WiNNERS Notepad

August 2013

WINdows usERS

Fountain Valley Branch Library
17635 Los Alamos,
Fountain Valley
meetings on 2nd Saturday
10:00 am to 12:30 pm

Future Meeting Dates
August 10 - Discussion of SSDs
Sept 14 - TBA
Oct - 12 TBA
Membership
Annual membership is $20 for indivduals: $5 for each additional family members.

No CBS? No problem.
By Terry Currier

If you have Time Warner Cable you know that they have dropped showing channels associated with the CBS Company. If you read the email Time Warner sent out you, they said they were giving away a limited number of free in-door antennas. This was to be used for picking up over the air broadcast of CBS channels – and of course it will pick up other stations as well. I went down and got one, they verified I had an account with them and with due diligence warned me it may not pick up the stations. I did not bother telling them I already had three in-door antennas I use with my computers. More about that later.

Antenna from TWC

TWC even gave switches which could be used for changing from cable, to antenna signal. I attached the antenna to our HDTV in living room. Remember all the signals are now broadcast in HD, so unless you have a converter box, hooking it up to a non-HDTV would be useless. Just so you know my setup, it sits on a table connected by cable (with no box) through a Tivo unit. We use it mainly to entertain the grandkids, and record shows when the DVR it already in use. Simple to hook up, with the first image all I got was a blue screen. I brought up the TV menu and went into channel setup. I had to change the source from cable to air, and then tell it to scan for signals. **Note** this is where most will fail, they just hook it up and expect it to work.

The antenna sits on the table and with the first scan picked up 66 channels, but of course no CBS. Most were not very good signals, and thus not very good picture. If you remember the old rabbit ear days turning it sideways it got better, but bringing them together for greater height was best. I then set it onto a box (higher up), and the signals came in much better. A rescan picked up 98 stations including CBS, plus the picture signal was pretty good. Every once in a while the picture gets a little grainy, but comes back good. I'm sure if I was able to put the antenna up higher it would work even better. So now my wife can watch her Big Brother, and Under the Dome with minimal (switching source on the TV) problems. She however can not record them,

3 over the air antennas for computers

and she still complains about not getting Showtime.

Now with my older two desktop computers I've had TV cards inside them. One is hooked up with cable while the other uses an over the air antenna. The over the air antenna has always had a good signal even though it is just placed on top my computer desk shelf. My monitor is a Samsung HDTV connected via a DVI cable, and it also has an antenna hooked up to it so I can switch over to TV while the computer is doing something. The third antenna? Well I wanted to be able to have TV capabilities for my new computer, but I could not fit another card in to it. So I brought a Hauppauge USB 2.0 TV stick which comes with a antenna. The timing was just right since Frys had a sale for it at $79.99 with a $40 instant savings, and a $20 rebate. The WinTV-HVR-950Q is a portable USB TV tuner "stick" for NTSC, ATSC and clear QAM TV. It comes with Hauppauge WinTV, but I just use the Windows Media Center. It downloads a schedule of TV shows for each of the channels I get a signal from. With that I can schedule and record shows I want. So I won't be missing any CBS shows.

Interesting Internet Finds

By Steve Costello, President/ Editor, Boca Raton Computer Society, Florida
May 2012 Boca Bits
http://about.me/sefcug
brcssefc (at) earthlink.net

In the course of going through the more than 200 news feeds in my Google Reader, I often run across things that I think might be of interest to other user group members.

The following are some items I found interesting during the month of April 2012.
(Long URLs shortened with the Google URL shortener http://goo.gl/)

Deciphering the Power Label on Your A/C Adapters
http://goo.gl/6ljEj

The Best Free Portable Apps for Your Flash Drive Toolkit
http://goo.gl/JtJio

Best Free Android Apps
http://goo.gl/XyQr6

Webinar #11 - Mastering your own domain
http://goo.gl/xSygZ

How to Pick the Perfect Laptop
http://goo.gl/whLEM

Selecting a Digital Camera

Jerry Schneir, Member, Los Angeles Computer Society
June 2012 issue, User Friendly
www.lacspc.org
editor@lacspc.org

As a teacher of digital photography I am often asked for help by a student who is trying to select the "perfect" camera. It is very hard to tell someone that there is "no one perfect camera". What meets your needs today may not be great for tomorrow. I try to tell them that the most important thing about any camera is the six inches behind the
camera, the photographer.

Having said all that, there are some things that make one camera a much better choice than another, regardless of the expressed needs of the potential buyer. Just remember to keep in mind that the camera you need for your trip to Africa is vastly different than what you need as you walk through a street market in Rome Italy. You also need to come to grips with how much you are willing to spend, how often you are willing to replace a camera, and how much time are you willing to put into an attempt to master, to understand, and to "play" with a camera.

There are some general features you should look for in any new camera. Unfortunately, this means I have to be a bit technical and you will have to spend some time digging out the details on any camera you are thinking about. So here goes:

Sensor Size

Most point and shoot (P&S) cameras, those you can stick in a shirt pocket or pocketbook use the same size sensor called the 1 /2.3"which measures 6.17 x 4.55 mm. However, more and more, you may be seeing some cameras using larger sensors such as the 1 /1.7", 1/1.8" , and even a 2/3". The larger sensors, the 1/1.7 or 1/1.8, or 2/3 inch offer much better low light performance, the pictures tend to be sharper, tend to have less noise or grain. Don't confuse 1 /2.3".with the 2/3", they are very different in size, the 2/3" is much larger and therefore much better.

Sensor Type

The sensors that use a CCD type sensor are old school. They do produce reasonably good pictures but cannot keep up with the newer CMOS when it comes to movie making. Another type of CMOS sensor is called a BSI-CMOS and that is really the best of the lot, especially if you want to make high def movies or do a lot of photography in very low light.

Number of Pixels

With cameras that have the small sensors, more is NOT better. Look for cameras that have only 10-12 MP. More pixels, 14-24MP is only an advantage for cameras that have larger sensors, such as those found on the Nikon V1/J1, the Canon G1 X, the Sony NEX 5N or NEX 7, or the Fuji X10 or X100.

Zoom Range

Most, but not all cameras have optical zoom ranges from 3x to as large as 36x or more. What that zoom range really means is the "difference" from the widest angle to the greatest amount of zoom. As an example, a 10x optical zoom for a camera with a lens that has a wide angle of 28mm is 10x28 or 280mm. All these measurements are in 35mm film terms. For most purposes, that is an ample zoom range. Some of the cameras do not have any zooming whatever, others only have 3 or 4x optical zoom. Disregard or ignore any digital zoom values.

Widest Angle

This is a very important feature for anyone trying to take pictures in a street market setting or at a party or in any crowded situation. The SMALLER the starting number the greater the wide angle of the camera. A 36mm wide angle is not good, a 28mm lens is very good, but a 24mm one is even better. Taking pictures in confined spaces works better with the wider angle lens, you get more of the picture without having to step back. However, as the lens angle gets bigger, wider, more encompassing, distortion starts to rear its ugly head. Straight lines get bent and the results are not always pleasant.

Maximum Zoom Range

One might think that a large amount of maximum zoom would be good, very good, but there are penalties to pay for that long a zoom range, size and weight are two of the more important penalties. There

are cameras with zoom ranges up to 18x optical that can still fit into a shirt pocket. Of course, these cameras do weigh more. But as you start going over 10x optical zoom the need for some type of viewfinder becomes much more important. At over 18x optical, the lack of any viewfinder would prevent me from buying the camera. There are attachments that can be screwed into the tripod hole of a camera that mimics to some extent a viewfinder. Check the website for ClearViewer www.clearviewer.com/) to see if they have a device for your camera.

The lack of a viewfinder for the longer end of the zoom range cameras really spells trouble. Camera shake becomes a real problem even for those cameras with very good image stabilization (I.S.).

Aperture or F Stop
The smaller the number the better the camera performs in dim or subdued light. In an attempt to keep camera prices down and camera size small, most cameras do not have a "fast or bright" lens. A "fast or bright" lens is one that lets in a lot of light very quickly. This allows for a fast shutter speed which allows the photographer to capture fast moving events. This is very important if you are taking pictures from a moving vehicle or of very fast moving subjects or action. The other advantage to a bigger lens opening is the shallow depth of field (DOF) that such a lens is able to provide. Objects in front of or behind the subject are blurred when shooting with a large lens opening, a nice way of visually isolating your subject.

Most zoom lenses have two stated aperture values. One for the widest angle and one for the maximum zoom. The aperture at the widest angle generally ranges from f2.8 to f3.8. A lens with a f2.8 aperture at wide angle admits almost double the amount of light in a given time as one with a f3.8. At the other end of the zoom you will generally find aperture values of f5.5-f5.6. This means that for a given shutter speed the lens at maximum zoom can only let in about 1/4-1/8 of the light at maximum aperture. Thus at maximum zoom you have to use shutter speeds 1/4-1/8 that used when at maximum wide angle. If your camera can properly expose a scene at 1/250 of a second at maximum wide angle (24-28mm), you would need 1/30 to 1/15th of a second at maximum zoom, thus subject movement and camera shake become a greater

problem. Another problem occurs because almost all of the point and shoot cameras require fairly bright settings to focus quickly and an f stop of f5.6 just doesn't do well, especially in dimmer light.

