



Midland Michigan

BITS AND BYTES

MARCH 2021

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GENERAL CLUB MEETING

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

Wednesday, March 24, 2021, 6:00 P.M.

Via ZOOM

MARCH MADNESS — not talking about basketball!

By Carol Picard

Internet connection dropping

Having issues with my Internet connection dropping out on all devices. Use Netgear Orbi router (base router and one satellite) which is about two years old. When computer was sitting idle, it showed the icon indicating it was connected to the Internet but when opening a browser it showed error "DNS server not found" and the icon changed to a globe, indicating no internet connection.

Logged into modem and checked the log. At about the time Internet connection was lost, the log indicated "Missing BP configuration setting, TLV Type: 17.3". Researching that error provided little information. But one thing that was suggested was to change DNS Server setting in the router.

Changed router DNS server setting from Spectrum to CloudFlare. That fixed the problem, for a couple hours, then again lost Internet connection. Changed DNS settings back to Spectrum and it would work for a few hours and then fail again.

Contacted Spectrum and, while they couldn't run diagnostics on the modem because it is not a Spectrum modem (I purchased my own Netgear modem), they checked signal and said everything looked fine and indicated it might be a router issue. Spectrum suggested resetting the modem. Initially tried just power cycling both the modem and router but that didn't make a difference. Subsequently reset the modem but that didn't fix problem. Didn't want to reset the router because I have several custom settings and didn't know if they would successfully re-install. Thinking it might still be the modem, called Spectrum again, planning to ask them to send me a Spectrum modem. Before I made that request they again checked the modem and said it was not indicating any problems.

Purchased an Eero Wi-Fi system but before opening it, decided to try setting up an old modem to see if a different modem would display the same problem. Configured the old modem to use the same SSID and passwords as Orbi modem hoping devices would connect without having to change those settings on all devices. Both modems are dual band but the Orbi uses one SSID for both 2.4GHz and 5Ghz bands while the old modem used a different SSID for each band. Connected a couple devices to the old modem and was able to get a connection. Planned to leave the old modem connected for 24 hours to see if there was still a problem. Did some additional research and found a website with current information specific to the Orbi router, indicating the problem might be related to the recent change to Daylight Saving Time. Don't remember exactly when the problem started but that sounded promising so decided to switch back to the Orbi router.

Reconnected the Orbi and applied one of the suggested fixes, which was to go into the NTP settings on the modem, uncheck Adjust for Daylight Saving Time, and change the time zone to one hour earlier.

At this point, about 40 hours later, there has been no loss of internet. Have multiple devices connected: IOT devices, tablet, cell phone, computer on wi-fi and computer on ethernet. If continues to work, just have to make note to go into router and change the time zone in the Fall. Have not had this problem before when time changed, so Netgear may come out with a router update that fixes it.

Computer hack: tax information, passwords saved in browser

Was recently contacted by someone who was locked out of their computer. They got a call (supposedly from McAfee) indicating there was a problem with the security software on the computer. Unfortunately, they gave the intruder access to the computer and he changed the password. Owner shut computer down. Intruder called back several times asking for computer to be turned on but owner redid not turn it on. Intruder refused to provide account password.

There was only one user account on the computer, which, by default, was an Administrator account. I had worked on the computer in September 2020 and had done a backup at that time.

Did not initially connect the computer to the Internet. From another computer, created USB flash drive with Windows 10 using Microsoft media creation tool.

Procedure to reset password requires booting from that USB flash drive. When starting computer and pressing key to view boot devices, USB keyboard wasn't working. Had to connect PS2 keyboard to view boot devices to enable boot from USB.

After successfully changing the password and accessing user's account, compared files on computer to files on backup drive and all documents and downloads had been removed from the computer. All pictures were still there. Believe intruder transferred files to himself and possibly took copies of emails and contact list stored on the computer in AOL Desktop.

Left computer idle for a couple hours. Came back to shut it down and was prompted for Restart to finish installing update? Computer had not been on the Internet in over 48 hours. Update must have been downloaded a few days ago but didn't install until computer was idle for a while. Shut down computer and on restart it installed update.

Shut computer down again, booted from flash drive and chose option to Install Windows 10. Prompted for Windows product key but selected "I don't have product key". Chose option: Custom: Install Windows only (advanced). Thought this would delete all user files and user installed programs. Specified partition to install to (chose largest partition). Did not reformat partition. After setup completed there were numerous files on the computer from previous user and wasn't comfortable just deleting the files because couldn't be sure intruder hadn't hidden malware on the computer.

Next attempted to reset PC under Security & Update - Recover - Reset this PC and chose Remove everything. Not sure where it found files to use for installation. USB drive with Windows installation files was still in computer so maybe it used files from there. This attempt was successful.

