



PLATEAU PC USERS GROUP, INC GAZETTE



November 2011

Published by the Plateau PC Users Group, Inc. P.O. Box 3787, Crossville TN 38557-3787 www.PPCUGinc.com

November 2011

“JOIN US FOR FUN AND LEARNING AT CROSSVILLE’S COMPUTER CLUB”

Volume 17, Issue 11

This Month’s Meetings

November 4 at 1 p.m.
At FFG Community Church
Photo Editing Workshop

November 21 at 3 p.m.
At 127 S. Senior Center
General Meeting

November 19 at 10 a.m.
At 127 S. Senior Center
Investment SIG

November 24 at 1 p.m.
At FFG Community Church
Photography Club

November Program

Safely Surfing the Internet

Carl Nordeen will discuss the various safe guards to use for being as safe as possible while surfing the Internet. For example:

1. How good are the antivirus programs in protecting you?
2. Mal ware protection.
3. Operating system security updates.
4. Social engineering of email and web sites.
5. Various other security updates such as Java, Flash, etc.

This is the last Gazette for 2011. We do not publish one in December.

Happy holidays to everyone. May 2012 bring you good health and happiness.

Tip of the Month

Add Pictures To Contacts

If you have a face (in this case a picture) to put with a name in Microsoft Outlook’s Contacts list, you can easily add an image file to the contact’s file. Begin by creating or opening a contact. Open the Actions menu and click Add Picture. Next, browse for the appropriate picture and double-click it to add the image to the contact information.

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“FREE” Table

We have set up a table at our member meetings to share our “extra” goodies with other club members.

If you have something to give away, bring it in and put it on the FREE table. It's first come, first served. If you see something you want, help yourself.



Membership Dues and Expiration Dates

Membership dues are \$25 a year for a family, \$20 a year for an individual, and \$10 a year for a student 21 years of age or under. Your membership is valid for 12 months from the month you join (or renew your membership). Please pay your dues to the treasurer before the last day of your anniversary month. Anyone who is 30 days or more in arrears with membership dues cannot participate in the door prize drawings.

Corporate memberships are \$25 a year for the first two memberships and \$10 a year for each additional membership from the same company.

Our Club cannot exist without you, the members. Remember, you and your membership dues are important to keep the club functioning!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS DISCLAIMER

All members of the Plateau PC Users Group are willing to help one another in the area of advice and tutorial instruction over the phone. If you should require more involved services or instruction, we have a few members who are very knowledgeable in several areas. As a responsible consumer, it is up to you to discuss, before retaining a member, any and ALL charges for repair services and time consuming tutorial activities.

It is not the desire of this Board of Directors to set fees for individuals for services rendered, nor the responsibility to intervene between members who enter into a contract among themselves

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Investment Club	Bob Mohar	(931) 707-0434
Photography SIG	Jim Mansfield	(931) 484-6920

Up Coming Meeting

The next General Meeting of the
PLATEAU PC USERS GROUP
Will be on January 16, 2012 at 3:00 P. M. at
127 S. SENIOR CENTER

Staples will present a program highlighting new equipment available.

There is no meeting in December

New Members

Ron Joos

Classes

Please send ideas for new classes to Alan Baker
(ambaker@citlink.net)

Cool Sites

How Healthy in your Bank??

[http://banktracker.investigativereportingworkshop.org/
banks/tennessee/crossville/](http://banktracker.investigativereportingworkshop.org/banks/tennessee/crossville/)

Submitted by Bob Mohar

News of the Special Interest Groups

The PPCUG sponsors several Special Interest Groups (SIGs) tailored to meet the varied needs of our many members. Each SIG is a small group whose leader prepares material for presentation and encourages open discussion and questions. We urge you to attend the SIGs and hope you will find one or more of interest to you. Ideas for additional groups are welcome, as are volunteers to form and lead new SIGs.

Investment Club

Meets the third Saturday of each month at 10 a.m. at the 127 S. Senior Center. The leader is Bob Mohar . Anyone interested should contact Bob at 707-0434”.

Pleasant Hill Group

The Pleasant Hill group meetings will be announced by the SIG Leader, Dick Riesz. Meetings are held in the Pleasant Hill Community House on Main Street across from the Pleasant Hill Post Office. All members are welcome and visitors from the Pleasant Hill area are especially encouraged to come.

Photography Club

The Photography Club, a PPCUG SIG, meets the fourth Thursday of each month at the Fairfield Glade Community Church at 1:00PM. Topics vary each month but we show and discuss member's photos each month. One or two "People's Choice" photos are submitted to the Glade Vista each month for publication. The SIG leader is Jim Mansfield.

A photo editing workshop is held at 1PM at the FFG Community church on the first Friday of each month.

PPCUG ISP

We wish to thank the following for providing ISP connections:

- Frontier for DSL at the 127 Senior Center and Fairfield Glade
- Multipro for dialup at Pleasant Hill

PPCUG Website

Visit our website at www.PPCUGinc.com. The Learning Center class schedule and Gazette are all available on our web site.

Send your comments and suggestions to the Webmaster, Alan Baker
Webmaster@ppcuginc.com (931) 788-2201

Free Online Computer Tutorials from "InPictures"

by Ira Wilsker

WEBSITE:

<http://inpics.net>

I get a lot of requests from individuals on how to accomplish a myriad of tasks using popular software. I also get requests from individuals asking for help creating web pages, or writing computer programs in a variety of computer languages. Now there is an unusual free resource that can give everyone detailed instructions on how to complete his selected tasks. While there are many free online help and tutorial services, what makes this one unusual is that it is mostly based on still images (screen captures), with only a small amount of text explaining each image.

This interesting service is freely available to anyone online from "InPictures" at inpics.net, and only requires an internet browser; all internet browsers should work equally well. There is nothing to buy, download, or install in order to use the tutorials. There are no animations, movies, videos, or music, only a logical sequence of sharp black and white images, along with some text, that explains and demonstrates how to accomplish each desired task with the listed software.

