Midland Computer Club
Midland Michigan

BITS AND BYTES

MARCH 2022

https://mcc.apcug.org/

ARTICLE INDEX

Articles in this Newsletter have been obtained from APCUG with the authors' permission for publication by APCUG member groups. The Midland Computer Club has not verified the information contained in the articles nor tested procedures or hardware/software. Articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the Midland Computer Club.

GENERAL CLUB MEETING
VIA ZOOM

Wednesday, March 23, 2022
6:00 P.M.

Editor's Notes

From APCUG Workshop - January 26, 2022

Snapseed photo editing
Snapseed photo editor for iPhone/iPad and Android. Also works on Chromebooks that have Google Play Store.
https://geeksontour.com/2022/01/jan-26-2022-apcug-snapseed-for-editing-photos/
(Can view video but class materials requires membership.)

Video editing
https://screencast-o-matic.com/

Sites for Seniors

Geeks on Tour
Some presentations require a membership to view. Over 700 tutorials on website.
Geeksontour.com
Geeks on Tour YouTube channel

Tech For Senior
https://www.techforsenior.com/home

Chromebook End of Life
Approximately 6.5 years and then Chromebook is no longer supported and no longer receives either OS or Security updates. Can continue to use the Chromebook but recommendation is to buy a new one.

How to See Your Chromebook's End-of-Life Date (howtogeek.com)

The AUE (Auto Update Expiration) is dependent on when the computer is manufactured, not when it was purchased so suggest checking the expiration date before purchasing a new Chromebook. Information is available on https://support.google.com/chrome/a/answer/6220366?hl=en

Acer Chromebook purchased new July 2019, AUE is June, 2022.

Dell Chromebook purchased new October 14, 2019, AUE is 2025.

Windows Edge Browser
After Edge updates, some Privacy and Security settings get changed. If you have changed any settings in Edge, when notified of an update, good to go in to Settings and check if your settings have been changed.

Robot or human?
Recently tried to access Walmart.com using Edge browser and a window displayed a captcha which instructed to click on a button to prove you're a human. There was a Cancel button on the screen so clicked on that.

Robot or human?

Activate and hold the button to confirm that you're human. Thank You!

PRESS & HOLD

Try a different method
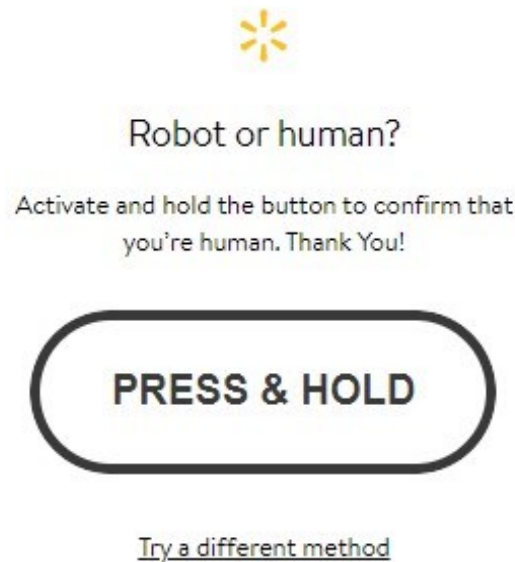
From Google Chrome browser was able to access Walmart website successfully.

Went back to Edge browser, reentered walmart.com and again got Robot or human? prompt. Clicked the Press & Hold button and a progress bar started to fill the space from left to right. Had a "What am I doing?" moment, and clicked the cancel button, which cancelled the progress. Wondering if it had to do with VPN so temporarily disabled VPN and was able to access WalMart website. However, later, after re-enabling the VPN was also able to successfully access WalMart website with no captcha.

Checked browser History and website address it showed when the Robot or human? page appeared was https://www.walmart.com/blocked?... with a large string of characters following.

Appears this may be a valid action by WalMart based on traffic from specific ranges of ISP's based on web search. A responder from Australia said the notification is IP address specific and designed to prevent BOT traffic, and he said he gets the captcha in Australia. One recommendation was to use a VPN which isn't very helpful, since I was using a VPN. Of course other suggestions were extensive and required booting into Safe Mode, etc., none of which would have any effect and just result in a lot of wasted time and effort.