Image Stabilization (IS)
Most cameras have image stabilization (IS) of some type. The better ones use either a moveable element in the lens, called OPTICAL IS or a movable SENSOR. Neither of these help when the subject is moving or you are moving, like in a vehicle. A few use other things like increasing the sensitivity of the sensor to light in order to use faster shutter speeds to minimize subject or camera motion. Some use a combination of different IS systems. The combination version has problems which are best avoided if possible. Some cameras allow you to turn off some parts of the IS very useful in your camera has multiple means of stabilizing the camera.

Viewfinders
Most cameras in the P&S family of cameras do NOT have any type of viewfinder. It is only when you get to the more advanced cameras or the super-zoom cameras that you can find an electronic viewfinder (EVF). Viewfinders are very nice to have but are almost impossible to find in most of the P&S type cameras.

LCD
The brightness of the LCD and the size contribute to the ability to use the camera in bright light and can either make the camera easy to use or a big pain you know where. Generally the more pixels or dots in the LCD the better, but unfortunately there are exceptions. <u>You</u> must evaluate the camera for ease of use in bright light. Some LCDs articulate, i.e., they move up and down or swivel around. That is generally a very desirable feature and can help when shooting in very bright light. Some LCDs are touch screen. You can point to an object displayed in the LCD and the camera will use that as a focus point. You may be able to control various camera settings using the touch screen. Not everyone likes touch screen LCDs, if a camera has that feature, check it out, use it, some are easier to use than others.

There are two other points to consider, but these can only be evaluated by actually handling the camera.

And even then, the pluses and minuses may escape notice unless you have handled a lot of other cameras.

Camera Speed

This is not something you will find in any chart. What I am specifically referring to is how fast does the camera "grab' focus, how fast is the camera ready to take another picture, how fast is it ready to go to take a picture when turned on, how fast does the camera respond to menu commands?

Controls

Menu system - Some cameras allow the photographer to make a lot of choices, some treat the photographer as not at all
interested in the finer points of photography. What I mean here is your not letting the camera make all the choices. If you always shoot in the AUTO mode, then the ability to set the aperture or shutter speed is unimportant. But, if you are thinking about getting more involved in photography then it is something to consider

It is impossible to list some features that may be very important to some people, things such as built-in GPS or the various movie formats available. Prices are constantly changing, generally downward from when the camera was first introduced. Read reviews both by various websites and by the users of the cameras. My three favorite places to look are DPReview, CameraLabs, and ImagingResources. Steve's Digicam is also a good information source.

Darwin Wanna-Be's ---

DON'T ASK GOD TO PROVE HIMSELF, HE JUST MIGHT...
A lawyer and two of his buddies were fishing on Caddo Lake in Texas. A lightning storm hit the lake and most of the fisherman immediately headed for the shore. But not our friend the lawyer. He was alone on the rear of his aluminum bass boat and his buddies were in the front. This gentleman stood up, spread his arms wide (crucifixion style) and shouted: "HERE I AM LORD, LET ME HAVE IT!" Needless to say, God delivered [well, wouldn't you?]. The other two passengers on the boat survived and are said to have immediately joined the Ministry.

"And the Oscar Goes To . . ." - Making a Good Video

By Greg Skalka, President, Under the Computer Hood User Group, CA
April 2012 issue, Drive Light
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I've discovered it is a lot harder to make a good video than it is to take a good photograph. It is definitely a lot more work.

For the most part, the majority of the effort involved in taking a good photograph occurs before the picture is taken. While some augmentation and enhancement can occur after the exposure, through the marvels of digital photo editing, much of the merit of a photo comes from basics like subject, composition, focus and lighting. While photo editing software can enhance a photo, perhaps making a good picture great, it can only go so far in fixing a poor photograph.

In making a great video, once you have captured the action, your work typically has only begun. In spite of all the star-centric hoopla surrounding the Academy Awards, have you ever noticed that the majority of the awards don't go to performers, but to creators.

There are only a few categories of awards given to actors and actresses. The majority go to writers, directors, film editors, cinematographers and designers of sound, sets, costumes and effects. In a lot of movies made today, most of the work is done after the filming is over. The difference between raw footage and polished final product is much greater for video than for still photography, indicative of the amount of post processing work usually required. As with photography, however, it is still hard to turn poor exposures into a good final product.

I got my first still camera in 3rd grade, taking black and white film photos. In the 40-something years since, I learned to take decent photos (at least by my standards) using mostly slide film, where there was no chance for corrections after the exposure. I've had a digital camera for eleven years, but still don't typically edit or enhance my pictures after taking them. I've spent more time making digital corrections

on the slides I have digitized, to fix the effects of film aging and imperfections, than on any of my recent digital photos.

Growing up, my family never had a movie camera. A neighbor friend my age got access to their family's old 8 mm movie camera, and he and I made a two-reel epic titled "The History of Aviation". Through careful planning and filming, we came up with a pretty impressive movie for a couple of grade school kids, though we probably destroyed most of our collections of model airplanes in the process (in addition to scorching the underside of his family's metal patio cover during our "reenactment" of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima). I'd love to see that film again, if it still exists.

When my wife and I had kids of our own, my in-laws gave us one of the early shoulder-mounted video cameras (it was so big and heavy, you had to rest it on your shoulder), which recorded directly on VHS tape cartridges.

It recorded some of the early moments in our children's lives, but being analog tape, the results were of mixed quality and could not be edited. We still have some of those 20-year-old tapes around (we should digitize them), but unfortunately I think a few were taped over at some time in the past. Later, we bought a smaller handheld camcorder, which used the smaller VHS-C tapes and was more convenient to take on family outings. These too would not be editable unless digitized.

My very first digital camera had a primitive video capture capability of 320 x 240 with no audio, which was about half the 704 x 480 equivalent resolution of the camcorder NTSC video, but was much more convenient to carry. It still resulted in only video snippets of our lives being captured. Even after graduating in 2007 to a new digital camera with 640 x 480 video and sound, I only shot occasional video clips, and never tried to find a way to edit and combine them into a coherent video feature.

For my birthday late last year, my wife surprised me with a Panasonic SD40 HD video camcorder. It records HD video (1920 x 1080) in the AVCHD (Advanced Video Coding High Definition) file format.

Depending on the card size, it can store hours of video on an internal SDHC memory card.

One of the first things I learned about shooting HD video with this camcorder is that I'm going to need more hard drives. I think I shoot a lot of digital photos, sometimes hundreds per month. Using my 12 Megapixel camera, this averages 5 MB per photo, I'm generating around 0.5 GB of new photos per month (assuming 100 photos), or 6 GB per year. I first used my new camcorder in earnest during family festivities on Christmas Day, and managed to fill up the 8 GB SD card that came with the camcorder that day.

If I hold my filming down to 16 GB of video per month, that means I'll generate nearly 200 GB of video data every year. How am I going to store it all?

The second thing I learned about shooting HD video is that not every computer can easily play it. I normally use my XP laptop PC to copy my still photos from memory cards to hard drive and to view them, so I plugged in the SDHC card from the camcorder. Unfortunately, I could not view the .MTS AVCHD video files with any program on that computer. When I put the SD card in my wife's new Windows 7 laptop, I was able to play the files with Media Player. Score another one for Windows 7.

To make the 45 minute video on computer upgrading that was shown at our meeting last month, I started by shooting 51 video segments, totaling 5.7 GB. These included the introductions and descriptions I gave, the scenes of dis-assembly and modification of the computer, and the screen shots of the computer showing the results. A tripod proved essential in filming the scenes where I was talking, as I had to work with a film crew of only one (me). The camcorder's display can be flipped around to allow the subject of the video to see how they look onscreen. The tripod was also used in most of the shots where I was working on the computer, since it usually took two hands to do the work. I would set up the tripod and camcorder to give a good view of the hardware, and then start filming. I was not watching what was being filmed, but just made sure my activities stayed within what I understood was the field of view.

One of the filming mistakes I made was in sometimes not allowing enough "lead in" and "lead out" time at

the beginning and end of the scenes. Excess footage can be trimmed, but you can't easily make more footage after filming is done.

I started shooting scenes before determining what program I would be using to edit the video, so I was not sure what editing capabilities I could count on. I was not sure the program I would use could add titles, so I printed titles on paper and held them up in front of the camcorder. I later found titles could be added using software, but not with the flexibility of my paper signs.

Although I had a couple of commercial video editing software packages available to install, I decided to initially try the editing software that came with the camcorder, Panasonic's HD Writer LE 1.0. I installed it on my wife's laptop to make sure I'd have enough horsepower to do the video editing quickly.

I found the software would not recognize the raw video files I had copied from the SD memory card to the computer's hard drive. To use the captured video with this program, I had to connect the camcorder to the PC with the provided USB adapter cable and download the files from the camcorder through the program. The program had all the basic features I had seen in other video editing software. It allowed clips to be combined on a timeline, with a number of choices for transitions between scenes. Scenes could be edited for length, and basic titles could be added.