According to the website's creator, whose name is not listed on the website, " In Pictures tutorials began as part of a research study we conducted for the U.S. Department of Education. The goal: to make it easier for people with learning disabilities to learn computer subjects. As part of the study, we created simple, illustration-based tutorials. Everyone who tested them - not just people with learning disabilities - said the new tutorials enabled them to learn faster and easier than conventional text-heavy books." Since all of the images are situated on individual web pages, the user can easily control the size of the images by utilizing the native zoom feature incorporated on most browsers. To zoom in with your browser, simply use the Ctrl+ or Ctrl- features (press the Ctrl key and the "+" plus key simultaneously to enlarge the screen; Ctrl and "-" minus zooms out).

The list of software and programming is not extensive, but covers some of the most widely used titles, including Microsoft Office, Open Office (this will also substantially apply to Libre Office, an Open Office clone), HTML and CSS for webpage creators, and the programming languages MySQL, PHP, and Perl. The Microsoft Office tutorials cover both the 2003 and 2007 versions of Office, and include Word, Publisher, Excel, PowerPoint, and Access. While Office 2010 is not yet listed, a user needing help with Office 2010 tasks will likely find that most of the tutorials for 2007 will pretty much apply to 2010, although there may be some cosmetic and functional differences. Open Office users (as well as Libre Office users) will find the tutorials for Base, Calc, Impress, and Writer are comprehensive and easy to follow.

For those who would like to learn how to create web pages using HTML and CSS (Cascading Style Sheets), InPictures covers HTML basics, site navigation and layout, online forms, uploading to a server, and advanced layout techniques. For anyone who would like to learn programming, the tutorials for MySQL, PHP, and Perl are clear, concise, and easy to follow, and are easy to comprehend because they avoid "geek speak", and incorporate a series of screen captures that clearly display the appropriate operations and functions.

Since I am typing this column using Word 2007, I decided to use the Word 2007 tutorial to demonstrate to myself the usefulness of the InPictures service. Clicking on the Word 2007 link on the left margin of the start page. When the Word 2007 main page opened, the user is presented with a simple choice; either follow a sequential tutorial covering all of the material operations and functions of Word, or to manually select individual topics as a quick tutorial or to refresh the users' knowledge about how to perform a specific task. The novice user would be wise to use the complete tutorial, as it is comprehensive and provides a complete series of instructions on how to use Word. If the user selects individual Word tutorials, he can select from Word Basics, Long Documents, Special Features, and Advanced Word. The same four categories of tutorials can be selected from the top of any of the Word tutorial pages.

Word (2007) Basics is just what it says, and includes the most basic Word functions used, and includes new document creation, copy and paste, formatting words and paragraphs, bullets and numbering, page settings, spell checking, and page viewing. The Long Documents selections include guidance on how to format text with styles, find and replace functions, the use of

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tabs, and the creation of headers and footers. Many users of Word like to use some of the "Special Features" shown in the in Word tutorial, including columns, drop caps, the insertion and management of photos and other images, drawing and painting in Word, and the use of tables. The final section of the Word 2007 tutorial, "Advanced Word", explains how to do a mail merge (create a series of personalized letters from a mail list), create and use templates, print envelopes and labels, count words, and create and insert a table of contents. A similar series of tutorials is available for other Office components (Excel, PowerPoint, Access, and Publisher), both the 2003 and 2007 versions. Likewise, similar tutorials cover Open Office (and Libre Office).

For anyone who needs basic training or some occasional help with office software, the creation of web pages, or common programming tools, the InPictures website at inpics.net may be a valuable, and free, resource.

“Facebook Changes - Why”

By Gregory West

SENIORS NOW GET FREE HELP at: www.alternatecloud.com

Gregory (at) alternatecloud.com

Cyberspace is alit with flare-ups from all of us using Facebook this past while. People are screaming that they are quitting Facebook and going to Google Plus (many are doing just that) while others have already switched to other social media spots such as Twitter and LinkedIn. I personally believe, even though the Internet is amassed with complaints about Facebook’s new changes, people will stay with Facebook. They will click their way into learning the new Facebook and any other changes they may throw at us. Why?

The adage of “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” doesn’t hold water anymore, at least not in the online world where many of us now reside much of the time. Like it or not, we necessitate change online. We demand things work faster, easier and are activated from anywhere, anytime, and by anyone. Plus, these online companies are no different than “brick and mortar” businesses: they all need to make money to survive. Facebook is moving into a new arena where they can make even more money. “The company is expected to bring in \$3.8 billion in worldwide advertising revenue this year and \$5.8 billion in 2012, according to research firm eMarketer.” (Washington Post)

While discussing Facebook, people admit that it is the first website they check when going on the Internet in the morning, even before any news sites or email programs - Facebook is many people’s first choice for keeping up; keeping connected is very important to many of the 800 million users who now use Facebook. The Post says that, “Facebook is a technology company that wants to keep improving its products so that people keep using it and it doesn’t grow stale.”

I remember reading a book in college by Alvin Toffler: “Future Shock” wherein Toffler described how people would not be able to accept the rate of change. Toffler wrote, "too much change in too short a period of time". I believed this would happen, but it never did. The book was written before the Internet was born, although ironically, Toffler “popularized the phrase information overload” (Wikipedia).

We are a connected society now. One just has to look to the streets, to the malls, along sidewalks and in grocery store lineups. What is it you see? People staring at their smart phones, connected in a “brave new world.” These are the people who are learning to tolerate and navigate through the rough seas of change, be it a computer, a tablet or a smart phone. It is so much part of our lives today that these devices, once called “toys” are now a major necessity. We are, and we will, continue to live with change - I believe deep down we must thrive on change, otherwise Alvin Toffler would have been correct back in 1970.

If you have a computer problem or a great tip, please pass it along to Greg at First Monday and he will post it in the next issue.



File Types: What are they? And why should we care?