The version of Windows was current (20H2). There were no user files on the computer and there was no Windows.old folder. Video resolution was not correct, but, after connecting to the Internet and installing additional Windows updates, video resolution was correct.

When resetting computer, created two user accounts, one with Administrator privileges and one as Standard user.

Caution:

The individual had multiple years of TurboTax information on the computer and PDF files of the final tax returns. Do not leave tax information on your computer. PDFs of the final tax return and backups of the datafile for the tax information should be stored on a thumb drive that is only used when working on taxes, not on an external USB drive that is always plugged into the computer.

Saved passwords are visible in Firefox but may have been old passwords. Browser history showed intruder had tried to log into financial accounts and also to change passwords on financial accounts. Saved passwords in Firefox were visible. Saved passwords in Chrome browser require entering Google account password in order to view them. Not sure whether saved passwords are visible in Edge browser.

Computer owner had already contacted bank and credit card company. Found name of other companies in Firefox under Saved Passwords and History and recommended contacting those companies. Also recommended putting a credit freeze at the three main Credit Reporting Agencies and changing online passwords.

Did not reinstall Firefox but did change settings under both Chrome and Edge browsers to not save passwords, payment information, or address information.

Did not reinstall AOL Desktop. Individual uses email on tablet and hoped to determine if intruder set up email forwarding but did not find a setting for forwarding in AOL mail through web browser. have to research if/where that setting would be in AOL mail. Provided instructions for accessing AOL Mail through web browser.

On a positive note:

Android to iPhone

In the past, switching from Android to iPhone was not an easy task. Was contacted by someone who had a Samsung Galaxy (Android) and had purchased an iPhone. Asked if I could help set it up. Verizon transfers the phone number but no longer assists with transferring data. Verizon did provide hand-written instructions and also a phone number to contact for assistance in completing the transfer.

Powered the iPhone on and proceeded through the setup process. It presented option to transfer from iPhone; transfer from Android; or No transfer. Choosing to transfer from Android, was prompted to download/install a specific app on the Android phone from the Google Play Store. After installing and opening that app, was prompted for a code that was displayed on one phone and had to be typed into the other. Then asked what to transfer. Don't remember all of the options but it included Pictures, Contacts, SMS Messages. Once those items transferred was asked if wanted help finding any of the Android apps in the Apple store but the phone owner was not interested in any of the apps so skipped that step.

Transfer went smoothly and all information was placed in the appropriate location on the iPhone.

The individual was initially worried about switching to IOS device but after going through the basics of buttons and sending/receiving messages and phone calls (yes, some people still make phone calls on their cell phone), they were comfortable with navigating the iPhone.

Upgrade to Windows 10

Free upgrade to Windows 10 is still available, using the Windows Media Creation Tool. Recently upgraded two different computers to Windows 10, one from Windows 7 and other from Windows 8.1. After upgrade, it verified it had a valid Product ID.

While I haven't personally experienced this during an upgrade, it is possible that some hardware on a specific computer might cause this not to work.

Have a computer that is already running Windows 10 v. 1909. When checking for updates, it indicates that an upgrade to v2004 is available and will be notified when it is ready to be installed. Researched the specific model and apparently it isn't upgrading due to issue with the video card/drivers. Based on that, I decided not to force the upgrade. If it had been running an earlier version of Windows and tried to upgrade to Windows 10, expect it would fail and, hopefully, reinstall the previous Windows version.

Plan 9 for Windows 10

By Greg Skalka, President, Under the Computer Hood User Group
Drive Light Newsletter — www.uchug.org — president (at) uchug.org

In “Plan 9 from Outer Space,” a low-budget 1959 sci-fi horror movie from Ed Wood, extraterrestrials in flying saucers try to stop the rash and violent humans on Earth from advancing their technology further and risking the destruction of the universe. They finally resorted to ‘Plan 9’, which involves resurrecting an army of dead humans to get our attention. The film is narrated and introduced by The Amazing Criswell, who greets the viewer with: “We are all interested in the future, for that is where you and I are going to be spending the rest of our lives!”

In the present day, minute spongy beings from a part of the galaxy known as Redmond Washington strive not for the attention of humans, but for their resources. Their goal to dominate the computer activities of humans has been successfully achieved over the last three decades through their operating systems and office suites. Their seventh Plan was highly successful, though their eighth was a flop and resulted in their loss of control over many humans. Faced with losing the human’s interest to other operating systems and new portable devices, these beings enacted Plan 9, which involved subscription software and a new OS, not referred to by the number 9, but instead 10. To tighten their grip on the resources of those humans still under their influence, they made their Plan 7 obsolete, hoping the humans would flock like zombies to their latest offering. Just as Criswell asks at the end of the 1959 film, “Can you prove that it didn’t happen?”