Complete Robocall Deterrence
A two-step approach: prevent the ring and convince the robocaller that your line is disconnected.
Part 3 of a 3-part article series
By John Krout, Presenter & Newsletter Contributor
Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society—https://www.patacs.org
jkrout.apcug.presenter (at) gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

In Part 1 of this series, you learned how to configure your smartphone so that only your Contacts will ring your phone, a Whitelist strategy.

In Part 2, you learned robocall systems respond to the Special Information Tones (SIT) that begin certain phone network messages, such as the number has been disconnected, by removing the dialed number from the robocall systems internals list of known valid numbers. In addition, you learned how to obtain a recording of SIT, how to record your voice, and how to combine SIT and your voice recording into a complete voicemail greeting using Audacity.

In this conclusion, you will learn how to record that complete greeting as your custom voicemail greeting, using your computer to play the combined greeting while your phone "listens." The key to this puzzle is that the smartphone and the recording system for voicemail greetings expect greeting sounds to come in through the smartphone's microphone.

There are at least three ways to feed audio from your computer into the smartphone microphone.

THE SIMPLE APPROACH

The low-tech, low fidelity way is to use your computer to "speak" into the phone.

The steps are simple: prepare to play the combined greeting on your computer speakers. Then, on your phone, work through the steps to begin recording your customized voicemail greeting. Hold the phone up to the computer speaker, tap the final Record button on the phone, and immediately start the audio playback on the computer. When the combined greeting playback is done, tap the Stop Recording button on the phone.

There are problems with this simple approach. First, this approach also records environmental sounds such as air conditioning or heating, other people, or passing vehicles. Second, the quality of the recording is limited by the quality of the speakers. The weakest link in any audio system is the speakers. Third, we need to make sure the high frequencies of the SIT are faithfully recorded so that robocaller systems, when they reach voicemail, will have no doubt that robocallers have heard and recognized SIT at the start of your greeting.

THE WI-FI APPROACH

It is possible to connect and transfer audio from my computer to the microphone device of my Android phone. Using this approach, the phone can record the incoming audio from the computer, just as if the audio was being delivered through the microphone. However, since speakers are not involved, the audio received is high quality. Simple improvements can further increase audio quality.

To make this happen, I found and tested an Android app called **SoundWire**, and its corresponding personal computer application called **SoundWire server**. Both are freely available. There are versions of SoundWire Server available for Windows, Linux, and Raspberry Pi. The app is available on the Google Play Store, and SoundWire Server can be obtained from this URL: http://georgielabs.net.

The basic idea is that the SoundWire Server captures audio being played on your computer and sends captured audio via your Local Area Network Wi-Fi to the SoundWire app on your phone. The SoundWire app on your phone then injects the incoming audio into your smartphone's microphone device and plays it on your phone's internal speakers.

To accomplish the SoundWire connection of the app and the server, you must not run a Virtual Private Network (VPN) client on your computer or phone. Using a VPN client means the two cannot be connected via your WiFi.

STEP 1. Start the SoundWire Server application on your computer. Initially, SoundWire Server will display a window like that shown in **Illustration 1.** Note the status **Disconnected,** which appears in red and is circled. That status is normal at startup.
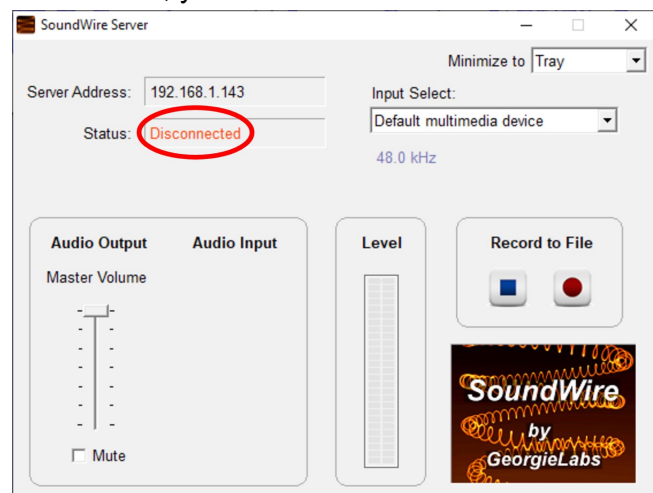

Illustration 1

STEP 2. On your computer, start the audio playback application, which will play your combined audio greeting. Then, load the combined audio greeting in that application.

STEP 3. On your Android smartphone, start the SoundWire app. It will look like the app shown in **Illustration 2**. Note the big wire-filled button which dominates the app screen.