By Phil Sorrentino, President, Sarasota PCUG, Florida
August 2011 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor
www.spcug.org / president (at) spcug.org

Understanding File Types is the key to successfully organizing and using your computer files and folders. The File Type is the extension to the file name (the characters after the period). Unfortunately, File Types are hidden when you first startup your computer Operating System. I've always thought this was odd because knowing the type of a file can help explain what is going on or at least what can be done with that particular file. (Because the file type can be changed using the Rename option, I suspect this was done to prevent a user from renaming the file type and possibly making that file un-useable.) Without the file type, confusion can arise. Hiding the file type leads to the appearance that there are multiple files in a folder with the same file name. While actually, the file names are different because they have different file types. It is only the file type that shows them as two distinctly different files. File Types can be shown along with the first part of the file name. In XP and Windows 7, this is accomplished in the View tab of the Control Panel's Folder Options Applet. Just uncheck "Hide extensions for known file types".

Let's start with some very basic File Management concepts. Every file in a folder has to have a unique name. (Two files may have the same name, but they must reside in different folders.) The name has two parts, separated by a period. The part after the period is called the file type or file extension. Typically the file type is three or four characters, but it can be longer. The limit is tied into the overall size of the path of the file in question, but practically you will see file types of around three or four or five characters. If you Google "file types," you will be amazed at how many file types have been defined and you will also see some pretty long file types, like the following 8 character file type, ".debuglog." In these lists you will see all the familiar file types like .doc, .docx, .txt, .rtf, .xls, .jpg, .bmp, .gif, .mp3, .wav, .m3u, .wma, .avi, .mov, .mp4, .wmv, and so on.

A few sentences ago, I mentioned "path." The path is a unique description of where the file in question is located. Typically we think of a file's location as being in a particular folder, but the path is more general. The path starts out with the computer followed by the drive, then the folders in hierarchical order, leading down to the particular file. So the path to a picture of a group of cousins taken on July 4th, 2009, might look like: [\\Desktop2\D:Photos\Family\2009\FourthOfJulyPicnic\Cousins.jpg](#) where "Cousins.jpg" is a picture (or at least a .jpg file) in the "FourthOfJulyPicnic" folder, which is in the "2009" folder, which is in the "Family" folder, which is in the "Photos" folder on the "D:" drive of the "Desktop2" computer. (Note that the "\" is used to separate components of the path. Similar to the way "/" is used to separate the components of an address on the internet.) So you see the path to every file must be unique, so that the file can be unambiguously found. This also explains why we can have two files, with the same name and extension, exist in different folders. The path would be different, not by the file name and extension, but by one of the folder components. So when all is said and done, the file type is part of a file's name that makes that file unique.

That is only part of the story. The file type is really a definition of all of the data that is held within the file. (It defines in great detail just what every bit and byte in the file means.) And this is where Files and Applications come together, or where they become "associated". File Association links a file type with an Application. An Application knows how to handle a particular file type because of the file type definition. Fortunately we, the users, don't have to know anything about the details of the file type, only that a particular file type can be used with a particular Application. So if a correct association is made, the Application will handle the file in the expected fashion. If an incorrect association is made, the results will be undetermined.

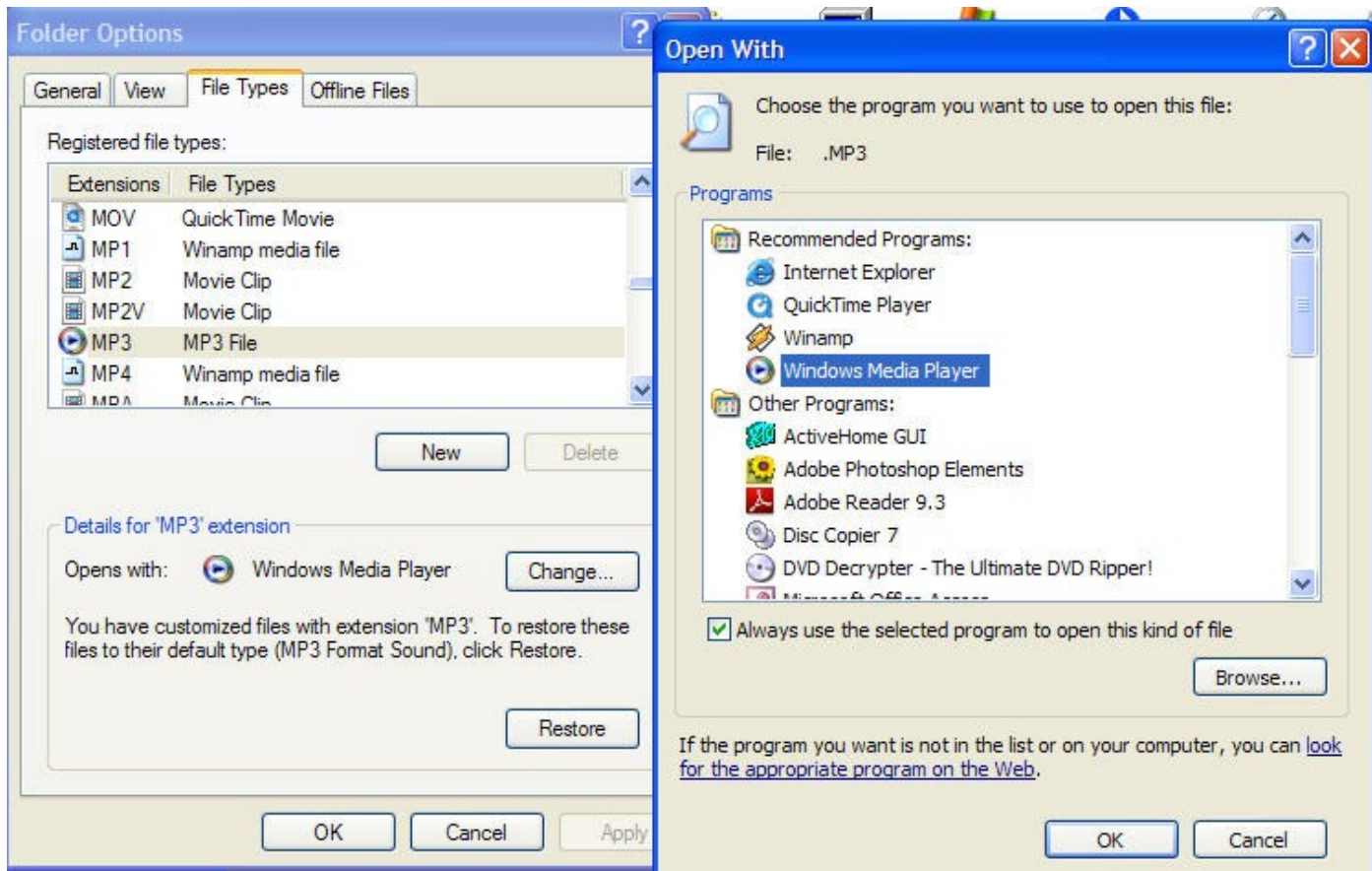
Many applications can handle many different file types. For example, Windows Media Player can use a whole host