I chose the least flashy transitions and put the video segments together one by one. Because of the brief lead-ins I had shot, I could not add much in the way of additional titles, but fortunately the signs I had filmed worked well. I was concerned that 45 minutes might be too long without a break, so I split the video into two 22 minute segments, allowing an intermission in between.

The program could convert the finished video to several different resolutions on DVD or Blu-Ray discs for playing on home players or computers. I'll try using one of my fancier video editing programs with this camcorder one day, but I found the Panasonic-provided software could turn out a good video.

Since making a coherent video out of the filmed segments I made was not too difficult, I'll probably try to make similar edited videos for all the events I film.

Google+: The Missing Manual
The book that should have come with the site
Book review by Steve Costello
President/Editor Boca Raton Computer Society, Inc.
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  http://about.me/sefcug

Author: Kevin Purdy
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http://shop.oreilly.com/product/0636920021919.do

Introduction
I enjoy Kevin's posts at http://lifehacker.com/, and have been using Google+ since late July 2011.

When I saw this listed on the O'Reilly site, I immediately requested it for review.

About the Book
This book consists of an introduction and nine chapters. The following list will give you an idea what each contains:

Introduction:
How Google+ works, what you can do with it, a little about this book, the very basics, online resources, and Safari Books Online

Chapter 1—Getting Started:
Signing in, Joining up, and fleshing out your profile

Chapter 2—Managing Contacts with Circles:
How circles work, adding, creating, editing, organizing, & sharing circles

Chapter 3—Streams, Sharing and Privacy:
About streams; writing Google+ posts; choosing who sees your posts; sharing, interacting, editing, deleting, and controlling posts

Chapter 4—Notifications:
Where you get them, and controlling them

Chapter 5—Sharing Photos and Videos:
Viewing, sharing, tagging, editing, and more

The book can be read in any order. However, I suggest reading the Introduction and first four chapters in order, particularly if you are brand new to Google+.

Conclusion
I got a lot out of this book, even though I have been using Google+ for a while. Of particular interest to me was Chapter 8, as I have just moved into the 21st century by getting a smartphone.

If you are just getting started with Google+, or interested in learning more about it, I highly recommend you read this book.

Disclosure
This book was received through the O'Reilly User Group Program, at no cost, in exchange for this review, which in no way influenced the above review.

The Darwin Awards
Loser Wins Roach-Eating Contest.

(5 October 2012, Florida) Police say that Edward A., 32, died after winning a roach-eating contest (and losing a worm-eating contest) at a reptile store. By some reports, he ate a plate full of superworms, a handful of mealworms, and half a bucket of roaches. Nominated for a Darwin Award, Mr. Roach Man loses the prize because--surprising but true--roaches and worms are considered edible. Entymologists say that an all-you-can-eat insect buffet is not normally deadly, just silly.
The cause of death was not officially finger a dormant food allergy waiting for the right trigger. Contestants were disallowed if they were allergic to shellfish, and roach allergies can develop in people living in infested tenements.

Dad is probably not a Geek, but is most likely a Technophile!
By Lou Torraca, President, The TUG MOAA
Computer User Group, Hawaii
www.the-tug.org
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Christmas is coming up, so you have some time left to pick a goodie for him, and don't forget granddad and even great-granddad [since I'm all 3 had to put in a plug {:-)] Here are a half dozen ideas for u 2 consider:

The Abyss LED Touchscreen Watch
Think Geek wrote the following about this watch, which I think is pretty nifty!

If you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you. This watch is famous. Srsly, we wouldn't lie about something this important. Here's just a small snippet of the things it can do for you:

- Gives the ability to gaze into the abyss and come face to face with the true nature of your being
- Enables you to experience reality in four dimensions like a Tralfamadorian (no I don't have any idea what that is either, but I suspect is has to do with aliens!)
- Use your knowledge of blue oyster cult numerals to control the Eye of Sauron
- Flaunt your disregard for the Temporal Proliferation Treaty of 3012
- Suck the souls out of your enemies, leaving them empty shells of the losers they once were
- Experience the horror (the horror) of the heart of darkness or blue lights like Tron
- Be friended on Facebook by such famous wizards as Merlin, Gandalf, and Dumbledore (he's not dead!)
- Get you into top secret locations without top secret clearance
- Instantly assess whether someone believes in midichlorians

Seriously, you'd better get your hands on this watch before we get a Cease & Desist from the Federation.

This kind of technology just shouldn't be on the open market for any chucklehead to order and use. But we trust you nerds. At least, we trust you won't use your newfound powers to hurt us.

Now for the serious stuff-

Product Specifications:
- Japanese-inspired blue LED touchscreen digital watch
- Gently touch the screen to display the time
- Touch and hold to enter time setting mode
- Blue & white LEDs encircle the mouth of the Abyss
- Black, snakeskin-textured leather band with buckle clasp
- Powered by 2 - CR2016 batteries (included)
- Longer-than-average battery life since the time only displays when you tap the watch!
- ThinkGeek is not responsible if the watch drives you crazy…Me either {:-)

Lighted hands - the next step in human evolution
If you're trying to do difficult work in the dark (assuming you are) you need a pair of these LED Work Gloves. They allow you to focus beams of light on your work while keeping both hands free to do said work. Whether you're putting together computers, fixing the innards of your vehicle, or building a robot companion, a little extra light goes a long way.

One LED light with four attachment points on each glove (two lights per pair)
- Ergo-flex designed palm pattern
- Reinforced foam padded palm
- Neoprene cuff with pull tab closure
- Air flow panels in fourchettes
- Micro-textured grip enhancing polymer material gives you a firm grip on items, life
- Micro-terrycloth perspiration pad
- Double layered synthetic thumb
- Star stretch fabric so the gloves fit nice and snug
- Sizes S-XL

The Hydrokinetic Adjustable Wrench adjusts to the job
Doctor Who has his sonic screwdriver - a small tool that can adjust to any situation. It uses advancements in technology to provide an infinitely adaptable tool. While the Hydrokinetic Adjustable Wrench won't let you start up your TARDIS (that would be the time machine) it will let you fiddle with twenty three different sizes of bolts and nuts. And the secret resides in wrench's liquid core. Take a look at the little computer graphic cut-away, and you'll know what we mean.

To adjust the Hydrokinetic Adjustable Wrench, just open the valve, fit around the nut or bolt of your choice, and push the gripper on the opposite end. It will compress the liquid which will, in turn, push the gripper on the end you want. Once it is snug against the nut, close the valve and your Hydrokinetic Adjustable Wrench is locked into position. It's that easy! The slim heads of the wrench will let you sneak it into tight spaces, and the design of the grip will help you turn even damaged nuts and bolts. Once you get your Hydrokinetic Adjustable Wrench in your hands, you will instantly know its power - which it looks like something from Doctor Who or Star Trek doesn't hurt either!

Features:
- Patented, liquid-core technology allows this wrench to adjust to fit almost any nut or bolt.
- Easily adjusts to 23 different sizes (metric and standard): 7mm - 19mm and 1/4" - 3/4".
- Slim, ergonomic design allows the wrench to fit into hard to reach areas.
- Great for removing even damaged nuts and bolts.
- Made of nickel plated, cold forged steel.
- Dimensions: 7.5" long

Custom Tie
Yes, the good old standby for gifts when you don't know what to give the Dad who has it all!

What's a tailored suit without a custom tie! Create one-of-a-kind ties for yourself or your loved ones. Upload your own images and patterns, or browse thousands of stylish designs to wear in the office or on the town.

- 55" long, 4" wide (at widest point).
- Unlimited colors.
- Made of silky 100% polyester fabric.

The ICON Link Flashlight
A flashlight is just one of those things that's just good to have around. Whether it's being prepared for a potential weather-related emergency or just having a good light source available in person or in your car, you just never know when you'll need a flashlight. The Link by ICON is a great option for just such circumstances.

The Link is 4 inches long and has a carabineer clip, so the flashlight is easily stashable in the glove compartment or clipped to be within arm's reach. The Link's high strength aluminum body (3.1 oz) feels substantial yet not weighty in hand and is rugged (and waterproof) enough to take whatever you can dish out. But the selling point for any flashlight is the light And with both powerful 50 lumen and a useful 6 lumen outputs, the Link can shed the right amount of light under any condition with merely one AA battery.

A Great Gift For: Emergency preparedness, camper.

Have fun and remember to be careful out there on the www.
Aloha, Lou

Read all of Lou's columns at Oceanic Time Warner Cable's Community Website
http://www.aroundhawaii.com/technology_in_plain_english.html
http://bit.ly/f3TQ5t

Media Sharing & Devices
By Jerry Grommes, Editor, Sandwich Computer Users Group, IL
April 2012 issue, SCUG News
www.scug.org

As many of you know I feel strongly that my media, whether it's pictures, videos, music, recorded TV, etc., should be available to me on whatever device I own and not just tied to a computer, CD/DVD player or a DVR. With the increasing number of different kinds devices coming to market, each with its own nitch, I have finally resolved myself to the conclusion that there is not going to be a one size fits all anywhere in the near future.