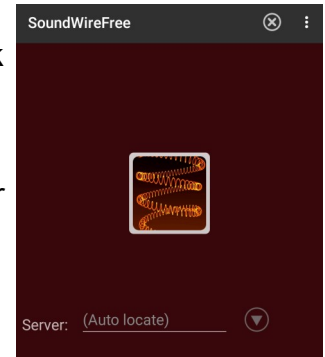**STEP 4.** This step connects the SoundWire app and the SoundWire server application across your Wi-Fi.

Illustration 2

On your smartphone, tap and hold the wire-filled button in the SoundWire app for about 1/3rd second. The SoundWire Server application status should change to Connected on the computer, as shown in **Illustration 3**.
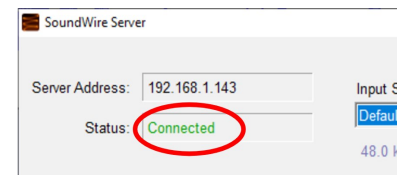

Illustration 3

The SoundWire connection method described above is known as the **automatic method**. If it does not work for you, try the **manual method**, as follows.

Note the IP address displayed by the SoundWire server, in the field Server Address, directly above the Status field. You can see that IP address in Illustration 1.

Type that IP address into the SoundWire app field named Server. Then re-try the long tap on the big button in the app.

When you connect SoundWire for the first time, I suggest you use a smartphone voice recording app to test audio transfer and recording quality on the phone. There is an excellent variety of free voice recording apps available on the Google Play Store for this testing purpose.

THE TEST

After establishing the SoundWire connection, as shown above, start the voice recording app on your smartphone, tap the Record button in that app, and start your audio playback application on your computer. For example, the phone on my WiFi received audio about 1/4 second after the computer played it.

Here are more steps to improve audio quality when using SoundWire. While using SoundWire, the Android phone physical microphone still works. However, it will pick up audio from your computer speakers, which means the voice recorder app will pick up an echo, and it will pick up ambient environmental noises. I strongly suggest blocking the smartphone microphone with duct tape, electrical tape, or the like to prevent that. Also, while doing the test, I strongly recommend listening to the computer audio on earbuds or headphones instead of speakers.

When the computer audio finishes playing, tap the Stop button of the voice recorder app on your phone. Play back the voice recorder recording to make it recognizable, fairly loud, and free of ambient noises and echoes.

USING THE COMBINED GREETING ON ANDROID

Since each carrier and smartphone have different ways of starting and ending an effort to record the customized voice greeting, I must leave those details for you to figure out.

On Verizon Wireless, my Samsung Galaxy S10 phone, running Android 10 (and later 11), the voicemail greeting recording is found in the Voicemail app Settings. I strongly suggest practicing the recording start steps two or three times to become familiar with the somewhat complex sequence of steps before you attempt the actual recording.

Once you figure it out, the recording process is basically the same as the test process above. However, instead of using the voice recorder app, you use the Voicemail app or whatever other app your carrier and smartphone provide for recording a customized voicemail greeting.

ANALOG AUDIO CONNECTION TO IPHONE

I could not find an iPhone equivalent for SoundWire. So, for iPhones, the approach is to feed analog audio coming from the computer speaker/headphone socket into the headset socket of the iPhone.

Such a technique faces some challenges. First, the audio level coming out from a headphone socket is line level; the audio level expected on the headset socket is mic level, roughly 1/1,000th of the line level voltage. We need a method to reduce that audio signal voltage. Cables that accomplish this signal voltage reduction are called **attenuator cables.** Second, the iPhone headset socket includes a microphone input connection and two headphone output connections. We need a way to connect the analog audio from the computer specifically to the socket's microphone input connection.

These days, a single cable can resolve both issues. For example, some **attenuator cables** provide a monophonic 1/8th inch diameter phono socket and a 1/8th inch diameter plug for connection to the iPhone headset socket.

The third challenge was more vexing. Even when the Windows 10 audio volume was fully turned up, my audio feed volume to my phone's headset socket was **so low** that Verizon Wireless refused to use my custom voicemail greeting. Instead, Verizon Wireless switched automatically to the default greeting, in which it announces my phone number. Finally, I added a **mixer** in the cable path to amplify the audio signal a bit. I expect few readers will own a mixer, and mixers can be expensive. An alternative way to amplify the signal is to use an analog audio device that may already be in your hands: a **stereo receiver**. But the cable cost is still substantial. Since I am an audio recording enthusiast, I had a mixer and cables on hand, but most people will have to buy them.