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of audio and video file types, such as wma, mp3, m3u, aiff, wmv, avi, mpg, mpeg, mpv2. Sometimes when you install a new application, the application will automatically associate with the file types that it knows how to use. This may not be the associations that you originally wanted. Some Applications are much more polite, and ask if you want them to associate with certain file types. If associations happen automatically, you can end up with different applications being used to handle a particular file type. For example, you could end up with “Real Player” playing your music that you originally had Windows Media Player associated with.

The Operating System provides a capability to review and establish the associations. Each operating System is a little different. In XP it is provided in the File Types tab of the Folder Options, Control Panel, as shown in the graphic example that follows. (The example shows the .mp3 file type chosen for a change (on the left) and the Recommended and Other Programs (Applications) selections (on the right.) In Windows 7 (and Vista) it is part of the Default Files Control Panel (Associate a file type or protocol with a program).



Associations can easily be changed, but be very careful. Only use the Recommended Programs. If another program is used, the results may be undetermined and may even damage the file in question. But this is the way you can get things back to the way you want. You can get your music back to being played by your player of choice, or your videos back to being played by Windows Media Player, or your .bmp graphics files back to being displayed with the Paint application.

So, we care about File Types because they help to uniquely define a file's name and location, and their definitions enable applications to determine how to handle the contents of the file. These are two very big jobs for a seemingly very small (and often hidden) aspect of the Windows Operating System.

PowerPoint Isn't Just for the Business World

By Nancy DeMarte, Columnist, Office Talk, Sarasota PCUG, Inc., Florida
August 2011 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor
www.spcug.org
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In recent years, people who purchased PC's often bought the Home and Student version of the Microsoft Office suite as a way to get the powerful Word program. Besides Word, this suite contains Excel, a sophisticated spreadsheet program; OneNote, a fancy organizational program; and PowerPoint, a presentation program. If you find that you have never moved beyond Word, perhaps it's time to explore a program which has many uses for the home user: PowerPoint.

PowerPoint has been around for many years. Originally called Presenter, this program was created for the Apple Macintosh computer by a company called Foresight. In 1987 Microsoft purchased Foresight, added features to Presenter, and renamed it PowerPoint. Traditionally, it was designed to enhance corporate meetings or training sessions. Over the years, special effects and other improvements have been made to PowerPoint. As a home computer user, you will find this program easy to use in a variety of special and everyday situations.

Personal Uses of PowerPoint:

The most common personal use is slide show creation related to an event. Let's say you have a family wedding approaching. PowerPoint can help you put together a slide show of still photos and videos of the bride and groom from babyhood to the present, complete with captions, narration, a musical background, and transition effects like fade-ins. You can copy photos to each slide from anywhere on your computer or the web. Although PowerPoint is not as sophisticated as some expensive presentation software, it can produce a professional-looking slide show.

Other home uses for PowerPoint include a personal résumé or visual memoir, which can list biographical history interspersed with photos of the subject in all aspects of life. Cooks might use PowerPoint to create an electronic cookbook of recipes, including photos of preparation techniques and finished creations. Artists often use PowerPoint to create portfolios of their work as a lure for potential buyers. Members of book discussion groups might create an overview of a book's plot or author's life using a few PowerPoint slides. PowerPoint can also design electronic family photo albums, considered superior by some since they can be stored and shared more readily than the old hard bound albums. Finally, any type of training program can be enhanced by a well-designed presentation.

Creating and Editing a Presentation:

One easy way to create a professional-looking presentation is by using a template. PowerPoint has built-in "themes" which give each slide a similar background color, font color and design. As part of its Office website, Microsoft has many free, downloadable PowerPoint templates for occasions, holidays, and other purposes; many more are available at third party websites. For example, wedding templates exist for invitations, programs, thematic backgrounds for slides, borders, and clip art. All you have to do is fill in the information and add the photos. Other template types which might interest a home user include family tree charts, special occasions, seasons, religious, travel, and holidays. Go to www.office.microsoft.com or search the web for 'PowerPoint templates'.

One powerful feature of PowerPoint is that almost anything visual can be put onto a slide. Slides can include text, photos, charts, spreadsheets, tables, and drawings. For example, you can create a short spreadsheet in Excel, display it as a graph or chart, and copy it onto a PowerPoint slide. By using a theme from the PowerPoint gallery or a template, various types of slide content can blend smoothly.

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Editing slides is easy. The new versions of PowerPoint use a spell checker much like that in Word, which corrects not only spelling, but grammar. Slides can be rearranged simply by dragging them to a new location in the list or the slide sorter, which resembles a storyboard. Transitions between slides can be added or removed easily.