With Windows 7 security updates ending on 1/14/20, I knew last year that Windows 10 would be in my future, and so started making plans for switching my family over. I went through quite a few plans and a fair amount of resources, and though not quite as daunting as raising the dead, it was and continues to be a challenge that I hope to work out completely in the future. Here are the first four of my nine plans to that end.

Plan 1 - My Wife’s Desktop PC. Way back in October 2018, I was anticipating the end of Windows 7’s security in a year and formulating a plan to continue safe computing in the new decade. I wrote a newsletter column that month, outlining the pros and cons of the alternatives as I saw them. I recognized that I would be living dangerously in 2019, needing to do something before Win7 security updates ended on 1/14/20.

I was definitely going to be at risk, as practically all our computers were running Windows 7. My wife’s nine-year-old Acer desktop PC seemed to be constantly on the brink of a calamity, though I somehow managed to overcome minor hardware failures and Windows issues to keep it running. My primary computer was a six-year-old Fujitsu 14” laptop which ran fine, probably due to the care I gave it. My wife also had a six-year-old laptop. These Win7 computers met our needs, though due to their age lacked more modern features like USB3, Gigabit Ethernet, and solid-state drives. I’d put in upgrades where I could, but they were all past their primes.

I did have a two-year-old Lenovo desktop I had bought for myself and turned into what I call my “chameleon” computer. I had installed a 3.5” bare hard drive dock in a front bay in the case, so the boot hard drive could be easily changed. I envisioned having many boot drives with different operating systems for this computer, but I have only set up two so far - the original Win7 and a Win10 drive that I created by cloning the original drive and upgrading it while Microsoft was still offering free Windows 10 upgrades in 2016. Since I used Win7 at work and Win10 seemed a bit unstable in this upgrade arrangement, I really never used this computer, preferring to stick to my laptop.

The good husband that I am (and because I tired of working on her PC), I planned to replace my wife’s computer first in this conversion to Windows 10. None of our computers were worth upgrading, and I was less than thrilled about the results of my one upgrade experience. It was about time we got some new hardware with new features anyway.

I starting looking but didn't find any good deals for Black Friday in 2018. I unfortunately also am the type of person that needs a deadline to get motivated to do something, and January 2020 was still almost a year away. After seeing how Fry's Electronics seemed to be slowly circling the drain, I widened my search for computers and in August 2019 found a good deal at Costco. I bought my wife a Dell Inspiron 3670 desktop for \$549 (it was \$150 off). It had all sorts of good things, like a 9th generation Intel I5 processor, a 1 TB hard drive, and a 128 GB SSD, USB3.1, GigE, and HDMI. I was concerned about the relatively small SSD filling up, as in the past my wife and Microsoft's upgrades had often conspired to fill up the boot partition on her old PC. A good friend with extensive Win10 and SSD experience reassured me that 128 GB would be sufficient for the boot drive.

Plan 2 - Dual Monitors. A few weeks later, with the Dell PC box still unopened, Costco had a sale on Dell 24" monitors. I had been using dual monitors on my Win10 computer at my new job and really liked it. I bought two monitors for my wife's new computer, thinking it would help her feel better about the hassle of having to change computers. My friend reviewed the Dell computer's specs and assured me that it could run one monitor from the VGA out and the other from HDMI.

Plan 3 - My Mom's Desktop PC. Move ahead to November 2019, now only two months before the Win7 apocalypse. I still have not found the time or the urgency to open the box on my wife's new PC. I'm in Costco again and see that they are still selling the same model Dell PC (which is reassuring), and it happens to be on sale again for the same price. I knew my mom needed a new computer to replace her old Win7 desktop, and I had not come up with a Christmas gift for my parents. I decided to double down on the Dell computer and buy another one for them.

Now I had a bit more urgency, as I wanted to get it set up for them before Christmas, but unfortunately had no more spare time. I needed to set up my wife's PC first, so I finally opened the box on hers on December 23, as I had that week off from work.

Plan 4 - UEFI. I connected up my wife's new Dell PC on a card table with one of the new monitors. It powered up fine, and I saw that it had 36.6 GB used on the 128 GB SSD, with 67.1 GB free. I assumed (as I later confirmed) that Dell had used some of the SSD for recovery and diagnostics partitions, so the SSD was initially only 36% full, which seemed reasonable. After activating Windows, my next step was to make a backup of this "as delivered" configuration.

I have been using Acronis True Image for computer backups for many years and have been very happy with it. I know it works well as I have restored many times, the true test of a backup program. Although it can be installed on a PC, I have never done this. I prefer to use the boot CD that comes with the software to boot outside the OS and back up using the version running from the CD. There are fewer features in this version, but since I would need to use the bootable version should I have a hard drive failure, I felt always using it would make me more familiar and confident with it.

