sketch tool (new in Win 10 V1809) has been enhanced to take a snapshot of a specific Window as well as of the entire screen or an arbitrary rectangle on the screen.

The “Patch Tuesday” date in May is May 14. That’s the earliest likely date V1903 will start being delivered to PCs. This presumes that there are no last-minute stability issues with the release. Microsoft presumably doesn’t want to repeat the experience from the last update (V1809) when they had to pull the update and spend a month dealing with reliability issues.

Preparing for V1903

In anticipation of the V1903 update, I recommend that Windows 10 users make an image or clone backup of their C: drive. Use your favorite backup imaging tool: Acronis True Image, Casper, Macrium Reflect or the Windows internal backup imaging tool. You will need an external hard drive with enough space to hold the image or clone. The Computer Club’s Hardware / Software Repair Lab team can help you with this if you’ve never done it.

I also recommend that Windows 10 users make a named Restore Point. This will allow you to easily revert your PC back to a known good state in case your PC’s V1903 update runs into problems. While this is uncommon, taking precautions pre-update is good insurance.

A final recommendation is that when Windows Update indicates it is planning to deliver the update, if you are running a third-party anti-virus program (Avast, McAfee, Malware Bytes, Norton, ...) you should disable the anti-virus program before the update begins installing. Many updating problems have been caused by conflicts between the third-party anti-virus program and Windows Update.

I saw a statistic recently that Windows 10 is now installed on 800 million devices. Even if this is somewhat overstated, updating such a huge number of PCs is a truly enormous undertaking. There are bound to be unforeseen hardware / software configurations that have issues with the upgrade.

Here’s hoping your own upgrade experience is smooth and trouble free and that the end-result is an improved experience using Windows 10.