About three weeks ago Bob Dell sent me a quote from the Tribune's business section (Visions of technology's future): *"Five years from now," says Nate Williams, Motorola Mobility's senior director, head of product marketing for the Converged Experiences group, "you're going to see a dramatic increase in the number of connected devices. The number is about five in the average home now — tablet, gaming console, PC — and it's going to 15 to 20. You're going to have a home with more technology and, hopefully, it will be managed in a way that's a lot more efficient."* I thought that over a bit and started counting. I have eight, which puts me a little above average but less than half of where they are predicting us to be at in the next five years.

Where are you at? Start counting, (Desktop PC, Notebook, Digital Camera, MP3 player, Smart phone, Smart TV, Tablet) that's 7, so you can see, they are adding up fast. Do they all share your media? The answer is yes, but not easily. In my opinion the industry has a long way to go to make it seamless for end users to have their content available across all devices and platforms.

All this lead in was to get to the point of sharing recorded TV and device #9. Ever since migrating from the Commodore to a PC, I have had a TV tuner card in every one of my PCs and if I want to record TV that's how I do it (record it on my computer). From there I can convert the recording to various formats for different devices or burn to DVD. This worked well until the arrival of digital TV. I have cable and they gradually kept dropping the analog channels till

it got to the point where I had to add a DTA (Digital Transport Adapter) to the TV tuner in my computer in order to get most of the basic channels again. This happened about the time that I migrated to Windows 7. Since most versions of Windows 7 include MCE (Media Center Edition), I decided to try MCE and found it to be an excellent avenue for watching TV in a little window or for recording TV. The programming guide makes it a snap to schedule recordings.

Device #9
So on to device #9. Two weeks ago I was surfing the channels and found a program that I wanted to record to watch later, problem was it was a High Definition channel which is not broadcast on an alternative digital channel thus I could not record it. Comcast seems to be doing more of this High Definition-only thing lately (not because you get a better viewing experience but rather they can rent you more HD boxes). While watching the show I couldn't record, I grabbed my tablet and started searching for a solution for recording HD on my computer. In a few clicks I was at the Hauppauge web site reading the specs on the WinTV-DCR-2650, a dual tuner CableCARD™ receiver for your Windows 7 PC. I then clicked on the "Features" tab which stated:

WinTV-DCR-2650 is just like a cable TV set top box (a "DVR" box) in that it can be used to watch and record TV from digital cable. There are a couple of differences:

- WinTV-DCR-2650 needs a PC to work. Currently, only a PC with Windows 7 Media Center is compatible with the WinTV-DCR-2650.
- WinTV-DCR-2650 does not have any internal disk storage: it uses your PC for storing recorded TV programs. The nice thing about using your PC for storage is that if you fill up your hard drive with TV programs, you can easily add a new hard drive to your PC.
- WinTV-DCR-2650 records in the original transmitted quality. For example, if you record from an HD channel, the recording will be HD.
- There is no monthly fee for the WinTV-DCR-2650. Once you buy it, it's yours to use forever. But you still need to sign up for cable TV service, and you will still need to rent a digital cable card from your local cable operator.

After reading the 3rd bullet point, that it could record

HD channels, I changed my search to a shopping search and had my order placed before the show I wanted to record was even over. How's that for impulse buying?

As you can see from the Quick Setup Guide instructions, there is not much to the setup and installation, it took approximately a half hour to complete the 1st time through. However, I had to repeat step 4 three additional times before everything was fully functional and that took over three hours because after every call I was instructed to wait 45 minutes or more before all the channels would be available. Overall, approx four hours from out-of-the-box to watching and recording High Definition TV on my computer.

WinTV-DCR-2650 rear panel connectors

Installation instructions for the WinTV-DCR-2650
Step 1. Run the Windows Digital Cable Advisor to make sure your PC is compatible with the WinTV-DCR-2650.
Step 2. Plug the WinTV-DCR-2650 into your PC via the USB cable. Connect cable TV. Insert the cable card you received from your cable operator into the back of WinTV-DCR-2650.
Step 3. Run the Windows Media Center TV Tuner setup and select your cable TV operator.
Step 4. Call your cable TV company to activate your cable card and "pair" it to the WinTV-DCR-2650

Four calls
In each of the four calls to Comcast a different support person was on the other end, each was very courteous, spoke very good English and seemed very knowledgeable. In the first call the support person activated the card and told me to wait 45 minutes or more before all the channels would be available. After 45 minutes I had all of the digital channels but only

the basic (2, 5, 7, & 9) HD channels.

Second call
In the second call the support person said she would resend the activation to the card and told me to wait 45 minutes or more before all the channels would be available. This netted the same results so I ran the Hauppauge diagnostic program that was included on the installation CD. It reported that the firmware on the CableCard was out-of-date and not supported.

Third call
On the 3rd call I gave the diagnostic information to the support person who put me on hold while he collaborated with another technician. When he returned he stated that he would have to flash the firmware of my CableCard and told me to wait 45 minutes or more before all the channels would be available. He also gave me a different phone number to reach a higher level of support if flashing the card didn't work. After my 45 minute wait I retried and had all digital channels but no HD channels (lost ground). I reran the Hauppauge diagnostic and it reported no errors and said all is well.

Fourth call
The 4th call was to the new number given by the last rep and the support person on the other end had all my information from the previous calls and said she would run some diagnostics on the card from her end, after which she said she would reactivate the card asked me to tell her what lights were flashing while she was doing it. While this was going on she said that if this didn't work she would schedule a service call. By the time we were done talking the reactivating had completed and I had all channels (including the HD Channels) that I subscribe to and I didn't have to wait for 45 minutes.

All Channels
I am very pleased with the Hauppauge WinTV-DCR-2650 picture quality; it is very good and since I was already using MCE there was no learning curve. I can receive every channel on my computer that I can get from the Comcast HD Box except On Demand and Pay Per View. With two tuners built-in you can watch one show while recording another. As for media sharing I give it a thumbs up because I can now record a HD TV show and use Windows Live Movie Maker to save it to a format that can be viewed on my

Android Tablet.

Hauppauge is headquartered in Hauppauge, NY and has been bringing TV to the PC since 1992. The Company is the worldwide leader in developing and manufacturing PC based TV tuners and data broadcast receiver products. Hauppauge's products allow PC users to watch television on their PC screens, videoconference and create both still video images and digital TV recordings. Hauppauge's flagship product, the WinTV, is the leading branded TV tuner card for PCs.

The Problem: Muffled Sound

By Steve Baer, Feature Writer, Hilton Head Island Computer Club, SC
May 2012 issue, Island Computing
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Lately when I'm with groups of friends there is an increasing chance that some subset of people will complain to me about how bad TV and DVD sound is getting, and how hard it is to at times to understand the dialog. I have been noticing this myself and decided to try to understand what is happening. There are several things going on, all of which conspire against us.

1 – As we get older our ears become less able, especially at higher frequencies. This is called Presbycusis, and there is good information on it on the web. Coming from Bell Labs, I learned about this almost 50 years ago, but I never thought it would apply to me!

2 – Many of the newer flat-screen TV's have very small bezels, and hence have small speakers or worse, put them at the sides or rear. When we put these sets in cabinets, or bookcases, the sound – especially the high frequencies, gets absorbed in the cabinets.

3 – Many DVDs have a very large dynamic range, the difference between the softest and loudest parts. Hence, in order to avoid being blown away during a car chase or explosions, we lower the volume overall. Then at the dialog passages, the sound is too low for our older ears.

4 – Many new DVDs are encoded with multi-channel

sound. When you play the DVD, you probably have seen the setup menu where the multi-channel options are labeled with terms such as: 5.1, 6.1, 7.1, DTS, THX, etc. This refers to the number of channels of sound that are in the film, if you have the equipment to decode and the right number of speakers. (The .1 represents the sub-woofer channel.) One of these channels is the center channel that usually carries most of the dialog.

If you have made an incorrect selection on the DVD setup menu or an external amplifier, and are trying to play back multichannel sound through a system without all the multi-channel speakers, you will miss a lot of the audio. If you are watching a movie through an ordinary TV without multi-channel sound capability, be sure to pick the appropriate audio option on the movie setup menu.

Some Solutions
There are some ways around these problems:

1 – Many people use a product such as "TV Ears" which wirelessly puts the sound into stethoscope type earphones that they wear. I have tried these, and they work extremely well. However, they are expensive and I have found them to be mechanically fragile. I have already had to repair two sets for friends – both failing in the same way. (Perhaps newer models are better made.) Two people would also require two sets. Be sure that you understand where the base station will plug in to your system in order to broadcast the audio to the stethoscope part.

2 – Several of my friends have supplemented the flimsy and poorly aimed speakers in their TVs with sound bars such as shown in the figure below. This is a Vizio model available from Wal-Mart for about $100. This does not solve the multi-channel problem, but for one or two channel sound, with the speakers facing the listener, they work amazingly well.