I pulled out my True Image 2017 CD, which had worked to back up my Win10 chameleon computer but ran into something new - UEFI. It stands for Unified Extensible Firmware Interface and is a replacement for the old BIOS (Basic Input/Output System) firmware that is now prevalent on new computers. It has many more capabilities and is more secure than the old BIOS. On this Dell, it was accessed the same as a BIOS, by holding the F12 key on startup. I selected the UEFI loader option in the displayed boot menu to boot from the DVD drive.

My True Image 2017 CD booted fine, but when running, the SSD drive did not show up in the program. Only the 1 TB hard drive was visible, so I could not back up the SSD. Seeing on the Acronis web site that I could no longer get support for my old version, I ordered the latest version, True Image 2020, from Amazon (at a lower cost than that listed on the Acronis site).

When my Amazon True Image arrived, I realized I had ordered a box with only an activation code - no CD was enclosed. I would have to download the software from the Acronis website. I was able to register there and download a bootable image file to burn to a DVD. Unfortunately, booting the new bootable version resulted in the same problem - the SSD was not visible to the program.

I finally had to break down and install True Image 2020 on the new computer, and when I ran it under Windows, the SSD was finally visible. I found an option under the rescue media builder tool for the simple method, which configures the boot media it creates to suit this computer best (no doubt taking UEFI into account). When I created a boot disc in this way, the bootable version was at last able to see the SSD. I could finally back up the way I was accustomed to, but now had a program installed that I didn't intend to install. My first back-up showed that 42.32 GB out of 103.8 GB on the SSD was now used (now 41%).

Feeling even more concerned about filling up the SSD, I decided that partitioning the 1 TB hard drive might help. If I split it into a 200 GB APPS partition and an 800 GB DATA partition, I could more easily install less critical programs on the hard drive, saving space on the SSD. I obviously could do this with the hard drive as it was, but a separate data partition would help in segregating backups of her critical and more frequently changing data.

I looked into using my standard partitioning program, Acronis Disk Director 12, but found again that when booted from its boot disc (as I'd have to use it if I were partitioning a new blank hard drive following an existing drive failure), it would not work. Per their web site, I'd need new Disk Director 12.5, which would support Win10. In a hurry, I downloaded and installed the 12.5 demo version from their web site, and while it would set up to partition, it would not create one (I'm not sure what it was supposed to be demonstrating). Fortunately, I remembered to look up Acronis on the APCUG web site and found a 5/25/19 article on Disk Director 12.5 and the link to Gene Barlow's User Group Relations web site. Gene represents Acronis products to user group members and sells download versions at a significant discount from the Acronis web prices. I purchased Disk Director 12.5 and got his email with the product key the next day.

After putting the key into the demo version I had already installed (yet another install into the SSD!), I was able to easily partition the 1 TB hard drive the way I wanted it. I did make many attempts to create a working boot media (meaning one that would see both drives in this computer) with the Disk Director Media Builder tool, and though there were many options, none I tried were successful. I didn't care at the time to partition the SSD, but someday I'll have to email Gene to see if he has a solution.

I next installed some essential utilities like the Chrome browser, Adobe reader, and printer drivers for our two HP network printers (all on the SSD). A new backup showed the SSD was now at 45% full. I was now almost ready to make the swap - this new Windows 10 PC for my wife's old Win7 desktop. I'd still have to transfer data and other programs over from old to new, and this would require a new plan. Unfortunately, it was now January 12, 2020, only two days before Win7 security support ends.

I'll describe my Windows 10 Plans 5 through 9 in a future column (where Criswell predicts we will all be in a month).

SOC - Save Our Connectors

By Greg Skalka, President, Under the Computer Hood User Group, CA
Drive Light newsletter — www.uchug.org — [president \(at\) uchug.org](mailto:president@uchug.org)

In the early part of the 20th century, the internationally recognized way to signal that your ship was in distress was to send a radio telegraph message of three dots, three dashes, and three dots in Morse Code. This translated to "SOS", which, though selected as a distinctive pattern, became associated with the phrases "Save Our Souls" and "Save Our Ship." Though rarely used in Morse Code these days, SOS in the printed and spoken forms is still associated with distress situations.

When our tech devices are in distress, they seldom send us such a clear and unmistakable signal of their condition. We usually have to interpret indications of faulty operation to determine when and why our devices are having problems. One problem our devices can have is failing connectors. There are very few truly "wireless" devices in our technology collections; most involve connections through wires or cables at some point in their operation. Interconnecting, charging, and reading/writing data to devices almost always involves some wired connections. These wired connections are typically made through physical electrical

connectors on the devices and cables, and unfortunately, these connectors, being mechanical, can and do wear out and fail, especially if frequently connected and disconnected.