Stereo breakout cable *Patch cable* *Attenuator cable*

Connect plug to **computer stereo output socket**

Connect to socket on breakout cable and socket on attenuator cable

Connect plug to **smart phone headset socket**
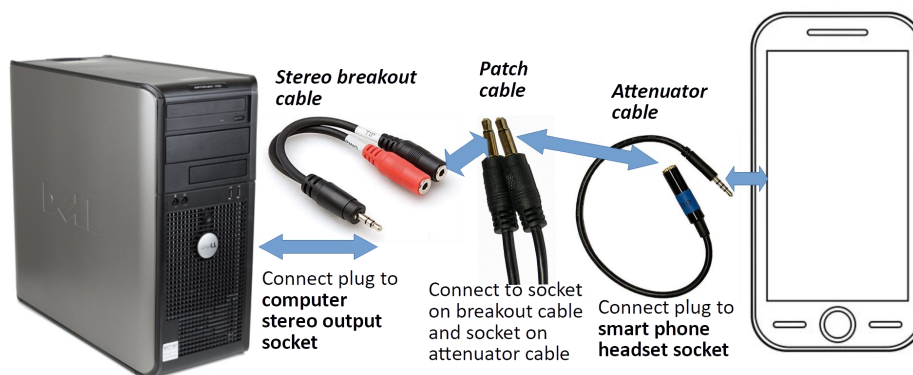
Illustration 4

For my initial attempt, during which I found the volume was too low, I used an inexpensive set of cables, as shown in **Illustration 4**. Overall, this cable set costs only about $35 on Amazon. The most expensive is the Attenuator cable, at about $22. Please note that the patch cable is monophonic since the microphone input on the phone headset socket is monophonic.

Recently, my son found audio software for his Windows 10 laptop that drives the speaker output to greater audio volume than is possible using the normal Windows 10 audio controls. The software, I thought, could eliminate the sound amplification hardware requirement. That would make the original, least expensive cable set shown in Illustration 4 work.

I found the software my son uses, **Sound Booster** by Letasoft, which works for 14 days as a free trial, though the free trial version drops out the volume boost for 5 seconds once every 2 minutes. Also, Sound Booster is available for Windows only. So, I found some alternatives to Sound Booster. I cannot test all the other options, and I do not have a Mac for testing in any event. Here is a table listing many of the alternatives.

Software title	Download from	Works on Mac	Works on Win10	license
Boom 2	https://www.globaldelight.com/	yes	yes	Single payment $14.99
Sound Boost-er Lite	https://soundbooster.froyosoft.com/soundbooster.php	yes	no	Free
DeskFX	https://www.nchsoftware.com/deskfx/index.html	yes	yes	Free for personal use

Once you establish a setup like this, I suggest you do some tests with the **Voice Memos app** of the iPhone to find an appropriate volume knob setting on the stereo receiver. You can find that app in the iPhone **Utilities** folder. Fortunately, there is no need to block the physical microphone on the iPhone since connecting audio into the microphone connection in the headset socket disables the iPhone physical microphone.

Before you record your combined greeting as a custom voicemail greeting, I suggest you practice the steps required to start that greeting recording process a few times so the steps become familiar.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If you feel plagued with robocalls and their voicemails, as I did, the results will justify the work and the dollars. As I mentioned in Part 2, while using such a combined greeting on my smartphone, my rate of incoming robocalls has fallen from 25 per week to 2 per week, and my rate of robocall voicemails has fallen from 10 per week to *zero per week*, in about eight months.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John Krout has been writing about creative uses of personal computers since the early 1980s, and more recently, about creative uses of smartphones. He finished a long career as a software engineer with 14 years as a technical writer for a federal contractor. He lives in Arlington, Virginia, with his son, many computers and cameras, and too many cats.

Adiós, Dashlane. Hello Keeper!
Dashlane No Longer Supports Desktop App
By Kurt Jefferson, Editor, CKCS Newsletter
October 2022 Issue — https://ckcs.org/ — lextown2 (at) gmail.com

After using Dashlane for many years, I stopped using the popular password manager. Why? The company decided to no longer support its desktop app on either Mac or Windows.

Let me be clear.

I wish Dashlane well. But because Dashlane was one of the most expensive, secure, well–designed

password managers, I would expect the company to continue providing both a desktop app that sits on the Dock of my Mac along with a web extension for Safari, Firefox, Brave, Chrome, and other popular browsers.