In my experience, good one or two channel sound is far superior to poor multi-channel sound. I heard this particular sound bar unit a few nights ago and I was amazed at the clarity. It is an active speaker, meaning that it has its own small amplifier built in. It can receive audio input from your DVD player or your TV set via red (right) and white (left) type of standard RCA cables. Some sound bars also have digital inputs for more complex setups.

3 – If you use an amplifier to drive a multi-channel speaker system, make sure that the center channel speaker is aimed, directly firing at the listener. Also raise the treble to make up for your possible high frequency loss from Presbycusis.

Finally, many amplifiers will have a compression setting that minimizes the differences between loud and soft passages. Make sure that you engage that feature. I recently did these three things in my system, providing a large improvement in intelligibility.

The Darwin Awards
A 22-year-old Reston man was found dead yesterday after he tried to use occy straps (the stretchy little ropes with hooks on each end) to bungee jump off a 70-foot railroad trestle, police said. Fairfax County (Virginia) police said Eric A. Barcia, a fast-food worker, taped a bunch of these straps together, wrapped an end around one foot, anchored the other end to the trestle at Lake Accotink Park, jumped and hit the pavement. Warren Carmichael, a police spokesman, said investigators think Barcia was alone because his car was found nearby. "The length of the cord that he had assembled was greater than the distance between the trestle and the ground," Carmichael said. Police say the apparent cause of death was "major trauma."

Your Office Web Apps questions

by [Annik Stahl](#)
on May 13

People have been using the Office Web Apps at an astonishing rate. And if you haven't, well, you're on the wrong bus headed to wrong station in the wrong town. You've heard the term [cloud computing](#) right? Well, this is it, folks, and with Office Web Apps it's free and it's easy and it's kind of silly not to take advantage of it.

Rather than rehash what Office Apps are and how to use them, what I want to do today is address some of your questions.

But, before we get started, if you're not familiar with Office Web Apps, [read up on them](#); this will fill you in on what they are, what you can do with them, and why they are the latest *must haves*.

And if you're *already* using Web Apps, you've just become Crabby's pet readers and today you just may get the answers to the questions you've asked. (And how do I know what your burning questions about Office Web Apps are? A few different ways: 1: You write to me directly and ask me; 2: You post comments on the various Office Blogs posts about them; 3: From Microsoft Answers; and finally 4: I have—*er*—*had* them!)

Do I have to have Office 2010 to use Office Web Apps?

You do not. You don't have to have *any* version of Office. That being the Office Web Apps and all they can do are best experienced when you have the Office desktop programs installed. I mean, think about syncing: You can't very well sync from a Web App to your desktop if you have nothing to sync to (and vice versa).

When is a good time to use Office Web Apps?
On the [Office in Education blog](#), some students recently talked about using Office Web Apps when researching, writing a paper, and during a group science experiment. Read Jennifer Bost's post about [how and when these students use Office Web Apps](#).

Can I receive a notification when someone edits a document on my SkyDrive?

Quick answer: Why yes you can. Useful answer: You can set it up so that you get an email notification if someone edits a document or adds a photo or comment but *only* if you've been added as a reader or writer of that folder (and if it's "your" SkyDrive then of course you have those permissions).

Here's how you [turn on or off Notifications](#).

Do I have to use Internet Explorer to access my Web Apps?

No way. You can use Firefox, Safari, Chrome—just about any browser. (And you don't need [Silverlight](#), either.)

Can I move the ribbon?

Boy, you are what I call *ribbon-persnickety*. But okay, let me answer this: No, you cannot exactly move the ribbon; you can, however, minimize it. On the top right of your window, see the little carat icon? Hover over it and you'll see this:
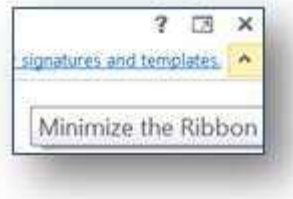
More information about Office Web Apps

- [Come fly with me: Office Web apps](#)
- [All about Office Web Apps](#)
- [10 reasons to use Office Web Apps](#)

Have more questions? Ask away below and I'll do my best to answer them.

Crabby's Find of the Week: [The Web is dead; long live the Internet](#) (My manager, Louis, sent this to our team and we had a lively discussion about it.)
— Crabby
Not finding the help you need from the various channels you've tried? [Microsoft Answers](#) may have the answers to your nagging problem.

How to find Twitter's hidden options

By Linda Gonse, Editor/Webmaster, ORCOPUG
(Orange County PCUG), California
April 2012 issue, Nibbles 'n Bits
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More people are using the Twitter social networking site and finding out that they like the mini-blog that allows them 140 characters to say whatever they want to say. But, there is more to Twitter than tweeting (posting a comment).

A new Twitter user might not realize there are options that are hidden, unless a user knows how to find them hiding in plain sight.

For instance, hovering over a tweet will reveal links that might not be found anywhere else.

What's more, depending on the type of tweet the hidden options will be different.
For instance, if I am just looking at my tweet on the page and not hovering the cursor over it, I only see the time or date when it was written in the upper right-hand corner.

If I hover my cursor over the tweet, however, hyperlinked options — Reply, Delete, Favorite, Open — appear on the same line as my name at the top of the tweet, but in the right corner in green text.

I can click on Reply to the person who posted the tweet. I can Delete the tweet. This option is only available to the person whose tweet is posted. In other words, only I will see the Delete link for my tweets. And, only I can delete my tweets. I can mark it as

a Favorite—it won't be cycled out of my timeline, but parked in a permanent area on my Profile page for favorite tweets when I want to reference it again. Finally, I can Open the tweet to read replies that others have had to this specific tweet.

If I hover my cursor over someone else's tweet the options are Reply, Retweet, Favorite, and Open. There's no Delete.

Clicking on the Open hyperlink allows the tweet to expand when other tweets are associated with it. The expanded tweet will also reveal if other people have favorited your tweet or retweeted it.

This is a recent innovation at Twitter. It is now possible to view your tweets in a thread, including replies to another person in their open threads. It is very convenient to view the conversations that are revealed, because there may be several hours, or sometimes days, between a tweet being posted and replies to it.

The Open link automatically changes to a Close link. You can collapse all the tweets again, except the original tweet, when you have finished reading them.

Get Free Help, Tips, and Tricks from "MakeUseOf"

by Ira Wilsker

WEBSITES:
http://www.makeuseof.com
http://www.makeuseof.com/about

It never ceases to amaze me as to how much reliable and quality help is available on the internet. One of my favorite resources for tips, tricks, cheat sheets, and apps is the website at www.makeuseof.com. With an international staff, but hosted in the U.K., MakeUseOf has established a recognized reputation of excellence in terms of tips and tricks to improve our cyber lives, regardless of what operating system that we choose to use, or devices that we own. Windows, Android, Linux, Apple OS, and other operating systems are covered, as well as hints and help for smart devices and phones, tablets, laptops, netbooks, desktops, and other digital platforms. The menu bar at the top of the website somewhat says it all, indicating what type of information is available, with the simple headings linked to "How To & TIPS", "Best of APPS", "Ask Tech HELP", "Cheats and GUIDES", "Websites INDEX", and "Geeky FUN."

The front page of MakeUseOf.com, which I review on a daily basis, shows the latest articles posted, as well as a listing of the most popular articles referenced. Founded just six years ago, in July, 2006, MakeUseOf has 450,000 active subscribers and 15 million page views each month. MakeUseOf is ranked as one of the top blogs on the web, and listed as one of the top 1000 websites by Amazon's Alexa. The heart of the MakeUseOf website is the collection of articles that it has posted; with about 10 article summaries per page, starting on the front page of the website, there are 1393 pages of article summaries, with each summary linking to the full article! As I type this, the most recent articles on the front page include such diverse items as, 3 Tools To Unleash Your Mac OS X Menu Bar, 10 Free MP3 Albums To Download (Sunday special, every Sunday), Why I'm Done With Windows (Commentary), Cool Websites and Tools, Cool Tech Deals of the Week, and Create Your Very Own Operating System With Linux From Scratch [Linux].
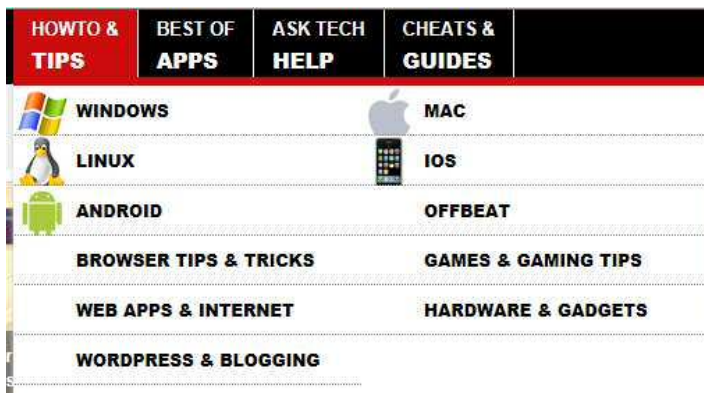
While a comprehensive collection of nearly 14,000 catalogued and indexed articles is a wealth of useful information, these articles make up but one small part of the MakeUseOf website. Moving the cursor over the "How To & TIPS" part of the menu bar on the website opens a wide choice of options; here is where operating

system help can be selected (Windows, MAC, iOS, Linux, Android), browser tips covering all of the major and most of the minor internet browsers (Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari, Opera, Chrome, and many others), Facebook and Twitter help, Wordpress and blogging assistance, online music help, security information, gaming, hardware and gadget information, and a variety of other interesting topics. Being personally interested in cyber security issues, I clicked on the "Security" link on the pull-down "How To & TIPS" menu, where the latest person-level security articles were posted. Among the latest articles posted was an updated story about the 450,000 Yahoo!

passwords that were compromised by hackers and posted online, an update on the FBI pulling the plug on internet servers that it had been running to mitigate the impact of the DNSChanger malware (see my April 27 column in the Examiner online archives), security risks on the Pinterest social media service, Trojans attacking Android and iOS devices, and a frightening prediction from Trend Micro that warns of a massive malware assault on Android devices, stating, "Trend Micro expects to

find 138,000 malware samples in the fourth quarter of 2012 – up dramatically from 5,000 at the start of 2012." Other contemporary security columns include articles on massive password thefts, gaming security, and online scams.