We may think of our smartphones as wireless devices, and in most modes of operation, they are. They still come with an electrical connector, however, as that is the most convenient and sometimes only way to charge their internal battery and connect them to other devices for data transfer. The connectors used are usually USB, typically the large Type-A on computers and the smaller Mini, Micro, and Type C on portable devices, while Apple products use the small Lightning connector. These connectors have a rated life that often ranges from a thousand insertions or removals to ten thousand, with 5,000 typical for a good connector. Five thousand connections or disconnections for a connector's lifetime may seem like a lot, but if you charge a smartphone every day, that uses up two per day or 730 in a year. Connect to the phone three times a week to offload photos and you have over 1000 connections per year, meaning your phone's connector might work reliably for only five years.

If you bought a lower-end product, used poor-quality cables, or used less care in connecting them or protecting them while connected (allowing large side forces on the cable connector, for example), the lifetimes of the connectors will wind up being even shorter. Lower-cost devices and cables may use low-cost, less reliable connectors. Some connector types may be less costly to manufacturers but also less reliable (such as the now less frequently used USB Mini).

In the test engineering world, especially for military products, connector savers are often used to prevent the useful life of product connectors from being reduced by interconnections made in product testing and debug. Connector savers are small adapters with the same type on each end, but with opposite genders. When plugged into a product connector, the connector saver presents to the world the same type and gender as the product connector. The connector saver is plugged into and removed from the product only once in the test cycle, with any necessary additional connections made during testing to the expendable connector saver.



Photo 1: Magnetic Power Cable

To make your consumer electronic products last longer, you should extend the connector saver concept to your heavily used devices. I have had several perfectly good tech items become unreliable or unusable due to connector problems. Fortunately, there are ways to improve the reliability of failing connectors, as well as steps that can be taken to prevent connector wear failures and extend the life of product connectors.

For most of us, our smartphones are in constant use, sometimes requiring multiple charges per day. The risk of wearing out the power/data connectors (on device and cable) is significant if you plan to keep the phone for some time. The cable can usually be replaced when its connectors become unreliable, but when the phone's connector wears out, it usually cannot be changed. Fortunately, there are now some new products that follow the connector saver concept for USB Micro and C connectors, as well as Apple Lightning.



Photo 2: Mag Cable Adapters - C and Lightning and Micro



Photo 3: Magnetic Power Cable Adapter

Search "magnetic charging cable" on Amazon and you will find some products that hold contact connections together using small but powerful rare-earth magnets. A small magnetic connector adapter is plugged into the phone connector; the cable connects to this adapter through a strong magnet in the cable end, holding them together. This saves the phone's connector as the adapter remains with the phone and the connection breaks between the two magnetic pieces.

There are cables for charging only (a two-wire connection) as well as cables for data transfer (four-wire). Most come with adapters for USB C and Micro, as well as Lightning.

I have been using a magnetic data cable with my Samsung smartphone for a month and it works well for charging and transferring data (I have used the Amazon TOPK data cable set and the power cable set by Terasako



Photo 4: 4 wire Magnetic Data Cable and Adapter on Phone



Photo 5: Mag Cable Charging a Smartphone

Because these tiny adapters contain powerful magnets, care must be taken to keep them away from anything that is magnetically sensitive. The adapters are small and pose the same risks to children as small neodymium magnets.

Another connector saving option for smartphones, smartwatches, and tablets is the inductive charger. Many devices, including some from Apple and Samsung, follow the Qi wireless charging standard. A wire coil and additional circuitry built into these phones and devices allow a complimentary charging pad to transfer power to the device through inductive coupling. Small wireless charging receiver pads can also be added to the outside of older smartphones (plugging into the normal charging connector) to make them compatible with the Qi charging pads. These wireless charging schemes eliminate connector wear, but inductive charging is less efficient (may take longer) than direct charging.



Photo 6: iPhone on Inductive Charging Pad

Though the magnetic charging cables work well, I've yet to find one that includes USB Mini in its adapter line-up. The USB Mini connector has a reputation for poor reliability, yet it has been used on many non-phone tech products. I have had three products so far with failed USB Mini connections.

I once had a set of three identical USB2 external, hardware-encrypted hard drives (2.5" drive form factor) that I used to store and back up my most important personal and financial data. The drives had USB Mini connectors on their cases and connected to PCs through USB A to Mini cables that came with the drives. After years of use (where I disconnected the cables from the drives when not in use), the cable connection to the drives became unreliable. Trading the cables around helped, as did twisting the cables to put more pressure on the connector, but eventually, I was forced to buy new USB3 drives and discard the old ones. My new drives have a different USB3 connector, but I now leave the cables connected to those drives.

I have a pair of rechargeable bike lights (front and rear) that I normally recharge at least once a week;

they have USB Mini connectors to their charging cables. Recently I have been having problems charging them; I've had to twist the cable around to make good contact with the connector in the lights. A USB Mini magnetic charging cable would help, but they are not available.