Sharing the Presentation:

Besides showing the finished presentation on a screen with a projector or on a laptop at a table, PowerPoint 2007 allows you to send the show as an attachment to an email. It can be saved in .pdf or .xps format, which are universal file types. The 2007/10 version compresses the file size for sending. If you prefer, you can upload your presentation to your website and send the link to friends and family. A slide show can also be printed. Besides the slides themselves, PowerPoint allows printing of handouts, which contain slide thumbnails; note pages, which display each slide with room for notes; and a text outline of the presentation.

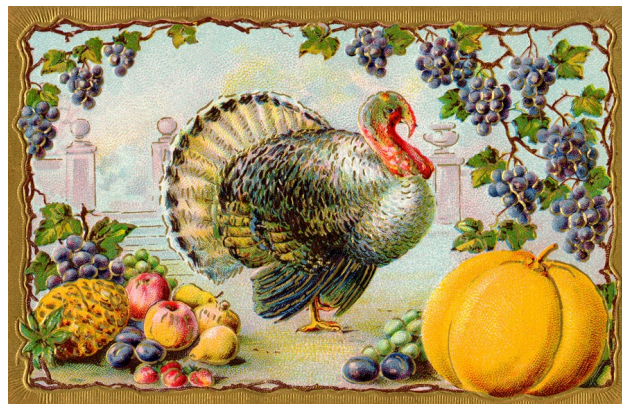
Tips on Creating a Good Presentation:

PowerPoint has developed a bad reputation among some people, not because it's a poor program, but because of the many boring presentations the people were forced to view in their corporate workplaces. When designing any kind of presentation, you must think carefully when selecting the content -- ideas, facts or opinions -- and how you want it to appear. Taking time to develop an outline of your presentation before creating any slides will result in a much stronger final product.

When you actually do begin to create slides, here are some tips for success:

1. Use a theme or style to tie the visuals together, and then add a few surprise visuals or quotes.
2. Minimize the use of clip art, especially that which is built into PowerPoint. Everyone has seen it. Instead, search Google images for something fresh.
3. Consider alternating text slides with photos or video to add interest.
4. Studies have shown that dark text on a light background is easier to read, as is sans serif text and words aligned left, rather than in the center.
5. Too many different types of transitions from one slide to the next look unprofessional and distracting. Select no more than two or three for a moderate length presentation.
6. Put very few words on each slide. Keep it simple.
7. If doing a training presentation, don't read to the audience. Instead, explain more about what's on the screen. But don't bring in other topics which will cause audience confusion.
8. Find a way to engage the audience. For example, put a question on a slide and take a few minutes for the audience to discuss it.
9. Keep the presentation moving. (1 - 3 slides per minute)
10. Make the presentation only as long as it needs to be to get your ideas across.

You paid a lot of money for your Office Home and Student suite. It's time to benefit by learning to use PowerPoint.



TrueCrypt

Free open-source data encryption software for Windows 7/Vista/XP, Mac OS X, and Linux
By John Langill, Newsletter Co-editor, Southern Tier Personal Computing Club, NY
August 2011 issue, Rare Bits, STPCC Newsletter
jlangill (at) stny.rr.com

The May, 2011 issue of *Rare Bits* contained an article by Dick Maybach titled “Cloud Computing” in which he pointed out the necessity of securing your data via encryption when it “...is stored on the same disks, uses the same memory, and passes through the same processors as everybody else’s.” I recall Dave Bilcik voicing a similar warning at the May meeting and also mentioning the program TrueCrypt. It just so happens that I am currently using TrueCrypt and I believe it to be a very satisfactory solution whether you need relatively modest security or very tight and sophisticated protection.

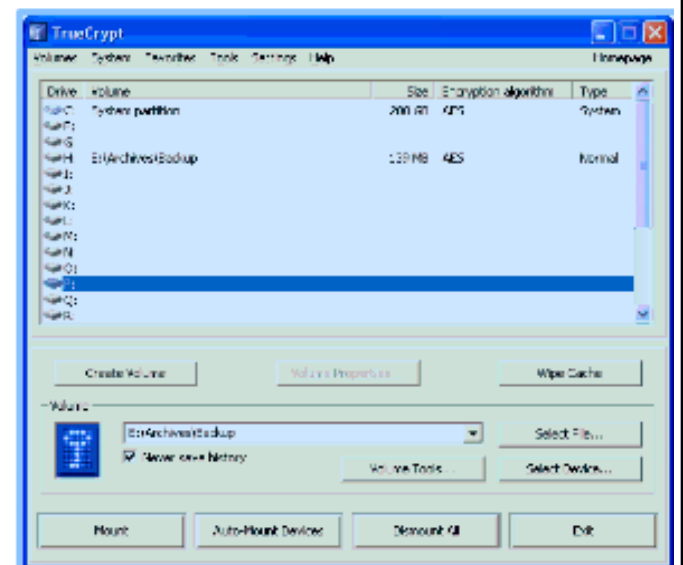
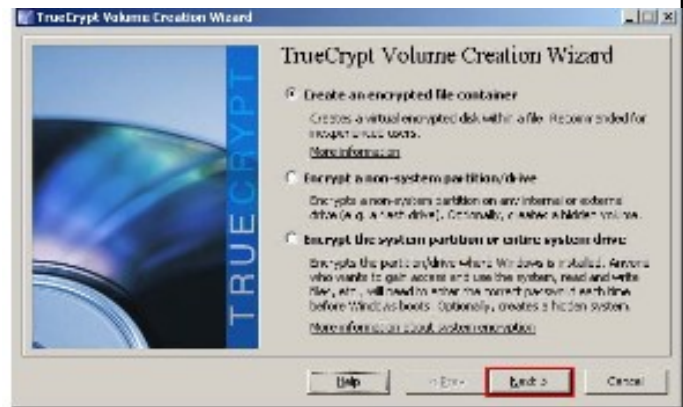
TrueCrypt is a software system for establishing and maintaining an on-the-fly-encrypted volume (data storage device). “On-the-fly” encryption means that data is automatically encrypted or decrypted right before it is loaded or saved, without any user intervention. The entire file system is encrypted; e.g., filenames, folder-names, contents of every file, free space, meta-data, etc. No data stored on an encrypted volume can be read (decrypted) without using the correct password and/or key file(s), or correct encryption keys.