Under the "Best of APPS" banner is a directory of the best applications available, as determined by the MakeUseOf staff and broad community of contributors. The listing of categories of "Best APPS" is large and includes the best websites, as well as the best software, applications, and plug-ins for all of the major operating systems, portable devices (including smart phone and tablets, including the iPhone and iPad), browser extensions and add-ons, Wordpress plug-ins, portable applications (most run from a USB flash drive), and Linux distribution files. In this lengthy list, there is literally something for everyone.

With the widespread and increasing utilization of digital technology, it is inevitable that all of us will likely need some type of technical help or assistance; while there are many online sources of this technical help, including manufacturers' or publishers' websites, MakeUseOf has compiled an impressive collection of articles in its "Ask Tech HELP" section. Technical help and assistance is available for all of the major operating systems, hardware and software aid, networking solutions, Facebook help, Smartphone assistance (Android and iPhone), help with the many different web browsers currently available, and help for bloggers. Since I have an Android Smartphone, I decided to explore some of the more recent Android tech support issues, and I found several of use to me. In each of the tech support categories, the protocol is for someone to post a question, and then there may both expert and community responses. The number of possible solutions is posted adjacent to the inquiry, with the answer box color coded, which indicates if the problem has been resolved to the satisfaction of the person who originally posted the inquiry; red indicates unresolved, while green indicates satisfactorily resolved. Only registered users can post tech support questions on MakeUseOf, but registration is fast and free. MakeUseOf recognizes the users' registration on Facebook and other social media websites, which can be used to access all of the features and downloads on MakeUseOf; for those without social media membership, or those who prefer to register directly, they may do so directly from any page on the site.

I am not too proud to say that sometimes I need help with some of the most commonly used

applications, and MakeUseOf offers about 75 full length guides, and about three dozen cheat sheets. The full length guides are available for free to registered users (password required, and is provided free to registered users). The free downloadable guides are available in the universal PDF format which can be downloaded or viewed online, or in ePub format which can be viewed on an iPad, Nook, Kobo, and most other e-readers. Kindle users will have to convert the ePub file to MOBI format in order to read it for free on the Kindle, or it can be purchased directly from Amazon for download to the Kindle. One of the guides that I use frequently is the 30 page long "Office 2010: Ultimate Tips and Tricks" which is exactly what the title says. Other guides include comprehensive guides to Windows Phones, Photoshop, Chrome, iPad, LinkedIn, social media marketing, Google+, Android, Ubuntu, a complete guide to malware removal, guides to backup and restore, and many other useful (and free) complete guides.

The free MakeUseOf cheat sheets are mostly one or two pages in length, and consist of keyboard shortcuts, hints, and other tips that may make applications faster to use and more enjoyable for the user. I regularly use several of these cheat sheets in some of the adult education classes that I teach, and have taught entire classes using only the appropriate cheat sheets as my instructional text. I routinely use several of the cheat sheets myself, including Windows, MAC OS X, Office 2010, Google Docs, Outlook, Gmail, Facebook, "Chat Smileys", and Firefox cheat sheets, which I store on my desktop in PDF format.

Some of us occasionally need a little light humor when online, and the "Geeky FUN" section may meet that need. Geeky FUN has two primary sections, pictures and videos. There are enough funny computer and technology related pictures and images to satisfy anyone's funny bone, as there are a dozen funny pictures on a page, and there are 233 pages of funny images (about 2800 images)! For those who like funny videos, Geeky FUN has 55 pages of videos, with a dozen thumbnails per page (660 total videos). For entertainment value, these images and videos are a fun way to burn many hours of online time.

If you would like to keep up with the latest materials from MakeUseOf, it offers a customized free email subscription of user selectable topics including a daily newsletter, articles, tech support answers, and the newest "Geeky FUN" images and videos. With all of its extensive free collection of articles, tech support assistance, cheat sheets, guides, and humorous content, it would be easy for any user to become a regular on the MakeUseOf website. Anyone who visits the site and explores its offerings will comprehend why it is a part of my daily online ritual.

Free Utility to Test and Monitor Your Hard Drive
by Ira Wilsker

WEBSITES:
http://crystalmark.info/?lang=en
http://www.nodesoft.com/diskbench
https://www.techsupportalert.com/best-free-hd-health-monitoring-and-diagnostic-programs.htm

Many times before, in this column, and regularly on my radio show, I have repeated the three most important words in computing, "Backup!, Backup!, Backup!". Hopefully by now, most of you are maintaining current backup copies of all of your critical data, and an image of your hard drive, for the inevitable time that your primary hard drive ceases to function. I have published numerous reviews on good quality free and commercial software and online services that can be used to backup your hard drive. Large capacity USB external hard drives are again becoming readily available at reasonable prices, with 1 TB name-brand USB external hard drives now appearing in the $70 range (I just bought one at that price), 1.5 TB and 2 TB external drives now becoming

available in the $100 range (or less). If you listen to radio or TV, or read certain computer blogs, you are possibly inundated with ads and commercials for online backup services.

There are now no good reasons for not having a current backup of at least all of your critical data files, including photos, videos, documents, financial records, and other valuable data. Despite my frequent appeals for everyone to backup their data, I am totally cognizant that some users are blissfully unconcerned about certain hard drive failure, do not have contemporary backups, and are hoping for some type of warning or indication that catastrophic hard drive failure is imminent, and then they will perform a backup. This is a dangerous attitude that almost always results in the loss of important and valuable data.

On my PCs, I have installed and used a variety of free and commercial utilities generically known as "hard drive health monitors" which obviously monitor the health, temperature (hard drives can easily overheat and get a fatal fever), performance, condition, and other drive characteristics. While not absolutely capable of predicting the precise time of hard drive demise, they often can provide the user with powerful indications that hard drive problems are occurring, and that the health and condition of the drive are deteriorating. In the parlance of "dog years", one "hard drive year" is about 15 human years (my calculation), with a statistical increase of hard drive failure curving sharply upward after about four or five years of use (my anecdotal experience).

One of the top rated and free (but somewhat controversial) hard drive monitoring utilities is CrystalDiskInfo, version 4.3.0a, released March 11, 2012 (version 5.6 is now available.) CrystalDiskInfo is a 1.4 mb download, and can monitor 18 critical conditions, including temperature (in Fahrenheit or Celsius), read errors, spin rate, platter speed, and other important characteristics. By monitoring these conditions, and by using the 25 integral graphing features, potential causes of failure may be indicated before they become catastrophic, allowing the user to take corrective action (such as if the drive is overheating), or perform a backup if conditions start to deteriorate. This utility is heavily customizable, not just by being able to select about three dozen languages, but also by selecting desired functions, such as temperature display (C or F), memory resident or user loaded, startup delay time, health status settings, and other advanced functions. This version of CrystalDiskInfo can even be instructed to send an "Alert email" to any desired email address if some major problem is encountered or detected.