Figure 8: Bike Lights with Adapters & Mag Cable



Photo 8: USB Mini Adapter

I was able to buy a small USB Mini to USB Micro or C adapters. I cannot keep these adapters on the lights as connector savers, as they are too big in this application, but the adapters do help make a better connection to the lights. I am presently using the adapters in conjunction with the magnetic charging cable; this has improved the reliability of the connection. Since I am still making frequent connections to the light's connectors, I will no doubt eventually need to buy new bike lights.

I have an auto dashcam (photo 9) that I normally power from a battery through its USB Mini connector. For several years I frequently moved it between cars, disconnecting that Mini connection and eventually wearing it out. Fortunately in this application, I can use the same USB Mini adapter but leave it on at all times, disconnecting it at the magnetic charging/data cable. This seems to be more reliable, and I will now not have to wear the dashcam connector out any further.



Photo 9: Dash Cam with Adapter and Mag Cable



Photo 10: USB2 Hub and Flash Drive

The USB Type-A receptacle connectors used on computers and laptops are very robust, but even they wear out eventually. I still run an XP computer as it supports interfaces and programs I cannot run elsewhere. I no longer have it connected to my home network, so I transfer files to and from it through USB Flash drives. After 15 years of use, the two front-panel USB ports on the computer have become unreliable; I often must wiggle the Flash drives to allow them to be recognized. To provide continued access to the computer, I connected a cheap four-port USB hub into one of the computer's rear-panel USB ports. This provides handy access and acts as a connector saver for the rear ports.

Though your device connectors cannot send a distress signal (other than by failing), you can help extend their lives by using the connector saver concept on heavily-used connectors where possible. Magnetic charging cables, wireless inductive chargers, adapters, and USB hubs can all play a part in reducing connector wear and keeping your devices running longer. Avoid connector disasters - Save Our Connectors!

Transferring and Preserving Photos

By Dan Douglas, President, Space Coast PCUG, FL

May 2020 issue, The Space Coast PC Journal — www.scpcug.org — datadan (at) msn.com

Transferring and preserving photos is probably the single most common activity that practically all of us perform. Let's break this into two parts – A) the actual transfer of the picture files; B) how to store them.

A) The source of pictures can be varied, although I'm sure the most common today is via Smart Phone. The most common way to transfer pictures from a phone is to use a direct USB cable connection. The phone usually appears as a storage drive to the Windows file explorer and allows you to identify those files that need to be manipulated (copied/moved/deleted/edited/ etc.) as you would with any file stored on

any of your storage drives. They may also come from an actual camera using a storage card or even through a direct WiFi connection that is available on some models. Of course, pictures may also originate as email attachments or as downloads from web sites. Some of these allow direct transfer to a directory/library/folder located on your local PC.

B) By default, Windows 10 creates a folder called Pictures for each user account on a PC. This allows each user to maintain their library of files separate from other users on the same PC.

As with any collection of files, you want to think about how to organize them into sub-folders to allow for easy access later. The fact that picture files from phones and cameras will have additional information stored internally, such as the date and place the picture was taken, which will allow for ease of searching and categorizing later. This information is stored as part of the picture file as an Exchangeable image file format for digital still cameras (EXIF) standards. The storage can be on whatever is convenient and appropriate for what you want to do with them.

So for ease of portability, a USB memory stick can be ideal – cheap and readable by practically any device with a USB port. An SD memory card is common in many cameras and the micro SD card is commonly used in many other types of devices, such as android phones and other recording devices. CDs and DVDs were quite common ways to backup pictures a few years ago, but they have fallen out of use due to accessibility, speed, capacity, longevity, and cost considerations.

Of course, the best way today to ensure that you can always access your pictures is to use one of the many cloud services, many of which are already tied to your phone and PC. Refer to the April 2020 journal for a complete discussion of cloud storage options.

Virtual Meetings – How to get together - Without getting together

By Phil Sorrentino, Contributing Writer, The Computer Club
June 2020 — www.sccccomputerclub.org — [Philsorr \(at\) yahoo.com](mailto:Philsorr@yahoo.com)

Under normal conditions, we'd probably be looking forward to a meeting where we can get together with friends, but during these coronavirus days, it's better to get together without getting together. In fact, staying at least six feet apart is encouraged by everyone at all levels of authority. Fortunately there's Video Chatting, or is it Video conferencing? I used to think there was a difference. I thought of Chatting as one person to one person, and Video Conferencing as one person to many, as in making a presentation to a group of people. But now it seems like Video Chatting or Video Conferencing are used almost interchangeably. So what is the current thinking? One definition provided is, "Chatting is a form of conversation between two or more members over the internet". So Video Chatting would be a conversation between two or more members employing video-capable devices, over the internet; but that sounds like video conferencing. Definitions and terms may not be very important here, what's really important is the fact that we can interact with others using video-capable devices, over the internet (sounds like client-server technology to me). And, conveniently, these devices can be computers, tablets, or smartphones from any manufacturer.