Dashlane developers have decided to only provide a web browser extension on Mac and Windows machines.

This means there will no longer be any updates for the desktop app. Password manager apps are one of the most important apps on your computer – and they need to be updated to keep your data secure.

I rely on both tools – a desktop app that I can open at any time by simply clicking on the Dock icon and a browser extension I can use when using Firefox or Safari (my two most–used browsers.) A January 2021 Dashlane blog announced the news: "Today, we're sharing an update that we plan to discontinue support for the Mac and Windows apps. We estimate we'll be sunsetting the app at the end of 2021, and in the meantime, you can continue to use the desktop apps; however, we'll no longer be updating their design, features, or functionality."

Why the change? Dashlane writes in its blog, "We made this decision because we believe it's the highest quality and most secure experience we can deliver to our customers, putting us closer in line with our principles. In addition to details in this post about this new web experience, we'll provide frequent updates between now and when we stop supporting the desktop apps—so there'll be no surprises."

Surprises? Dashlane might be surprised to discover that many long–time users may well abandon ship.

It seems to be a strange time for a major password manager developer to alienate its user base. But, with the Delta variant and other strains of Covid still raging in Kentucky, the U.S., and the world, a supply chain that is broken beyond belief, and entire industries pleading for workers to apply for jobs, is now the right time to kill a major part of your software package?

Anyway, since I had used other leading password managers, including LastPass and1Password, I opted for another top–tier product: Keeper.

In its 2021 review, PCMag.com rates Keeper "Outstanding." (The Only one of the bunch to receive the outstanding rating.)

Dashlane, LastPass, Bitwarden, LogMeOnce, and Password Boss all received the "Excellent" rating.

PCMag rates 1Password, NordPass, RoboForm, Sticky Password, McAfee True Key, and Zoho "Good."

PCMag writes, "Keeper Password Manager & Digital Vault delivers an excellent experience across a ton of platforms and browsers. It also offers top-notch features such as robust two-factor authentication support, good sharing capabilities, and full password histories. As a result, Keeper is an Editors' Choice password manager."

It adds, "Keeper offers apps for Windows, macOS, Android, iOS, Kindle, Windows Phone, and Linux, as well as browser extensions for Chrome, Edge, Firefox, Internet Explorer, Opera, and Safari. Keeper also maintains a Microsoft Store version."

As soon as I began using Keeper, I felt right at home. It works well. If I want to check a password, look up a secure note, or retrieve a credit card number, I can easily open the Mac app on my Dock without opening a web browser. Isn't that how password managers should work?

Adventures with Apple and AppleCare Support
By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor, Region 2
APCUG Rep, PATACS & WAP — Gabe (at) gold.com

Having collected several Apple devices -- my and wife's iPhones/iPads, my Apple Watch, three HomePod Minis -- plus six outlets controlled by the Home app -- I've also collected a (very) few gripes, frustrations, irritations, and wishes:

> After the most recent Watch/iPhone software updates, very simple automation stopped working.

> Grouped notifications no longer indicate how many are stacked.

> The Zoom app didn't update on iPad with other apps; it had to be done manually.

> Siri Intercom messages only play on HomePods, not on iOS/iPadOS devices as I'd expected.

I finally called Apple to address at least the most annoying first two problems, especially the failed automation.

After negotiating the obligatory (but not ghastly) phone robot, I reached a very pleasant woman who quite thoroughly researched the automation problem -- putting me on hold for a bit, returning and apologizing for the hold, researching more. She finally said she'd have to escalate to Level 2.

In the process of doing that, I was disconnected. I sighed, not wanting to repeat the entire process. Then my phone rang, and I was called back and connected to the same person. That's NEVER happened when talking to customer support and disconnected -- it's ALWAYS involved calling again and starting from scratch.

I was then connected to John, "Senior Advisor" or some such title. He was great; he understood the problem, reviewed steps I'd taken to research/resolve it, and said I needn't repeat them (again, contrasted with most customer support, which follows rigid scripts and insists that steps be followed for them even if they've already been done).

When I mentioned that a local Apple employee had replicated the problem (likely with a newer iPhone than mine), he agreed that probably meant the problem wasn't specific to my hardware/software. He spent quite a while documenting the problem, during which he put me on hold and apologized for the wait; I joked that he might be writing a book about the problem and said I was keeping busy on my computer while waiting. I said that I hoped he wouldn't hold against me because I was using a Windows PC; he laughed and said he had one too.