While CrystalDiskInfo is freeware, there is a degree of controversy on how the author funds his intellectual property. CrystalDiskInfo is bundled with a piece of software called "OpenCandy" which is not generally considered as spyware or malware, but when CrystalDiskInfo is installed, OpenCandy will scan the computer for existing software, and then make recommendations for additional software to purchase or install. This is not some clandestine or otherwise hidden process, but openly displayed before the software is downloaded, with the indication that the installer includes "OpenCandy (Ads)". While installing the CrystalDiskInfo, a user license agreement appears which includes the license agreement for both the main program, and Open Candy. The OpenCandy license agreement says, "This

installer uses the OpenCandy network to recommend other software you may find valuable during the installation of this software. OpenCandy collects NON-personally identifiable information about this installation and the recommendation process. Collection of this information ONLY occurs during this installation and the recommendation process ...” For those who do not want to run OpenCandy during the CrystalDiskInfo installation process, there is a very simple method that will prevent OpenCandy from executing. Rather than simply allowing the CrystalDiskInfo installation to run when downloaded, or by clicking on the .exe file after downloading, click on the START - RUN and then browse to the downloaded file. Click on the filename, but then add / NOCANDY after the .exe and then run the install; this will prevent OpenCandy from running. When I installed CrystalDiskInfo, I followed
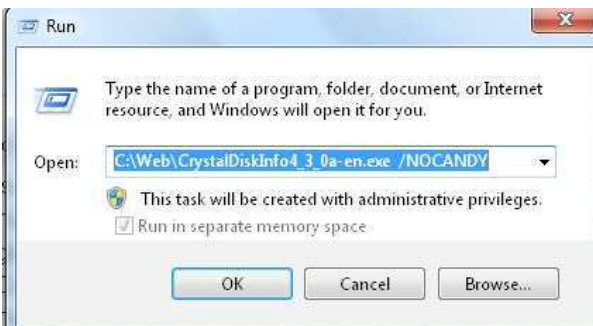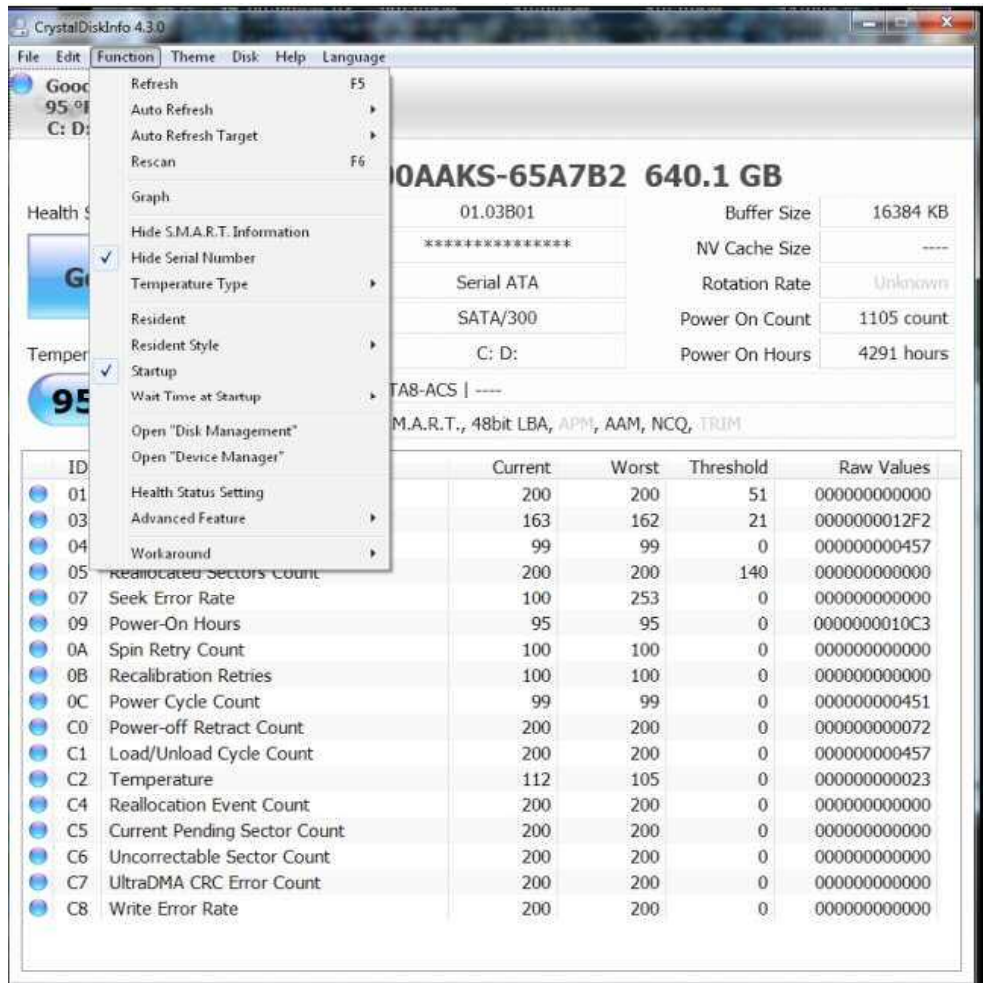
this process, and my START - RUN box showed “CrystalDiskInfo4_3_0a-en.exe /NOCANDY” which installed properly, without running OpenCandy, despite what the license agreement indicated.

The latest version of CrystalDiskInfo will run on almost all Windows PCs and servers, including those running Windows 7, Server 2008, Vista, Server 2003, XP, 2000, x86/WoW64, and i18n. It works fine on both 32 and 64 bit computers. CrystalDiskInfo does not run on Windows 95, 98, Me, or NT4, but an older

portable version of CrystalDiskInfo, version 2.7.5, will run on the antiquated Windows NT 4. CrystalDiskInfo works only on IDE (Parallel ATA) and Serial ATA (SATA) disks connected to an internal ATA or SATA controller. It also works with some USB external hard drives, but does not work with RAID disks and IDE and Serial ATA disks connected to an external drive controller. For those who carry portable utilities on a USB flash drive, there is also a free portable edition of the latest build of CrystalDiskInfo; I have used this portable version to diagnose hard drives running on computers that appeared to have problems, and it worked very well at indicating the condition and health of the target hard drives.

I use CrystalDiskInfo to continuously monitor the hard drives on my computers, and can recommend it (without the OpenCandy) for almost all PC and Microsoft server users. If information is power, then CrystalDiskInfo provides potential information that may empower the user to be better prepared to deal with pending hard drive problems or potential catastrophic failure.

Perfect Photo Suite 6

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Perfect Photo Suite 6, produced by OnOne Software
(www.onOneSoftware.com), is a collection of seven
image enhancement utilities. Perfect Photo Suite 6 can
be used as a stand-alone set of utilities, or the utilities
can be invoked from within Adobe CS4 or CS5,
Photoshop Elements 9 or 10, Lightroom 2 or 3 and
Aperture 2.1 or 3.

Here is a quick overview of the seven utilities
included;

Perfect Portrait 1 - Smart Retouching for Portraits,
automates many of the retouching tasks.
Perfect Layers 2 - Layers for Photographers, fast and
easy creation of layers outside of Photoshop, to blend
and combine multiple images.
Perfect Effects 3 - Create Images with Impact, using a
library of over 300 photographic and creative effects.
Perfect Mask 5 - Replace Backgrounds with Ease,
automates many common masking tasks with
incredible accuracy.
Perfect Resize 7 - Enlarge Images to Any Size using
Genuine Fractals – the industry standard for image
resizing.
FocalPoint 2 - Instant Bokeh for your Images,
selective focus, blur, depth of field, vignette, tilt shift,
etc.
PhotoFrame - 4.6 - ProLayouts, Edges &
Adornments, adds perfect finishing touches to your
images, also textures, backgrounds, and even complete
layouts.

Requirements for installation are Windows XP, Vista
or 7, or MAC OS/x 10.6 or 10.7. RAM – 4GB, 8GB
recommended. Display resolution should be OPEN
GL 2.0 compatible with at least 256MB dedicated
RAM, resolution at least 1280x800.

My copy came as a 2.2GB download from the
manufacturer's website, together with a license key.

There were no surprises in the installation. It just asks
for an install directory and installs itself.

I have Photoshop Elements 9 already installed. The
Photo Suite installation process integrated Perfect
Photo Suite 6 utilities into it automatically.

HTML Help files are available from the website.
There are also PDF Files available, but these are just
PDF prints of the HTML Help files and are not well
formatted.

There are many "How To" videos on the Website in
case you may be unsure of how to accomplish some
task.

The Photo Suite utilities automatically create layers
for the changes made to the image. The changes are
fully compatible with CS4/5, Photoshop Elements,
Lightroom and Aperture.

If the utilities are used in stand-alone mode, the
resulting file is saved as a PSD or PSB file, which
is also compatible with CS4/5, Elements 9/10,
Lightroom and Aperture. The image can be exported
as a jpg or tiff file.

There are just so many possibilities using this software
that it would take several pages to review them all, so
here is a small selection of their capabilities.

Perfect Portrait 1 – When a portrait is loaded, color
casts can be removed giving more natural skin tones.
The skin-tune parameters can be fine-tuned manually
to get just the right skin tones. When loading a portrait
image into Perfect Portrait, it will automatically find
skin, hair, eyes, and mouth as well as lips and teeth,
allowing each to be changed independently. The masks
that define these features can be refined as necessary
for full flexibility. Multiple faces within an image can
be enhanced independently and each is on its own
layer.

Most of the changes are done using simple sliders.
Blemishes can be easily removed, teeth and eyes
brightened, and fine lines in the skin removed. The
retouch brush can be used to remove blemishes, acne,
scratches and any other marks you just want to hide.
It is also good for hiding wrinkles and dark areas
under the eyes, while maintaining a natural look.

A set of thumbnail views appears along the bottom of the screen to show how each possible preset will look if applied. A particular set of adjustments can be saved as a preset and applied to similar portraits in the future.

Perfect Layers – When using Photo Suite in stand-alone mode, perfect layers acts as the hub for all of the utilities. Use the masking brush to paint-in or paint-out to achieve perfect masks. Use the masking "bug" tool to achieve perfect blending of multiple layers. Every time you make changes and save (click Apply), your changes appear on a separate layer. Using "view", a set of thumbnails gives a preview of how the multiple layers will interact together. Perfect Layers also contains tools for masking, healing and blending of layers.