Video conferencing or chatting is being used for a variety of reasons like Team meetings (The Computer Club Board of Directors just had their first virtual BOD meeting while everyone was social distancing in their own homes.), Webinars, where there's no interaction between attendees other than a textbox, One-on-One training and support, job interviews, attending religious ceremonies (We just attended church on Sunday in our living room.) and even telemedicine where you and a doctor interact via video conference.



Typical PC Video Conferencing Screen

Video conferencing allows people who are in different geographic locations to communicate by providing live audible and visual connections between them. Video conferencing technology includes audio and visual aspects so the following are the components of a typical Video conferencing setup: Internet connection (Ethernet, Wi-Fi), Displays (laptop, desktop monitor, smartphone), cameras and microphones (webcams with built-in microphones), speakers (built-in or external speakers), video conferencing software.

Fortunately, there are a lot of Video Chatting/Conferencing software options available today. Things were not as available a few years ago when I started having a video conference with three college friends. We were spread out in the US in four separate states. I was here in Florida, one friend was in S. Carolina, another friend was in Tennessee, and the fourth was in Arizona (so we had to deal with different time zones). At that time, the only practical/free application that we knew of, and could afford, was Skype. So we used Skype, once a month, every month for almost a year. Initially, it took up to a half-hour to get everyone set up and communicating, but by the time we stopped conferencing we had gotten it down to only a couple of minutes of preparation. (From what I've seen lately, Skype seems to be a whole lot easier to use now.)

But, nowadays, you have a lot of choices. Skype, which has been around since 2003, is still a good choice. Other fairly well-known choices are WebEx, GoToMeeting, Zoom, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Some other, possibly less known, choices are Microsoft Meet, Google Hangouts, Jitsi Meet, and BlueJeans. And don't forget Duo and Facetime, which were initially intended for smartphones, though they say that under certain conditions they can work with appropriate computers. Duo is available for Android and Apple devices while Facetime is available only for Apple devices. Some of these Video Conferencing choices are free, some have a free version and some have only paid versions. Having an account or a subscription (if there is a cost) allows you to set up and initiate a conference; there is usually no cost for attendees. Zoom has been in the news lately, once positively, for its increase in stock price because so many people have been using it, and once negatively for its poor security and the infamous "Zoombombing". (In fact, some companies have prohibited employees from using Zoom.) Some of the security concerns revolved around the choice of certain defaulted settings. These default choices have recently been changed to improve certain aspects of security, but the main security problem is the fact that communication between devices is not encrypted. Maybe this will be changed in the future.

If you are trying to decide which video conferencing software might be best for you, there are a few things to consider. Cost is always an important consideration, especially if it is only going to be used for personal use. If the software is used in a business it might be easier to handle the monthly expense. Next, the number of participants may be important, especially if you have a large number of people to communicate with. The free versions will probably have lower maximums. There may be a time limit for meetings, especially with the free version. Screen sharing, which may or may not be available, is the ability for one person to have their desktop or a specific window shown on all of the participant's screens. This allows a presenter to show everyone the same information, like the

slides of a PowerPoint presentation. Some packages may offer an amount of “free cloud storage” along with the software. That may be useful for sending large files (larger than could be sent in an email) to the meeting participants. This may also be useful if you intend to do cooperative document development. Messaging between participants during the meeting is the ability to send a short “text like” message to all of the participants, allowing inter-participant communications. Messaging may be desirable for large presentations. Having a permanent record of the meeting, for future review, may be important, so you may want a “Recording” feature. Some software might have Calendar syncing which is the ability to interact with certain calendars and allow meetings to be automatically put on the participants’ calendars. Whiteboard capabilities allow the participants to interact with programs, documents, and images, a feature may be only needed for business meetings. Security is always a concern and increased security probably comes with increased cost.

So, whenever you can, take advantage of Video Teleconferencing and your Windows PCs, Apple PCs, Android, and Apple mobile devices to help you get together without getting together.

Dan’s Desk—What is Streaming?

By Dan Douglas, President, Space Coast PCUG, Florida

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On the surface, we have been ‘streaming’ since the days of radio. Basically, you have a receiving device, like a radio, and a ‘broadcast’, like a radio frequency that you use the device to select and play. The same concept applies to TVs as well. You select a particular channel on the TV to play a selected broadcast frequency received through an antenna.

Streaming in the current sense is very similar; we use an application (app) to select a particular stream of data through the internet. In effect, we use the app to communicate to a remote server to request that a particular file is sent to our device. The app and the device then decode that file in a way that is appropriate for the user. On a smart TV/Roku/Apple TV/Fire TV stick/Chromecast/etc., an app like ESPN will allow you to select a particular show (like a channel or data stream) for playback on the TV. For a computer, it is the same; the app will select a particular data file to be displayed on the monitor and/or played through the audio system. The advantages of subscribed or paid apps versus free ones are usually two factors: fewer or no commercials and access to more content. Many apps, such as Hulu have multiple tiers of use: Free, limited commercials, no commercials, live TV channels. Some apps such as CBS All Access may offer shows such as Star Trek Discovery or Picard to only the subscribers of that channel.