I’m not sure how unique TrueCrypt’s approach is but I was nevertheless intrigued by it. The first step is to create a “container;” otherwise known as a TrueCrypt “encrypted volume.” To my mind, this is somewhat like obtaining a safety-deposit box at a bank.

TrueCrypt provides a “wizard” to assist with the task. As at a bank where safety-deposit boxes of various sizes can be rented, the encrypted volume can be created to have as much capacity as you need. For example, it can be a specific portion of a hard-disk, or an entire flash drive or other storage device. Unlike a safety-deposit box, however, you hold the only key... so you need to remember and protect it. And, into the container (the volume) you can store any number of files. If the capacity of the volume is exceeded, you simply create a bigger container.

One of the interesting facets of a TrueCrypt volume is that it has most of the characteristics of an ordinary file. That is, the volume can be moved or copied within the storage areas of a given PC or to a different PC. The name of the volume can be changed and the volume can be included in routine backups. It can be transmitted across the Internet; and even into the wild-blue yonder, if you’re so inclined. And, even if you have no intention of salting “the cloud” with your personal data, what about that minuscule 8- or 32GB flash-drive you carry around in your pocket. The smaller they get, the easier they are to lose. Wouldn’t it be reassuring to have made it an encrypted volume so that whoever finds it won’t have an easy time of it when they try to discover the contents of your personal data?

The downside of the file-like characteristics is that, like any file,



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an encrypted volume can also be deleted and all its content lost (...thank goodness for the Recycle Bin). That would be very bad if done unwittingly. But that's why we do back-ups! Yes? Once a TrueCrypt volume is mounted, the data files it contains can be copied to and from the volume just like they are copied to or from any normal disk; for example, by simple drag-and-drop operations.

Files are automatically decrypted on-the-fly in RAM (Random Access Memory) while they are being read or copied from an encrypted TrueCrypt volume. Similarly, files that are being written or copied to a TrueCrypt volume are automatically encrypted on-the-fly in RAM right before they are written to the volume. Note however, this does not mean the whole file that is to be encrypted/decrypted must reside in RAM before it can be encrypted/decrypted. That is, there are no extra RAM requirements for TrueCrypt. The following paragraph explains how this is accomplished.

Let's suppose that there is an .avi video file stored on a TrueCrypt volume; that is, the entire video file is encrypted. The user provides the correct password and/or key file and mounts (opens) the TrueCrypt volume. When the user double-clicks the icon of the video file, the operating system launches the application associated with the file type — typically a media player. The media player then begins loading a small initial portion of the video file from the TrueCrypt-encrypted volume to RAM in order to play it. While the portion is being loaded, TrueCrypt is automatically decrypting it in RAM. The decrypted portion of the video in RAM is then played by the media player. While this portion is being played, the media player begins loading next small portion of the video file from the TrueCrypt-encrypted volume to RAM and the process repeats. This process is called “on-the-fly” encryption/decryption and it works for all file types, not just for video files. The process also ensures minimal impact on processing performance.

Note that TrueCrypt never saves any decrypted data to a disk – it only stores it temporarily in RAM. Even when the volume is mounted, data stored in the volume remains encrypted. When you restart Windows or turn off your computer, the volume will be automatically dismounted and files stored in it will be inaccessible and encrypted. Even when power is suddenly interrupted (i.e., without a proper system shut-down), files stored in the volume are inaccessible and encrypted. To make them accessible again, you have to mount the volume by providing the correct password and/or key file.

Of course, as with any unintended power interruption or shut-down, unsaved changes to files are lost because re-encryption of changes occurs only when files are saved to the volume in a normal fashion.

I've only touched on a few of the main facets of TrueCrypt. In addition, TrueCrypt offers a choice of encryption algorithms from which you can select one that will give the degree of security you feel you need. This and other aspects of TrueCrypt are fully documented in an excellent User Guide. The latest version of the free software, Release 7.0a, can be downloaded from the product's home Website at <http://www.truecrypt.org>, as well as from CNET's <http://www.download.com>, and other sites on the Web. The User Guide PDF and a more detailed description of TrueCrypt can be found at the product's home web-site.

TrueCrypt is one free program that is, in my opinion, an exception to my general perception of the breed. Of course, the developers gratefully accept donations. In this case, I think they are well deserved.

eBay Adventures - “So what gives?”

By Rick Eblaw, Vice President, Southern Tier Personal Computing Club, NY
August 2011 issue, Rare Bits
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If you spend some time on eBay, you'll find all kinds of interesting stuff offered for sale. There's lots of collectibles, some of which would be hard to locate unless you were willing to travel the country going to flea markets. There are items that you can find in stores that are sometimes offered at a substantial discount. And then are some items that are hard to explain...

Here's a recent example. There's a fellow in China who is currently selling a lot of “Mini USB 2.0 Wireless Bluetooth Adapter Dongle” items, which you can readily find by searching eBay for “usb wireless” and sorting by “Price + Shipping: lowest first.” That in itself isn't interesting, there's no shortage of sellers offering USB Bluetooth adapters. What's interesting about this one is that the minimum bid is \$0.01 (one penny) and free shipping is offered. You don't have to be a financial genius to see that if only one person bids on one of these auctions, the seller is going to lose money. Since the seller is in China and presumably has direct access to the manufacturer of these devices, he's probably paying just a few pennies for each one. But he still needs to pay the international postage, and if you check the feedback you'll see a number of folks who did get their device for just \$0.01. So what gives?