Perfect Effects – for your creativity - comes with a library of effects. Full or partial effects can be stored as presets to be used to make similar changes on other images. These presets are stored as layers which can be changed and saved. Multiple effects can be stacked and will be applied to the image in the order given, which can be re-ordered as required. The way the effects are blended can also be controlled.

The preview engine shows examples of the effects as thumbnails along the bottom of the screen. Any changes to the effects will re-render the thumbnails.

Perfect Mask has so many tools for masking/ punching through to the layer below, that the lasso tool normally used in image masking may not be required. Perfect mask has a library of backgrounds which can be used, or you can add a layer with your own background. There are also tools to remove the halo from around an object to blend the edges between the image and the background.

Perfect Resize will use Document Size presets to crop and resize an image in one step from the camera size ratio to the paper size ratio. The tile option can be used to break up a very large print into several "tiles," which can be printed on a smaller printer and then be assembled to form the large printed image. The Gallery Wrap option can increase the image size, with several options, to allow for the wrap-around required by Gallery Wrapped images. Using an industry-standard method, instead of Bi-Cubic, to resize the

images, the image can be resized up to 1000% with no loss of clarity.

There is a built-in sharpening tool, a texture tool, and you can even add film grain to the image.

Focal Point is mostly used to apply selective focus, bokeh, and vignettes. The unique focus "bug" tool is used to control the effects. No complicated selections are required, nor having to learn to use settings and dials. Using the Focus Brush, areas of an image can be "painted" in and out of focus. You can control blur/ focus to mimic that of popular lenses chosen from a library in Focal Point. A popular tilt/shift effect can also be created.

Perfect Frame has a large library of Frames and Borders which can be applied to your images. You can also create your own frames and save them for use on other images. Similarly, layouts which you create can be saved as presets. Perfect Frame also allows textures and shadows to be applied to the image. The Instant frame option allows you to quickly create your own frame with just a few clicks of the mouse.

The utilities in Perfect Photo Suite 6 are designed to make Photoshop quicker and easier to use. I think that they do. Even the simple tasks I tried seemed easier to do than navigating the vast and complex menus of options that Photoshop has available. The ability to save many layouts, etc., that you create as "presets," is a great help too.

One of the real-world tasks I needed to do was create a frame, with a drop shadow, to apply to 20-30 images. Once I had created the frame, and added the shadow, I saved it as a preset**.** Then, using Perfect Frame from within Elements, I was able to use batch mode to select the images I wanted and apply the preset to them. Really slick and I still have the preset for next time.

As a Photoshop Elements user, I can certainly recommend Perfect Photo Suite 6 for either beginners in Photoshop, or more advanced users who will find it makes their lives easier.

It just makes many of the tasks not only easier to do, but also makes the final result much better. Photo Suite 6 also includes many libraries containing sample

frames, backgrounds, effects, and presets which add a more creative and professional look to the images.

A major advantage of Photo Suite 6 is that changes to images are saved as Photoshop "Layers," so that they may be reviewed, further edited or deleted in Photoshop.

The documentation downloaded from the OnOne Software website is basically the html help file printed as a PDF file. However, the vast number of how-to videos and Tutorials on the OnOneSoftware University website more than make up for this.

Users of CS4, CS5, Lightroom or Aperture will similarly find that Photo Suite 6 adds great value.

Perfect Photo Suite 6 is a product of OnOne Software Inc., 15333 SW Sequoia Parkway, Suite 150, Portland, Oregon 97224, phone (503)968-1468. Fax: (503)968-1469.

Price: the software can be found at about $250 Street. There is also a 30-day free trial version available.

Technical support is reachable via a problem report form on the website at; http://www.onOneSoftware.com/support/ Support is free to registered users and is available Monday through Friday, 8am to 5pm Pacific time.

The OnOne Software "University," containing over 100 free how-to videos, can be found at; http://www.onOneSoftware.com/university/#!/video/welcome-to-the-onone-university Webinars are run several times a week; a timetable is available on the website.

Here is another review of Perfect Photo Suite from an HDR point of view: (HDR, or High Dynamic Range is an image processing technique that attempts to make pictures look more natural by taking multiple pictures at different exposure levels and intelligently stitching them together so that we get a picture that is clear in both, dark and bright areas.)
http://thehdrimage.com/?p=1569

The Painter Wow! Book, 10th Edition

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Cher Threinen-Pendarvis has been authoring The Painter Wow! Book series for over 15 years. The books are always packed with an overwhelming amount of information and inspiring examples of original art by a variety of digital artists, including Cher herself.

The 10th edition in this series covers all the new and numerous features of Corel Painter 12. The companion CD contains goodies for personal use from contributing authors as well as brushes, patterns, photos, scripts, textures and sample Painter files contributed by Cher. There is also a study guide which could serve as a syllabus for learning Painter either in the classroom or on your own.

The book is divided into 11 chapters, appendixes, and an index, totaling 407 pages. The page layout is two-column with a main content area and a sidebar with related content and tips. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction, continues with pertinent content interspersed with a variety of exercises and ends with full color pages of magnificent original art.

Chapter 1, "Getting to Know Painter," is your basic introduction to the program, system requirements, file characteristics and file types, followed by how to navigate and manage the Painter workspace.

Chapter 2, "The Power of Color," gives some very useful explanations of what constitutes a color and how to work it in the digital world. The exercises lead you through the Painter tools related to the subject.

"Painting with Brushes" is Chapter 3 and builds on the previous chapters and gets you started with digital painting. The primers, 25 if I didn't lose count, provide step-by-step introductions to a wide range of media and techniques. At chapter's end you will find yourself at page 151 of 407.

If you have worked through each of the Chapter 3 exercises, you should have a good feeling for what the program has to offer and what direction you would like to further explore. You have also navigated from accomplishing basic to quite complex digital painting projects. The chapters continue with the titles of Building Brushes, Selections, Shapes and Masks; Using Layers, Enhancing Photos, Montage and Collage, Exploring Special Effects, Using Painter with Photoshop, Animation and Film with Painter and finally Printing Options.

This is a very thorough and detailed coverage of a rather complex program. I found the Study Guide projects (PDF file on the CD) to be a great asset for adding a structure for using the Wow! Book and delving deeper into Painter.

I recall that when I first used a very early edition of Cher's great book to learn more about Painter, I had to digest very small bits at a time. Then and now, this is a presentation to teach not only about Corel Painter but the principles of art and composition, with a lot of creativity thrown into the mix. A great resource for digital artists everywhere.

About: The Painter Wow! Book, 10th Edition
Author: Cher Threinen-Pendarvis
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Focus on Lighting Photos
By Rosemary Lloyd, President, Big Bear Computer Club, CA
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Excellent photographs gain much of their impact from the way the subject is lit. Focus on Lighting Photos is a unique how-to book that includes many pictures and diagrams. It demonstrate how light can be used to create the mood that the photographer wants to project. This is the latest of six books in the 'Focus on' series about photography.

The first half of the book looks at different methods

of putting light on the subject. Different ways of controlling the direction, intensity and color of the light are thoroughly covered.

The explanations are easy to understand. Concepts are demonstrated by series of photos of the same subject with different lighting. Diagrams supplement the written explanations. I find the use of progressively more intriguingly lighted pictures, of the same subject, very helpful. That technique enabled me to understand concepts better.

In the latter part of the book, the authors focus on methods for lighting diverse subjects. They deal with people, metal, glass and motion. The chapter on lighting for portraits goes into some detail on types of equipment.


They discuss how to make some of the tools yourself.

The target audience is hobbyists. Fil and Robin emphasize that you do not need to spend a lot money on photo equipment. Once you have a camera and a flash, you can shoot fine photographs with only a few other tools. In fact, they recommend borrowing or making your own items until you find yourself using them enough to justify buying.

Focus on Lighting Photos seems to be geared for readers who are somewhat familiar with photography in general. I would say intermediate level. However, there is a very good glossary of the photo terms used. If you have not taken a photo class, it is fairly easy to follow along.

The writing style is informal, clear and precise. I really enjoyed Focus on Lighting Photos. The techniques it presents are exciting and inspiring. It is a fairly easy read.

Focus on Lighting Photos
Hunter, Fil and Reid, Robin
Focal Press, 2011, 200 pages
$19.95, ISBN 978-0-240-81711-8
User Group Discount 40%
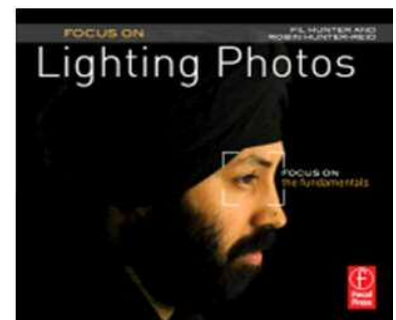
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meets at
The Fountain Valley Branch Library
17635 Los Alamos
Fountain Valley
meetings on 2nd Saturday
10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.