He sent me an email giving his contact information and a link to upload a screenshot of the failure message on my Watch when he finished. Finally, he said he'd take ownership of the problem and made an appointment to call back with updates from engineering.

He called back on the designated day and apologized for being nearly an hour late. I laughed and said that he was so far ahead of support from that other technology company (whose name starts with "M") that I hadn't noticed. He said the problem was understood and would be fixed in an upcoming operating system update -- either the next or the one after that. It wasn't fixed in one just installed -- there likely wasn't time for it to get in that one -- so I assume it will be along shortly.

So that's more strong contrasts with other tech support experiences -- individual problem ownership, contact information provided without being requested, and definite checkpoint provided.

The Zoom app now appears to be updating normally, with other apps (and it's not clear where that problem was); not displaying the number of stacked notifications seems to have been a deliberate (though puzzling) decision, and I'm still researching the Intercom issue.

Despite my product(s) being out of warranty coverage, Apple provided complimentary phone support. This support is available for questions, and product problems after the warranty and AppleCare (if purchased) have expired.

And the Scams Just Keep Coming
David Kretchmar, Computer Technician
Sun City Summerlin Computer Club — https://www.scscc.club dkretch (at) gmail.com

If you're on the phone with some nice, polite person who asks you to download some software onto your computer that will allow them to remotely fix something that has been a problem, please think twice about it. Then do not do it. The chances are high that you are dealing with a scammer trying to get financial and personal data about you.

It is probably generally a very bad idea to give a stranger access to your computer. Yes, there are exceptions; I have allowed a Microsoft Tech to access my computer remotely to fix an Operating System installation problem. But anything short of that, such as reactivating a permanent version of Microsoft Office after a hard drive failure, did not require me to relinquish control of my computer to a stranger. Therefore, it is extremely unlikely that any issue you might be having would require you to give a stranger remote access to your computer.

My Experience

I was having problems installing AOL Gold on a client's new computer. A Google search led me to what appeared to be a legitimate AOL site, or at least it fooled me. I called the number and spoke to a nice, polite young lady, who might have been on the other side of the world. She explained that to fix the problem preventing AOL Gold from loading, I would have to give her access to my computer.

She asked me to download and install a program that would allow her to access my computer, which I foolishly did. She then sent me a code by text or email, which I had to enter to activate a remote session.

Then for the first time, I wondered, why does she need to do that? I told her I was a computer tech who could probably follow her instructions, and she gave me an unsatisfactory answer. So, I terminated the call and uninstalled the remote access software.

Remote access programs such as TeamViewer, AnyDesk, LogMein, and dozens of others are legitimate programs, but they can be used for nefarious purposes
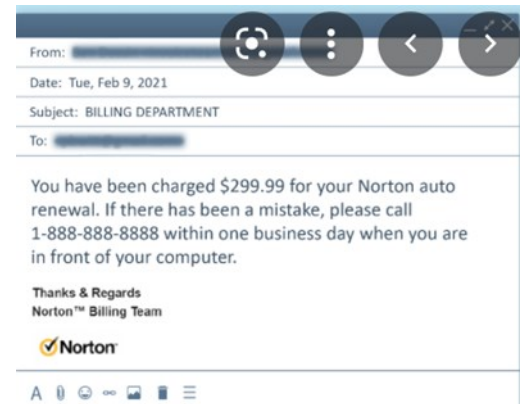
Scammers expertly reproduce the logos of legitimate software providers, such as AOL and McAfee. They can even spoof their email address, so an email appears to be coming from a legitimate company.

Fake antivirus email scam

Scammers might come at you via your email. For example, one message I have seen purports to be from McAfee or Norton, stating that your credit card will be charged for another year's subscription unless you contact them via a phone number or hotlink in the email. This message sounds authentic to many users, who might have had McAfee or Norton in the past, or who got a free trial that comes with many new computers.

When contacted, the scammer will state that for you to avoid additional charges, the scammer must remotely access your system. They will try to get you to download remote access software to give the scammer access to your computer. Just say no. There is no legitimate reason someone needs to access your computer to remove a program.

As we approach the holidays, computer scammers and hackers seem to step up their attacks on computer systems. Users are especially vulnerable to messages from vendors such as Amazon stating there is a problem with their order since many of us do order gifts from online vendors this time of the year. So don't let your guard down!

From: ▮▮▮▮
Date: Tue, Feb 9, 2021
Subject: BILLING DEPARTMENT
To: ▮▮▮▮

You have been charged $299.99 for your Norton auto renewal. If there has been a mistake, please call 1-888-888-8888 within one business day when you are in front of your computer.

Thanks & Regards
Norton™ Billing Team

✔ Norton

Gave Up My Mouse Long Ago and I'm Happy I Did
If You Hate Your Mouse, Try a Trackball Instead
By Kurt Jefferson, Editor, CKCS Newsletter
October 2022 Issue — https://ckcs.org/ — lextown2 (at) gmail.com

The article in Gizmodo doesn't mince words with the headline: "With its big roly-poly ball and huge hand rest, the venerable trackball mouse looks like a holdover from 1996. Or maybe 1946 – that's the first time a trackball was used as an input device in a computer," writes Alex Cranz in his 2017 article.

He asserts the waning popularity of the lowly trackball after more of us began using the mouse and then the trackpad. Cranz adds, "But here's the thing: The trackball is still good. Not just good—the trackball is great. So great that Logitech is introducing its first trackball in many years is a cause for celebration—even if I have some issues with my new favorite input device."

Photo: Kurt Jefferson
Logitech ERGO M575 Wireless Trackball
Stapler
Logitech M570 Trackball Mouse
Kensington Pro Fit Ergo Vertical Trackball Mouse
Kensington Expert Mouse Wireless Trackball

So, in 2017, Switzerland–based Logitech introduced its first new trackball in years. Guess what? The MX Ergo was a major hit. And sales are still climbing. Last fall, Logitech reported a 26% increase in mice and trackball sales. (Logitech sells plenty of mice – but it's also discovering many people insist on trackballs instead.)

Then, last October, Logitech introduced yet another trackball: the Ergo M575. The user can connect to a desktop or laptop, Mac or PC via a USB interface with a small transceiver or Bluetooth. It will also connect to an iPad using the Bluetooth option.

As more of us began working and teaching school from home in 2020 because of the pandemic, more of us are actively ditching our mice. (Plenty of us are still working and teaching from home via Zoom and other software.)

Make Tech Easier explains *why trackballs are better for you: "More workers are aware of the health risks and problems associated with long periods of sitting daily. It's supremely unhealthy, and many companies have made a serious effort to help modern office workers reduce the risks of desk-bound work.*

While standing up will help your health, more ergonomic input devices can protect you from an RSI or repetitive strain injury.

These injuries are caused by repeatedly straining your body in the same way, over and over again. These injuries can cause numbness, tingling, and pain, and they won't go away until you stop the stressor.

Trackball mice can be a blessing for workers suffering from a wrist-based RSI or carpal tunnel. The benefit comes from the trackball's stable position. While you move your wrist and arm to manipulate a traditional mouse, you only need to move your fingers to use a trackball. If you use a wrist rest with your trackball, your wrist will be at a healthier angle. This frees it from the strain associated with sliding your mouse around. Because your hand stays in one place, your arm and wrist won't be strained by the constant back and forth movement of a mouse."

As *Popular Mechanics* wrote in June, "A trackball mouse is a great way to make endless mouse movement less strenuous." It's proven that trackballs reduce wrist stress and grip fatigue.

While the best–selling Logitech trackballs are thumb-operated, Kensington, which might be called the "king of trackballs," sells at least seven trackballs on its website, on Amazon, Newegg, and other online sellers.

Because of growing demand, Kensington has released several new trackballs in recent years, including the:
    Expert Mouse Wireless Trackball
    Pro Fit® Ergo Vertical Wireless Trackball (White & Black)
    Orbit® Fusion Wireless Trackball
    Wired Orbit® Trackball with Scroll Ring
    Orbit® Optical Trackball.

The popular Expert Mouse Wireless Trackball often tops the ratings when reviewers put trackballs through their paces. The Wirecutter (a review website purchased by The New York Times), trackballmouse.org, gadgetreviews.com, and iMore all praise that finger-operated device.

A Japanese trackball maker, Elecom, has also earned a steady but growing market share in the States. Elecom currently makes the only trackball especially designed for left-handed users. It's the Elecom M–XT4DRBK model. (Read about it here at amazon.com).

Popular Mechanic's website tells what to look for as you decide whether or not to opt for the benefits of a trackball.

_____

Keeping Records Helps Organize Computer Maintenance

By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor, Region 2
Director, PATACS and Washington Apple Pi — Gabe (at) gabegold.com

My background is enterprise computing, having worked in a high-tech company's data center and for a vendor selling software to organizations large/medium/small. So it's second nature to me -- a habit developed over my career -- to keep records of changes I make to computer hardware and software, even when it's my PC.

The change log is useful for many reasons, knowing:

- what hardware and software is installed (important for debugging, upgrading, and replacing the PC)

- when I changed something (important for tracking the origin of odd behavior)

- how to replicate desired settings in a new computer (to avoid struggling to remember everything I've done to tailor/customize software)

- what I've done from my infinite to-do list (to avoid worrying about what I might have forgotten)

- what's left on the list (this is a separate section of the log)

- what I've spent on the computer

- how other devices are maintained and configured (such as a separate section for router settings and firmware updates information)

It's easiest/best starting such a log when a new PC is bought or built, but it's worth creating one by catching up as much as possible on what's been done and maintaining it going forward. Making this a habit means it's simple and quick creating entries, and the log will be a helpful reference.

Here are sample entries for my Windows 10 system:

05/26/20 Install Firefox 76.0.1
05/26/20 Install Office 2019
05/26/20 Install Kedit 1.6.1
05/26/20 Install Belarc 9.5
05/26/20 Install Sysinternals Process Explorer 16.32
05/26/20 Install Thunderbird 68.8.1
05/26/20 Install Malwarebytes 4.1.0

08/16/20 Install CutePDF 4
08/16/20 Change Computer name to Gabes-Windows10-Deskt
08/16/20 Change User name to Gabe
08/16/20 Install Audacity 2.4.2
08/16/20 Install iCloud 13.3.59.0
09/06/20 Set Firefox browser.search.openintab --> True
09/06/20 Define local HPLJ printer

01/18/22 Set Kedit currbox on/on
01/18/22 Use Kedit Margins 2 72 -3
01/19/22 Install Firefox add-ins InFormEnter+, NoScript, Print Preview
01/19/22 Disable NoScript -- broke too many websites
01/20/22 Set Taskbar option to NOT show desktop when the cursor moves to lower right corner
01/20/22 Install Firefox add-ons, Privacy Badger, Adblock Plus, Ghostery, Don't Track Me Google
01/20/22 Set Kedit RecentFiles 25

Interesting Internet Finds December 2021
By Steve Costello
scostello AT sefcug.com

While going through the more than 300 RSS feeds, I often run across things that I think might interest other user group members.

The following are some items I found interesting during November 2021.

How To Disable The Smart Compose Feature In Gmail
https://techviral.net/disable-smart-compose-gmail/

I keep the Smart Compose feature turned off because I distrust the AI figuring out what I want to say. So if you have not turned this feature off in your Gmail, I suggest you do it now.

Is Charging Your Phone Overnight A Bad Idea?
https://www.online-tech-tips.com/smartphones/is-charging-your-phone-overnight-a-bad-idea/

This question pops up from time to time. The people at Online Tech Tips answer this and some other questions regarding battery charging.

HTTPS vs. VPN: 5 Reasons You Do Need Both
https://www.makeuseof.com/https-vs-vpn-reasons-you-do-need-both/

If you don't have a VPN, always use HTTPS. However, if you have a VPN, this post explores why using both is a good idea. (Note: I always use both when I am away from my home network. Sometimes, I even use both, especially with banking and shopping sites.)

Five Simple Rules For Spotting A Scam
https://cynmackley.com/2021/11/22/five-simple-rules-for-spotting-a-scam/

I am sure you keep hearing about scams; I know I do all the time. This post has some simple and easily remembered tips for spotting scams. Check this post out.

How Using BCC Reduces Spam
https://askleo.com/bcc-reduces-spam/

Everyone should know this already, but I still get things from others who don't know or don't care. (Note: As a former user group officer and newsletter editor, I learned to use BCC early on, and I think everyone should too. If I see multiple recipients in an email, I flag future emails from that sender to go to a specific folder and email the sender back requesting that they use BCC in the future.)

The 6 VPN Features That Matter Most
https://www.howtogeek.com/758704/the-6-vpn-features-that-matter-most/

If you are in the market for a VPN, check out this post to see what features you should be looking to have.

My Debit Card Was Hacked
https://firewallsdontstopdragons.com/my-debit-card-was-hacked/

In this post, the author explains how his debit card was hacked and provides some advice gathered from the experience.

****