Common Streaming Devices

Smart TVs – TVs connected to the internet that have apps available to playback content from free or subscribed providers.

ROKU, Apple TV, Fire TV Stick, Chromecast, etc. – a standalone box that connects to a display of some sort, like a TV, that contains access to various apps that provide for streaming content from free or subscribed providers.

Web Browsers (Microsoft Edge/Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, Firefox, Safari, etc.) - the web browser is an app running on a PC Operating System (Windows, Mac OS, etc.) that allows you to select a server to connect to through the use of the Uniform Resource Locator (URL), or more commonly called the web address. The address itself can be the actual stream that is then played through various web browser functions.

Popular Apps

Here is a list of some of the frequently installed and mentioned apps across all devices in no particular order. You can go to the website for each for details on content, pricing, etc.

Movie Streaming

Netflix, VUDU, Movies Anywhere, Amazon Prime Video, Hulu, Disney +, Apple TV +, Fandango Now, Tubi (free), Google Play Movies & TV, Roku Channel (free), Acorn TV, BritBox, YouTube (free), Crackle (free)

Live TV Watching

Hulu, AT&T TV, Sling TV, YouTube

TV Channels on Demand

CBS All Access, PBS (free), Showtime, NFL, ESPN, HBO Go, A&E, ABC, Fox, NBC, SYFY, USA, BBC America, AMC

Music

Amazon Music, Stingray Qello Concerts, Sirius XM, Pandora

Plus thousands of others with more being created every day it seems. No matter what your tastes are, there is an app for it! I hoped this served as a general introduction to streaming and now enjoy!

About Reading and Using Goodreads

By Steve Costello

Retired, former user group officer and newsletter editor, grandfather, blogger, creative writing prompt blog participant, and loves to read.

Computers, Technology, and User Groups Blog: <http://ctublog.sefcug.com/>

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A Little Background

I read or want to read and review, as well as getting recommendations for new books to read. She has asked me to put together an article about how I use Goodreads so, the following will show you how I use it, and hopefully it can help you in these times of social distancing and isolation.

I have been using Goodreads since the beginning of 2012. As of this writing, I have read almost 1500 books since I joined up.

Get Started

First, go to goodreads.com. You will come to a page where you can read about Goodreads, and sign up for your own account, which is free.

Once you have signed up, set up your profile and account settings.

In your profile the only required field is your First Name, the rest of the fields are optional include as little or as much as you feel comfortable with, you can always go back and edit the profile later.

In settings, you can set privacy preferences, who can view various items, send private messages, and more.

The Home Page

When you sign in Goodreads will open to the Home page. The Home page contains information about what you are currently reading, if anything, an ad, a link to News & Interviews, the current year's Reading Challenge progress, a list of your current bookshelves, and more on the left-hand side, the right-hand side will show updates from your friends.

The My Books Page

The top section of the page has a search box where you can search for a book or author to add books to your shelves.

On the left-hand side, is a listing of your bookshelves with a count of the contents; reading activity links, add book links, and tools.

The right-hand side contains columns of your recorded books, which can be sorted in many ways. The way I use these columns is to go to my want-to-read bookshelf or a specific bookshelf, and sort by date added to figure out my next read.

Browse Page

On this page, you will find links to Recommendations, Choice Awards, Giveaways, New Releases, Lists, Explore, and News & Interviews.

I use Recommendations when I am looking to find a new author to read, and this is only occasionally as I have over 2,000 on my want-to-read shelf.

I check the Giveaways link daily to see if there is something I would like to get for review. This is also a way to find a new author. The giveaways can be either print or Kindle versions, and you will receive an email if you win telling you how and when it will be received.

The other link I use from this page is the New Releases. I use this at the beginning of each month and then place a hold at my local library site for new releases from authors I like to read.

Community Page

This page has links to Groups, Discussions, Quotes, Ask the Author, Trivia, Quizzes, Creative Writing, People, and Events. I don't know much about these links, but some might be interested.

Conclusion

I hope that this gives you a good idea of what Goodreads is all about, and gets you to sign up and start recording what you are reading. If you want to get an idea of what I read check out my Goodreads at <https://www.goodreads.com/sefccw>. If you have joined up, you can also follow me, add me as a friend, message me, and compare books at the same URL after signing in.

Also, I like to go back and read early books in a series if I like the author. Just check the author's page to see if there is a listing of the books in a series, which will be in book number order, and then see if your library has a copy you can borrow, or find on Amazon, Google Play Books, thrift stores, yard sales, or anywhere else that might have them.

Happy reading!

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