I had \$1.08 in eBay Bucks “burning a hole in my pocket,” so I figured I'd give this a shot. On my first attempt I set my maximum bid to \$0.99, and a couple of people tried to outbid me in the last few seconds of the auction, but the highest attempt was a \$0.50 bid, so I won with an automatic \$0.55 bid. I then tried to bid on another, but I was only allowed to bid on one of these items from the seller in a 10-day period — so the seller was not going to allow someone to buy a whole bunch of these for \$0.01 each in a short period of time. So I found another seller of the same item for the same price and put in a maximum bid of \$0.53, figuring that at worst I'd use up my eBay Bucks (which is “bonus money” based on how much you bought on eBay in the previous month). Again, I had someone else bid, but they only tried up to \$0.36, so I won my second dongle for \$0.41. When I paid the sellers using my eBay Bucks, I discovered that both “sellers” had the same PayPal account, so there was really just one seller using multiple eBay accounts.

Back to the “So what gives?” question. I see at least 3 possible ways to explain this:

1. The seller is hoping that the \$0.01 price will bring in bidders, but there will be enough people bidding on these so that the final bid will be high enough to make a profit, on average, over a large number of sales. This doesn't seem to be happening, I see lots of people getting these for \$0.01, and even my two quick attempts on this didn't raise the price to a point where the seller could break even.
2. The seller is offering these dongles as a “loss leader,” just like a retail store, in hopes that you will buy from the seller again when you want something that is being sold at a reasonable profit. While the “loss leader” concept has shown some success in the retail store market, on eBay and the Internet you have many choices available instantly so I don't think this concept is going to work.
3. This is my best guess to explain these auctions: The seller is trying to quickly raise his total number of feedbacks, his positive feedback percentage, his detailed feedback ratings, and to be a “Top-rated seller.” To understand why these measures are important, you have to be familiar with the eBay rating system and the preferences of most eBay buyers. I'm not going to go into the details here, but it's clear that the majority of eBay buyers want to buy from the

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“Top-rated sellers,” they like seeing big feedback numbers, and they want to see positive feedback near 100%. Normally, to achieve these sorts of numbers you have to sell a lot of items over a fairly long period of time, which is why most buyers feel that they can trust” a “Top-rated seller” -- they’ve got a “proven track record.” This seller is effectively trying to “buy” a solid reputation in a short period of time at a relatively low cost -- the loss on each individual sale of these dongles is the business cost of building his reputation -he’s basically giving away USB Bluetooth dongles to get a large number of positive feedback ratings.

You might wonder why a seller would use multiple eBay accounts. If a seller gets too many negative feedbacks in a short period of time, eBay may ban the account, or require the seller to take specific actions to “repair their reputation.” Even a handful of negative feedbacks in a week will turn off buyers even if eBay doesn’t take any action, so many of the “big sellers” have multiple accounts so that they can “throw away” an account that has been “poisoned” by negative feedback ratings.

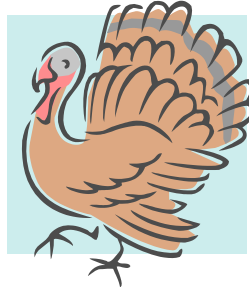
Bonus Cool Site Tip

An interesting web site I recently started using is www.biddingtraveler.com. This is for people who use Priceline.com to book travel. The operator of this site has figured out the algorithms Priceline uses in the bidding process and has come up with a program to help you work with them. For example, if you make a bid and it does not win, you usually have to change something in your request...star level, location, date, etc....in order to re-bid. Bidding-traveler lets you enter the request through them. When they see what you're requesting, they suggest low and high bids based on what recent bids have lost and won. This reduces the odds of having a losing bid. The "bot" also bids and re-bids for you until you've exhausted all chances to win. The site also links to reviews and other info. Though getting around some of the built-in limitations of Priceline, biddingtraveler appears to be approved by them as they request you enter your bid through their site rather than on Priceline, indicating they get a commission on either clicks or winning bids. Thus, they do not charge to use this site.

I used the site the first time this week and won a room at the Chattanooga Choo Choo hotel for \$65, about 60 percent off the lowest price I could find otherwise. I might have obtained the same deal directly on Priceline, but this way I was able to do it with one click rather than bidding and rebidding a number of times.

As an aside, I have always been afraid to use Priceline due to the way you have to commit to payment then wait to see what I get. On a recent trip north, we were moving from place to place to hit some tourist spots and also visit family in different states so needed five different hotels. I normally use hotels.com, travelocity, hotwire, etc. After booking a rather poorly rated Roadway Inn as the only thing I could find for what I was looking to pay, I bit the bullet and took a chance on Priceline. I ended up with a much nicer Holiday Inn for the same price, so canceled the other place. The rest of the trip had us staying, mostly, at Holiday Inns, though we did get one night at a big Marriott (not the Courtyard, Fairfield Inn, etc), all for what I was used to paying for La Quintas, Comfort Inns or Days Inn. Now, I'm going to use only Priceline unless I need a specific hotel for some reason.

Submitted by Steve Rosenstein



Many Free Programs from Microsoft

by Ira Wilsker

WEBSITES:

<https://www.techsupportalert.com/content/best-free-microsoft-downloads.htm>

Microsoft is one of those companies that many of us have a love-hate relationship with. Despite some possible ill will towards Microsoft based on our experiences with Vista, BOB, and a myriad of other software issues, Microsoft does have a kind and generous side when it comes to producing and releasing for free, numerous pieces of useful software. My favorite free software directory, Gizmo's TechSupportAlert.com recently compiled and published a comprehensive directory of free software from Microsoft, which can be found at www.techsupportalert.com/content/best-free-microsoft-downloads.htm.

Gizmo, and his volunteer staff, have tested and reviewed all of the free Microsoft software titles listed, and only those that met subjective quality and performance standards are listed. According to Gizmo and his staff, "An unavoidable fact is that some alternatives will be better than programs listed here, but the programs listed here are still good and useful - however, if a Microsoft program is ridiculously inferior to other free alternatives and simply not worth using, I won't include it. If a program has a loose affiliation with Microsoft but is not actually a Microsoft product (e.g. Paint.NET), it won't be listed here."

The Gizmo listings of free Microsoft software are categorized into eleven types of utilities, including security software, internet, system tools, desktop, multimedia, office, educational, programming, online services, entertainment, and miscellaneous. At the top of the directory is a listing of recently added free Microsoft software. A few of these recently added programs include Standalone System Sweeper (creates bootable CD to scan and remove malware), Microsoft Safety Scanner (comprehensive computer scan to detect and remove malware), and Fix it Solution (Microsoft's automated utility to repair or correct many common Windows and Microsoft software problems).

I have been a strong proponent of securing our computers, and have repeatedly encouraged users to utilize any one or more of the many free or commercial security utilities that are available. For those who may like the idea of using free security software from Microsoft, such software is available. One of Microsoft's most popular free software utilities is Microsoft Security Essentials, a decent and often well regarded utility that can provide real-time protection from viruses, spyware, and other common forms of malware, as well as scan for malware already on the computer. In its review of Security Essentials, Gizmo says, "This may be the best free product ever from Microsoft, and it was chosen as Gizmo's Freeware 2010 Product of the Year. MSE is a free anti-malware program with an interface ideal for average users, and effectiveness ideal for advanced users as well." Microsoft Security Essentials will run on any computer with Windows XP, Vista, or Windows 7. While this is an "essentials" program, only providing adequate protection against the most common threats, it does lack many of the features incorporated into other competitive free and commercial security products.

I am frequently asked about parental control software, programs that can give parents control over their children's internet activities. Microsoft obliges with its free "Windows Live Family Safety", which comes in versions for Vista, Windows 7, and a special version for XP. This program can filter web content, and restrict email contacts. Windows Live Family Safety can also create an activity log that allows parents to see who has been on the computer, and a list of which websites the child has visited.

Many Windows users like to tweak their computers in order to eke out any available performance increase, or to better manage the software that is running on the computer. Microsoft has several excellent free system tools that can

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perform these tasks and more. One of my favorites, which I frequently use, is Microsoft's Sysinternals Suite, a comprehensive collection of about 70 system utilities and troubleshooting tools that can be used to monitor and maintain most functions on the computer. Not all tools will run on all Windows machines (but most will), as some tools are XP only, while others will not run on XP, and some tools are for 32-bit systems only; still the majority of these utilities will run on most Windows machines. Another way of improving computer performance and speed, as well as to improve boot time, is to control what programs load when the computer is booted; Microsoft offers for free one of the finest startup managers available at any price, and this program is "Autoruns". Autoruns can also be used to identify and disable malware that loads itself in the boot process, a critical step in the removal of many types of malware. Autoruns, which will run on any XP or later computer, is one of the programs that I routinely install on almost all computers that I work on, and is seen by many IT professionals as a mandatory item to use to analyze potential PC problems.

Under the heading "Image Tools" in the Multimedia category, is another of my favorite free utilities, Microsoft Image Composite Editor (ICE). This program performs a task that most users are unaware of, but once used, becomes a fun task to accomplish when manipulating a series of digital photos or images. ICE is a "panorama stitcher" in that it can seamlessly merge a series of overlapping photos, and use them to create a panoramic image. Once this panoramic image is created, ICE can be used to crop, rotate, and otherwise manage the image, and then save the new image in a variety of popular image formats. If the user chooses to do so, images created with ICE can be uploaded to Microsoft's Photosynth website (photosynth.net) where they can join the 50,000 panoramic images that users have decided to share with the world.

Since taking digital photos and video have become some of the most popular personal activities, many of us have found a need to be able to edit our images and videos, but are often unwilling to pay for expensive editing software. For those who want a decent but free utility to accomplish those tasks, Microsoft offers Windows Live Photo Gallery and Windows Live Movie Maker. The Photo Gallery software enables the user to easily edit, organize, and tag digital photos. Like most of Microsoft's other free programs, Photo Gallery is totally adequate to carry out the most common image tasks, but it lacks many of the enhanced features found on more comprehensive competitive products. Windows Live Movie Maker, like Photo Gallery, offers the user the most common video editing functions. Movie Maker can also directly upload videos to YouTube, Facebook, and some other video hosting services. For anyone wanting to create a slideshow using digital photos, Photo Story 3 is a powerful program that can do that and much more. Photo Story 3 can create transition effects between images, pan, and zoom in on images, as well as add text to the images, audio narration, and music to the slideshow. Slideshows created with this software are saved in the popular and universally viewable WMV (Windows Media) format.

One of my favorite programs in the Educational section is Microsoft Mathematics, which is a full featured mathematical and graphic calculator. This free program can solve equations, perform unit conversions, display 2 and 3 dimensional graphs, and can process algebra, trigonometry, and calculus. One very useful educational feature built in is its ability to display simple instructions on how to solve math problems, which is a valuable teaching and tutorial function. Microsoft originally sold this program commercially, but the newest version was released by Microsoft as freeware. One other interesting feature in Microsoft Mathematics is that it integrates with Word and One-Note as an add-in, which incorporates the math features into those programs.

These are but a few of the many free programs that Microsoft has made freely available to Windows users. It may be a worthwhile and profitable exercise to review the list of free software from Microsoft before purchasing some commercial software. All of this software is available for download directly from Microsoft for an excellent price, that is hard to beat - free!

January 2012

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6 1 PM Photo Editing Workshop	7
8	9	10	11 2 pm Board Mtg	12	13	14
15	16 3 pm Q & A Session Followed by General Mtg	17	18	19	20	21 10 am Investment SIG
22	23	24	25	26 1 pm Photography Club Mtg	27	28
29	30	31				

PLATEAU PC USERS GROUP, INC.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Return this application, with check for annual dues (\$25 family, \$20 individual, \$10 student membership) payable to "PLATEAU PC USERS GROUP." Return to the club Treasurer during our meeting or mail to PPCUG Treasurer. P.O. Box 3787, Crossville, TN 38557.

Date

Last Name First Name Family Members (if family membership)

Address: City State Zip Code Phone Number

E-Mail address

I have used PCs since (year): I have belonged to a Computer Club before. Yes No

I have knowledge in the following areas and would be willing to share my knowledge with club members:
