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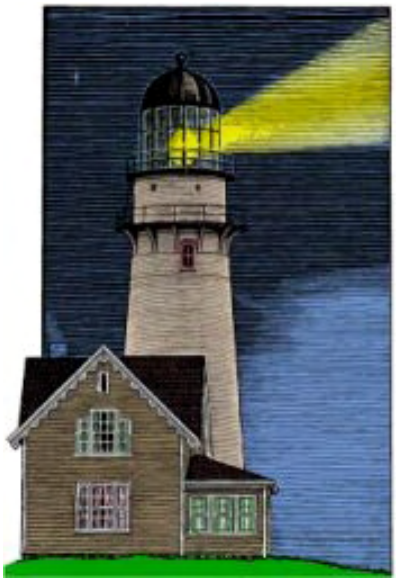

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Digital Dave

"Digital Dave answers your tech questions." by *Digital Dave*

A reader wonders about setting process priorities in Windows; a reader needs to extract DMG files to a PC; a reader wants to uninstall some of the applications in the Windows Office suite.

Dear Digital Dave,

I have often wondered what is the point of pushing Control-Alt and Delete to bring up the Task Manager; going under the Applications tab and selecting a running program, such as Internet Explorer, then right-clicking on it; selecting Go to Process; right-clicking on the process and setting priority and then setting the process to a different level, such as high or real time?

I ask because I have done that using my antivirus program and I have timed it. It still takes it 22 minutes and 30 seconds to complete an antivirus scan on my computer, so what is the point of this feature?

Mr. Carroll Jay Ware
San Diego, Calif.

Dear Mr. Ware,

For the test that you are doing with your antivirus software, there is no point in changing the process priority at all. An antivirus scan spends most of its time checking the files on your hard drives. With the size of today's hard drives, it can take quite a while to check the thousands and thousands of files. When you set the process priority for a running program that involves only the CPU, it has no effect on hard drive access speed.

Process priority involves how your system will utilize CPU (processor) capacity when you're running multiple programs simultaneously. The higher the priority, the more processor time and attention the program will get. For the average user, processor utilization is rarely a problem. However, there are a few scenarios where it may be worthwhile to change the process priority.

The first is when you are running an application that is so processor intensive that it starts to drag down everything else you're doing. An example could be graphics-rendering software or a backup program hogging processor time when you want it to work quietly in the background. The computer will become sluggish. In that situation, lowering the process priority will slow down the offending application, leaving more CPU capacity for the other running programs.

Another time you may want to change the priority is when your main application is not getting enough CPU time to run smoothly. Hesitation and jumping may be an indication of this problem. This may call for an increase in process priority.

You can change the process priority by opening the Task Manager after the program is running. (I prefer Control-Shift-Escape over the more tedious Control-Alt-Delete for opening the Task Manager.) Select the Processes tab and right-click on the process you want to adjust. (If you're not sure which process to

click, go to the Applications tab and right-click the proper application, then select Go To Process.) Select "Set Priority" and adjust in the desired direction (see Figure 1).

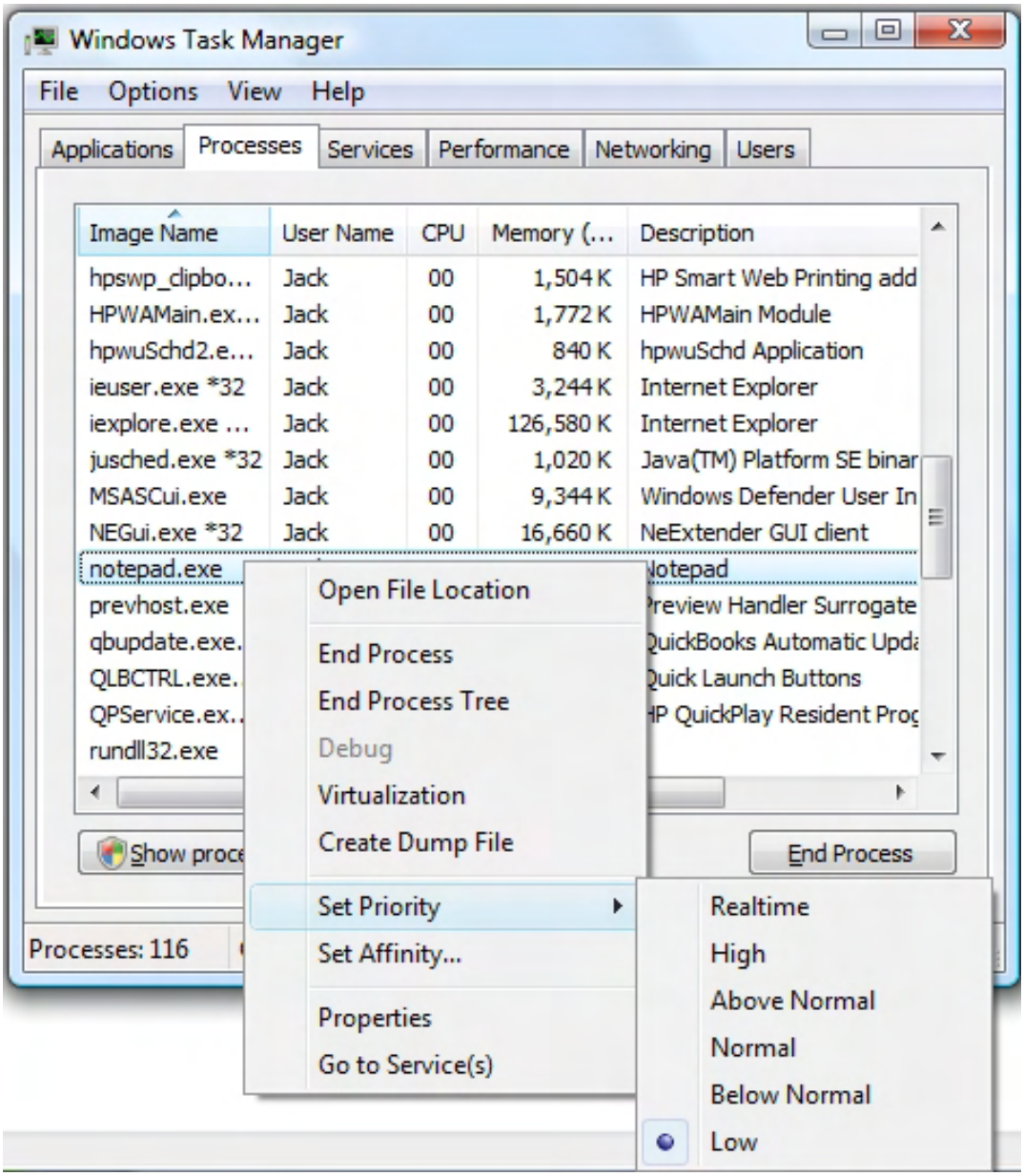

Figure 1. Setting Process Priority in Task Manager.

It's not recommended that you use the "Realtime" setting since it will try to use all of the processor time. It could interfere with other necessary operating system processes and make the system unstable. After you close the program (process), the priority will revert to the default Normal for the next time.

If you want to launch the program with a lower (or higher) priority, then you can do it with the Start command from the Command Prompt. By adding the priority to the Start command followed by the program path and name, the process will start with the new level of priority (see Figure 2).

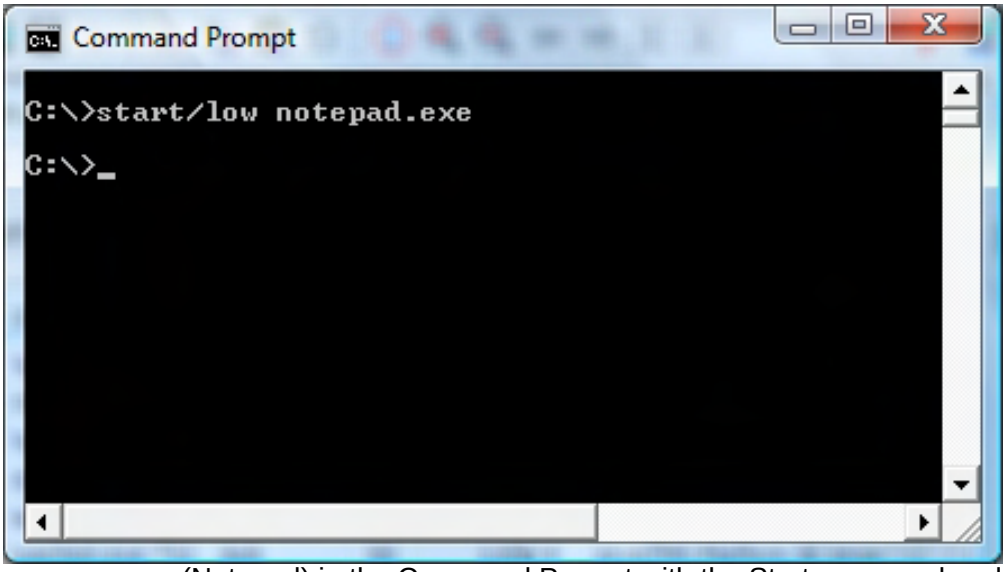

Figure 2. Starting a program (Notepad) in the Command Prompt with the Start command and assigned new priority.

If you will always be starting a program with a particular priority, then you can put the command in a batch file (a text file with the .bat extension) and create a shortcut to run it.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I am not the expert on the computer that some people think I am, so I'm writing to you about a problem I'm having now. I've downloaded a DMG file, and I need to extract the files within for use on my PC. I'm using XP.

I've searched, found and followed directions from two or three sources. So, apparently I am doing something wrong, because no matter how well I followed the instructions, I'm exactly where I started.

Can you direct me to or give me explicit directions on how to get the files decompressed/converted so I can install the program on my PC?

Thank you, Dave.

PS. I honestly love the mag!

R. L.
Lemon Grove, CA.

Dear R. L.,

I'm afraid that even if you do get the programs off of the DMG, some of them may not be much good to you—at least not on your PC. DMG is a Macintosh disk image format that is easily read by the Mac. It is used primarily for Macintosh programs and files, many of which may not run on a PC (unless you set up a Virtual Machine for the Mac on your PC). However, there are lots of types of data files that could be used in Windows, as well as on the Mac. You will either need to read the image with a Mac or convert it to a PC-readable format such as ISO.

ISO is the standard optical disc image file format used by the PC. There are a number of tools that will convert a DMG to an ISO. One shareware program called UltraISO (*www.ezbsystems.com/ultraiso/*)

should do the trick (free trial, then fee). There is a free program called dmg2iso (*vu1tur.eu.org/tools/*) that should also work.

Remember that an ISO file is a disc image that, before it can be read, will need to be either burned to a disc with any disc-burning software or mounted as a virtual drive.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I have Windows Office 2002 installed in my PC Windows XP Home machine. I don't use any of the programs, except for Word. Can I uninstall the Office programs that I don't use? Would it cause any problems?

Nancy
San Diego, Calif.

Dear Nancy,

There is no reason for you to keep programs on your computer if you don't need them. It shouldn't cause you any problem if you remove them. You should be able to uninstall individual programs via Change in the Programs section of the Control Panel.

To uninstall individual features of software suites such as Office, you will need to run the setup program. This is done via the Change option rather than the Uninstall option in the Programs section of the Control Panel.

If you don't get uninstall options for individual program modules when you use Change, then you may need to uninstall the entire package and reinstall. That means you will need to make your decisions while you install the software. Usually during the regular installation there is a choice for customizing, which will allow you to pick and choose what you want on your computer.

However, unless you're short on hard drive space, I wouldn't rush to remove the other programs. You may not use them now, but you never know when they may come in handy. Sometimes you may receive a file type from a friend that will open in one of the other programs automatically. I've seen people use Excel files and/or PowerPoint files use in a variety of ways. If you need those programs sometime in the future, having them preinstalled will save you the hassle of another setup.

Digital Dave

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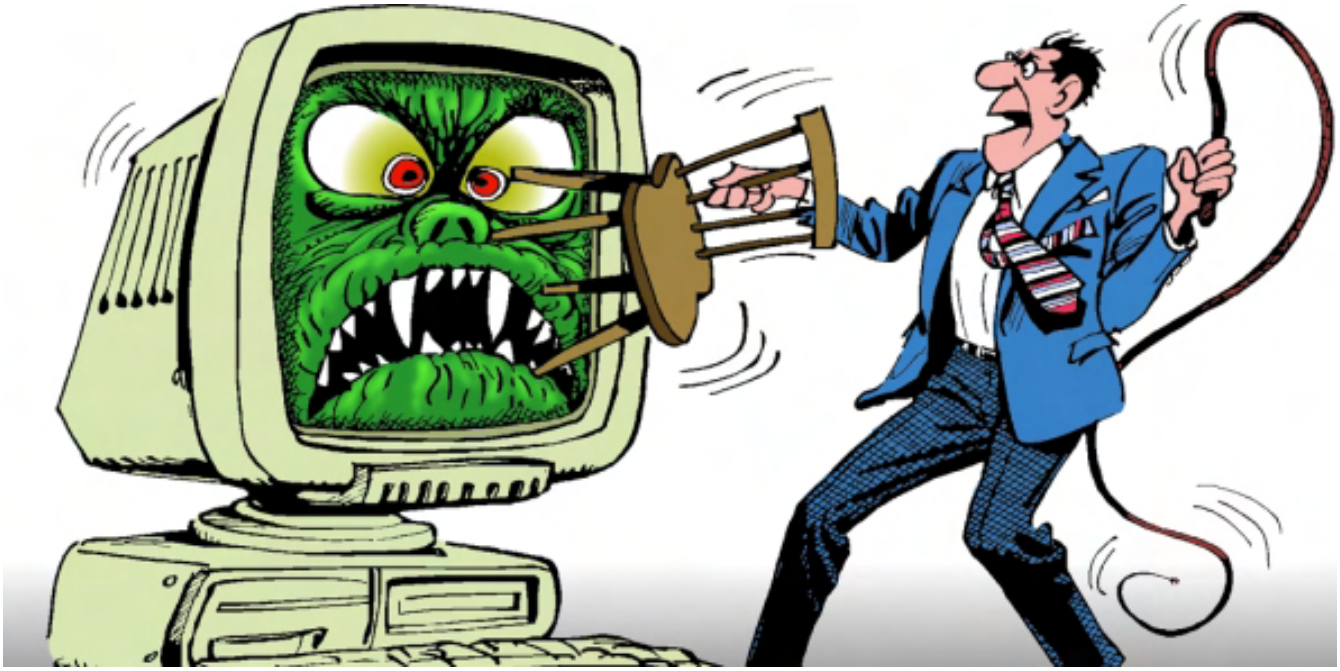

Windows Vista Tweaks

“Techniques for improving the Vista experience.” by Michael J. Ross

> Given all of the user interface and performance problems seen with Windows Vista, you would think that Microsoft would have tweaked it as much as possible before releasing it to the public. Fortunately, there are many known techniques for improving the Vista experience.

Microsoft has had a fairly difficult time getting Windows XP users to spend the time and money upgrading to Windows Vista, and there are many reasons for this: First, Windows XP had proven itself to be the best version of Windows, upon its introduction, especially in terms of stability and device-driver inclusion. Happy XP users were quite right in asking, "Why change?" Second, upgrading to Vista requires time, which is always in short supply for busy people. Third, there is the risk of rendering unusable any number of applications and hardware devices that are working fine. Fourth, switching to Vista involves not only the expense of purchasing a new Windows license, but the cost of upgrading your PC to match the significant increase in system memory and other components, as required by Vista.

Also, Windows Vista is quite similar to XP in some areas, and largely unchanged in others. Admittedly, User Access Control is a very noticeable difference, but in a negative sense, because it repeatedly asks for confirmation of common tasks—all of which becomes rather annoying (we will discuss a fix for that in a moment). Windows Vista has a new search field in the Start menu, but most people do not use it or even know that it is there. In Vista's Control Panel, the number of items has more than doubled, and they are now organized into 10 categories. But many people—especially power users who have learned to perform administrative tasks as quickly as possible—much prefer the Classic interface with all cascading menus enabled, and thus will never see those categories. Most of the menu bars were removed, which is maddening for all users who came to rely upon menus for performing tasks.

Finally, even though the very latest version of Vista and its service packs are causing fewer headaches than the initial version, there are still endless complaints about Vista updates causing PCs to freeze up, device-driver incompatibility, memory overload while copying files, Web access problems, applications being impossible to uninstall, unpatched but known bugs, and programs running much slower. The firestorm of criticism was so intense that consumer advocacy groups in several countries strongly recommended that people not purchase Windows Vista. Consequently, so many organizations and individual computer users have opted to stick with Windows XP

(or even Windows 2000!) and eschew Windows Vista entirely, that Microsoft has been under constant pressure to extend the availability of XP until the release of Windows 7.

Given all of the user interface and performance problems seen with Windows Vista, you would think that Microsoft would have tweaked it as much as possible before releasing it to the public. But such was not the case. Fortunately, there are many known techniques for improving the Vista experience, and we will examine some of the better-regarded ones.

Services and Disservices

Windows Vista's User Access Control (UAC) is an ill-conceived attempt to reduce the chances of malware infection by popping up one dialog box after another, asking you to confirm a range of everyday operations that used to be performed automatically in Windows XP. While increased system security is always a laudable goal, this was clearly not the way to achieve it. It did not take long for this new "feature" to become the most common sore spot for Vista users. Fortunately, the UAC nag can be silenced with little difficulty: Click the Start button, choose Control Panel, and then choose User Accounts (or User Accounts and Family Safety, if you are not connected to a network domain). Select "Turn User Account Control on or off." If you are prompted for an administrator password or confirmation, provide it. Uncheck Use User Account Control (UAC), and then click OK.

There are other Windows Vista features, aside from UAC, that will largely do nothing more than slow down both you and your PC. They can be safely turned off manually. But you would have to do this every time you boot up your PC, because they start automatically when Windows Vista does. So it is best to completely disable them: Return to the Control Panel, choose Administrative Tools, then choose System Configuration, and then click the Services tab. Deselect the following services: Fax (unless you own and plan on using a fax modem), Offline Files (unless you plan on using Offline File Sync, which few people do), Tablet PC Input Service (unless you have a tablet PC), Terminal Services and Windows Search.

Vista also has some unneeded features that are not listed as part of the automatic startup services. To turn them off, go to the Control Panel, select Program Features, and in the panel on the left choose "Turn Windows Features on or off." You can then disable the following items: Indexing Service, Remote Differential Compression, Tablet PC Optional Components, Windows DFS Replication Service, Windows Fax & Scan (unless you plan on using a modem for sending and receiving faxes, which few people still do), and Windows Meeting Space (unless you plan on using the Live Meeting Service). For those last two entries, if you are not sure at this time as to whether or not you intend to try them, it is best to disable them for now, because you can always reenable them later if needed, and you may forget to return to this part of the Control Panel to disable them.

Resource Hogs

As new and modified files are written to a hard drive, they may be broken up into pieces, with each piece located in a separate area on the hard drive. This fragmentation increases the amount of time it takes to read each file's contents, because the drive's head has to move a lot more to read those separate pieces. Defragmentation is the process of bringing all of those separated pieces together, and thus improves file-access speeds. Regardless of what operating system you are running, you should periodically defragment the hard drive. Do this anytime you are not using the computer, since it can be time-consuming. Unfortunately, Windows Vista does this continually, thus forcing you to endure the delays piecemeal. Click the Start button, and choose Computer. Right-click the C Drive, and choose Properties. Select the Tools Tab, then choose Defragment Now and uncheck Run on a Schedule. You should do this for all of your drives, if you have any other than the C drive.

Do you frequently need to close your laptop temporarily, such as when using it when traveling? If so, then the hibernate feature of your operating system (Windows or any other) is a welcome method for avoiding the inconvenience and risk of shutting down all of your applications and then the operating system itself, only to have to reverse the whole process just to get back to where you were in your workflow. However, most people do not have a need for hibernation (at least for their computers; putting oneself into hibernation for a couple of years

through the current economic crisis may be a tempting thought!). Windows Vista has its hibernation capabilities enabled by default, and they do consume a nontrivial amount of system resources. To turn them off, go to the Control Panel, choose Power Options, click Change Plan Settings, and then click Change Advanced Power Settings. In the Sleep section, go into the Hibernate After section, move the selector down to zero, and click the Apply button.

There are many more ways to fine-tune your installation of Windows Vista, and they can be found by searching on the Web. No matter what changes you choose to make, be sure to first do a full backup of all of your important data (something you should be doing frequently anyway). If you are familiar with how to export a copy of the Windows Registry, do that as well.

With these system tweaks and any others, you can improve Windows Vista to the point where it is quite usable—almost as good as XP!

Michael J. Ross is a Web developer (*www.ross.ws*), writer, and freelance editor. He creates Web sites that help entrepreneurs turn their ideas into profitable online businesses.

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Windows Vista Hacked

“Software vendors take on the pirates.” by Michael J. Ross

Microsoft built even more stringent security measures into Windows Vista, in an attempt to defeat software pirates. How successful has the company's efforts been?

Microsoft worked on developing the Vista brand of its flagship Windows operating system for many years (in fact, too many years, in the opinion of some industry pundits, given the evolutionary rather than revolutionary nature of Vista versus its predecessor). As part of this huge effort, the company built into Vista some new security measures, designed to make it impossible for pirates to produce a working bootleg version and then distribute that "cracked" copy to anyone on the Internet who wants to download it for free. This extra effort is partly a result of the company's goal to reduce piracy as a key way to grow its sales of Windows.

The company most likely recognized that more stringent measures were needed in order to battle the pirates, given the extensive history of Microsoft products being hacked—including all versions of Windows up to that point, along with Microsoft Office and many other products. Several of the earlier Windows versions, long before Vista, were supposedly protected with lengthy serial numbers, each of which consisted of five sets of five alphanumeric characters. These might have been annoying for users to type in when installing the given Microsoft product, but it was just as easy for pirates to distribute those serial numbers, which could be used to activate an unlimited number of bootleg copies of the product.

But now the Internet has made it much easier for companies to counter that software pirating strategy, through the use of online activation. Specifically, for any product that uses this security approach, any time the user starts up the program, it "phones home" to a Web server controlled by the company, and verifies that it is a legitimate copy of the program, before allowing the user to continue. This approach is straightforward and secure, but is appropriate only for cases where customers would not be overly inconvenienced by the program requiring an Internet connection. (Note that this is not the same thing as spyware sending your confidential information off to some Web server without your permission.)

For operating systems, however, this strategy of startup online activation would not be feasible or acceptable to the public, because no operating system vendor can reasonably demand that a customer have an Internet connection at all times, including when the software is being installed. What happens to the customer if her Internet service is, for whatever reason, not functioning? What if she is using a laptop and is currently outside of any Wi-Fi hotspots, or the Wi-Fi card in her laptop is broken?

With the introduction of Windows XP, Microsoft took a different tack, which normally utilizes Internet communication between the user's PC and Microsoft servers only once—in order for the operating system to notify Microsoft of the PC's configuration (sort of like a hardware "fingerprint") and the installation ID number, which consists of nine sets of six alphanumeric characters. The servers return a confirmation ID number, and from that point forward, that copy of Windows Vista is considered genuine, and works even when the PC is offline. In fact, no Internet connection is even required, because you can call a toll-free number at Microsoft, provide them with your installation ID over the phone, and they will then give you the confirmation ID to enter.

Stopping the Clock

People were allowed to install Windows XP and try it out for 30 days, without having to activate it either online or with a telephone call. Each day that you used a non-activated copy of XP, it would inform you as to how many days you had left before the system would lock up and not let you continue using it. In other words, the operating system had a built-in timer, which was always counting down. Pirates naturally wanted to extend that trial period indefinitely—or at least until the next version of Windows came out, at which time they might switch to that one as

their favorite "free" operating system. It did not take too long for them to hack the code so that the timer always thought there was plenty of time left during the trial period. (This is the most common way to crack trial software that uses a built-in timer.)

Microsoft built even more stringent security measures into Windows Vista, in an attempt to defeat anyone trying to fool the countdown timer. However, pirates raced to figure out a workaround, and they succeeded. An article published on KezNews (*keznews.com/1951_Permanently_Activate_Windows_Vista_by_Skip_Activation_with_Patched_TimerStop_sys_Crack*) provides the details on how this particular attack works. Anyone interested in the details can check that article.

What may be most interesting to the reader of that article is the brief mention of other methods of attack that have been attempted in the past, in order to "bypass, skip, delay, disable or spoof Vista activation," namely, "extend evaluation period, rearm method, install Vista in future year, 'frankenbuild' Vista by replacing RTM build WPA files with RC build files, activate against spoofed KMS server, or run and activate Vista with own local KMS server." The number and variety of these methods hints at how many potential vectors of attack that hackers can try in defeating the privacy guards of an operating system or any other piece of software.

Cracks in the System

Microsoft has employed other strategies to try to make these pirates "walk the plank" and become legitimate users. Some may not have been well thought out, such as the idea to have the fancy new Aero display—which includes dynamic icons, translucent windows and animated flips between open programs—work only for copies of Vista that have been designated as genuine. Users of pirated copies would see the regular, non-fancy display (as if that would be punishment enough). But considering how much of a drain the Aero display is on the PC's resources, the non-Aero display probably runs faster, partially undermining this strategy as any sort of deterrent.

In the fall of 2004, Microsoft began testing its new Windows Genuine Advantage program, as another way of putting a halt to Windows piracy. The success of the protection may be judged by the level of piracy still in the wild. Even as early as January 2007, fully hacked versions of Windows Vista Ultimate were appearing in China, in the black markets, for a very affordable $2.50. Anyone living outside of that area, or who wished to save even that amount of money, could see what was available on the filesharing networks, such as BitTorrent. A quick search on The Pirate Bay (*thepiratebay.org*) reveals dozens of cracked versions of Vista, such as "Windows Vista All Versions With Patch," clocking in at just under 3GB.

There have been numerous other reports in the press of Windows Vista being defeated by various hacking attempts. It all raises an interesting question: If it appears impossible to prevent any copyrighted software from being cracked, is there any point in investing the time and programmer hours in trying to make a product such as Windows Vista unbreakable? From the perspective of software vendors, it probably is worthwhile, since most customers do not have the technical wherewithal to crack the product themselves, or to find some pirate's handiwork. Furthermore, in the case of Windows, most users are unable to avoid the licensing fee anyway, since they pay it as part of the original purchase price of the PC.

The never-ending battle between software vendors and pirates is certainly not over, and you can safely predict that the release of Windows 7 will cause a flurry of pirates trying to be the first out with a cracked copy, thereby earning bragging rights. For those of us who run legitimate versions of Windows, it all may interest us primarily as a display of the impressive creativity of computer programmers, on both sides of the law.

Michael J. Ross is a Web developer (*www.ross.ws*), writer, and freelance editor. He creates Web sites that help entrepreneurs turn their ideas into profitable online businesses.

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Windows Vista Tips and Tricks

Windows Vista Tips and Tricks

"New Windows Developments" by Jack Dunning

There are a number of things developing on the Windows Vista front, including the Vista Service Pack, which is now in the final stages of testing; and some Windows 7 release news.

Coming Soon! Windows Vista Service Pack 2

There are a number of things developing on the Windows Vista front that are worth mentioning. The first is that Vista Service Pack 2 is now in the final stages of testing and should be released soon (as in March). SP2 concentrated on speed and streamlining performance. The most notable improvement will be the inclusion of a faster search capability in Windows Search offering more relevant results.

I expect that the automatic-update releases will occur over a period of weeks. I'll keep an eye out so I can guide you directly to the download site—just in case you're in a hurry. I wouldn't be in too much of a rush. It's usually a good idea to let a few million upgrades get out there before you jump on it. That way, the inevitable undiscovered issues have a better chance of surfacing.

Windows 7 Free Upgrades

"The latest Windows upgrade is an improvement but I really like the Microsoft cheerleaders!"

Windows 7 is likely to cause a drop in computer sales between now and June 28. That's because of the pervasive rumor that Microsoft will be offering free Windows 7 upgrades to anyone purchasing a new Vista computer after that June date. Windows 7 is touted as not only the replacement that will entice all Vista users, but the operating system that will bring XP users back into the fold. The problem is that anyone who buys a Vista machine between now and June will be forced to purchase an upgrade when Windows 7 finally comes out. Most people will wait until June 28—if at all possible. I suspect that there will be increased pressure from computer manufacturers for Microsoft to move up that guaranteed free-upgrade date.

Windows 7 isn't expected to be released until late 2009 or early 2010, but people know that it's coming. The reviews have been so good (what Vista should have been originally) that it could unleash a flurry of business. In the meantime, the only way to get people to continue buying Vista is to promise the free upgrade.

If you're currently using Vista, then moving to Windows 7 shouldn't cause too much of a learning curve. Some people have referred to Win 7 as Vista Lite because, although it's less bloated and even runs better on some of the older computers, it still has the look and feel of Vista.

Tweaking Vista

In this week's issue, Michael Ross has authored an article on Windows Vista Tweaks. There are a number of good ideas in the article, but while streamlining your system, I would caution you to investigate the purpose of any features that you're planning to disable. In particular, I've found Windows Search to be tremendously useful. If you turn it off, you will still be able to use the Search field in the Start menu to find programs, but documents, images, e-mails, contacts, etc., will no longer appear. It is often one of the quickest ways to find files. The new Windows Search arriving in SP2 is supposed to be even better.

It's not necessary to index the entire drive for Windows Search. You have control over which drives and directories are indexed via the Index Options program (type "index" in the Start Search field of the Start menu). There you can add and remove those drives and directories that Vista will index for the Windows Search. Once your data is indexed, Windows Search won't spend nearly as much time indexing.

Also, I should note that Disk Defragmenter by default runs only once a week (very early in the morning), and combines only those fragments smaller than 64MB. It is not likely to start its work while you're computing—unless you compute at 1 a.m. or your computer misses its scheduled time. If you want better control over the defragmenter program, then disable the schedule, as suggested by Michael, and use the Task Scheduler. There you will be able to automatically suspend the program if the computer is no longer idle.

In my experience, a weekly running of the defragment program does not last very long because it doesn't have that much to do. However, if you go a long period of time without defragging or have to manipulate a huge number of files, the process may run for hours.

Jack is the publisher of *ComputorEdge* Magazine. He's been with the magazine since first issue on May 16, 1983. Back then, it was called *The Byte Buyer*. His Web site is *www.computoredge.com*. He can be reached at *ceeditor@computoredge.com*

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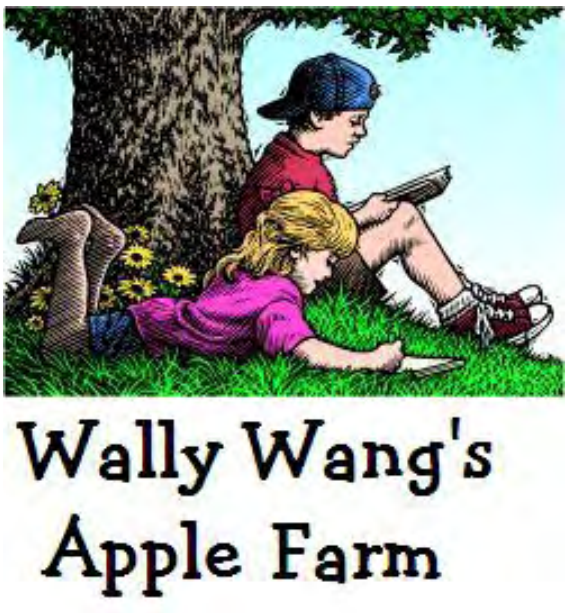

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

"The Woes of Vista" by Wally Wang

Vista's downfall is simply its lack of compelling features. Wally says skip Vista. Wait for Windows 7. Or better yet, just switch to the Macintosh or a netbook running Linux. Also, how the iPhone's Stanza app trumps Amazon's Kindle e-book reader, and a tip on using the SnapBack feature in Safari, which lets you return to a Web site without backtracking through multiple Web pages.

Two years ago, Vista wasn't worth the discs the software was stored on. With massive hardware requirements, sluggish performance and poor compatibility, Vista was something to avoid—and that's what thousands of people have done, opting to downgrade to an ancient operating system first introduced back in 2001.

Today, Vista is finally worth using. Its compatibility woes have been mostly eliminated, and today's latest computers sport enough horsepower to run Vista well. For the same price as a Mac mini, Apple's least-expensive Macintosh, you can get a far more powerful processor, massive hard disk and generous amount of RAM in a budget PC. From a hardware perspective, Apple computers are usually a generation behind the PC world.

Vista's downfall is simply its lack of compelling features. Vista runs fine, but so does Windows XP. Vista provides greater security, but armed with enough defensive programs (most of them free), so does Windows XP. Vista provides a visually redesigned interface, but does it really make tasks easier than Windows XP?

In the Macintosh world, the upgrade from Mac OS X 10.4 Tiger to Mac OS X 10.5 Leopard provided dozens of useful features for everyday users, from the Quick Look feature that lets you view the contents of a file without opening it (Command+Y), to the simple and graphically appealing interface of Time Machine for backing up a hard disk.

When I compare Windows XP to Vista, I see minor improvements, but nothing more. After using Vista with its security updates and service pack, Vista runs fine—but so does Linux, Free BSD, Solaris and a variety of other operating systems. The only advantage Vista has over these other challengers is its large library of available Windows applications.

Now Microsoft is touting Windows 7 as its new operating system. If you haven't bought a new computer yet, but still insist on sticking with a PC, wait for Windows 7, which is the operating system Vista should have been.

The only reason to use Vista today is to get acquainted with the similar user interface of Windows 7 tomorrow. Microsoft promises that Windows 7 will be faster, more stable and simpler than Vista, so why would anyone want to use Vista?

If you absolutely must run Windows programs, you'll still be better off running Windows on a Macintosh, either through Boot Camp (which effectively turns your Macintosh into a PC), or through a virtualization program like Parallels (*www.parallels.com*) or Fusion (*www.vmware.com/products/fusion*). This gives you access to the best of both worlds without limiting you to either one.

Skip Vista. Wait for Windows 7. Or better yet, just switch to the Macintosh or a netbook running Linux.

* * *

Amazon is proud of its Kindle, a dedicated e-book reader. The problem with the Kindle is that it's only a dedicated e-book reader, which makes it seem as antiquated as an early Palm personal digital assistant (PDA). Nowadays, the latest trend is to combine multiple functions into a single device, and that's where the iPhone shines over other smartphones.

Skip the Kindle and just download the free Stanza program to turn your iPhone into an e-book reader. Just access the Stanza Online Catalog, and you can view free and commercial e-books from a variety of sources, including Project Gutenburg, Harlequin Romance and BooksOnBoard.

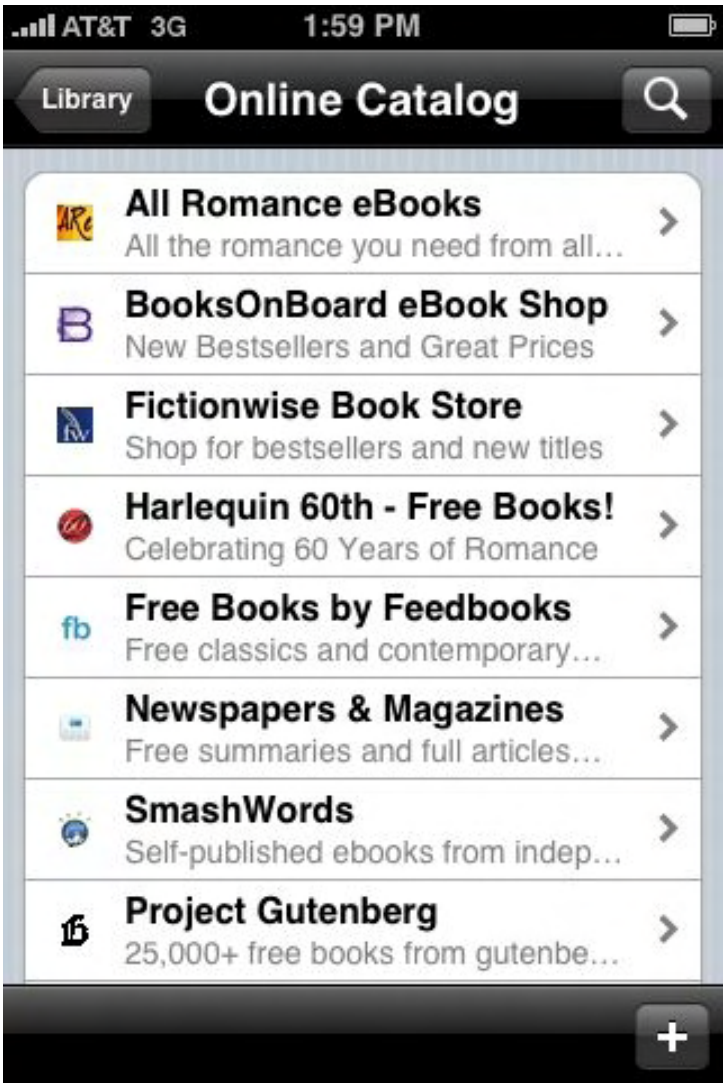

Figure 1. Stanza lets you download e-books from a variety of sources.

Browse through these online catalogs, download the latest bestsellers (for a fee) or the time-tested classics (for free), and now you can read your favorite books on the iPhone screen.

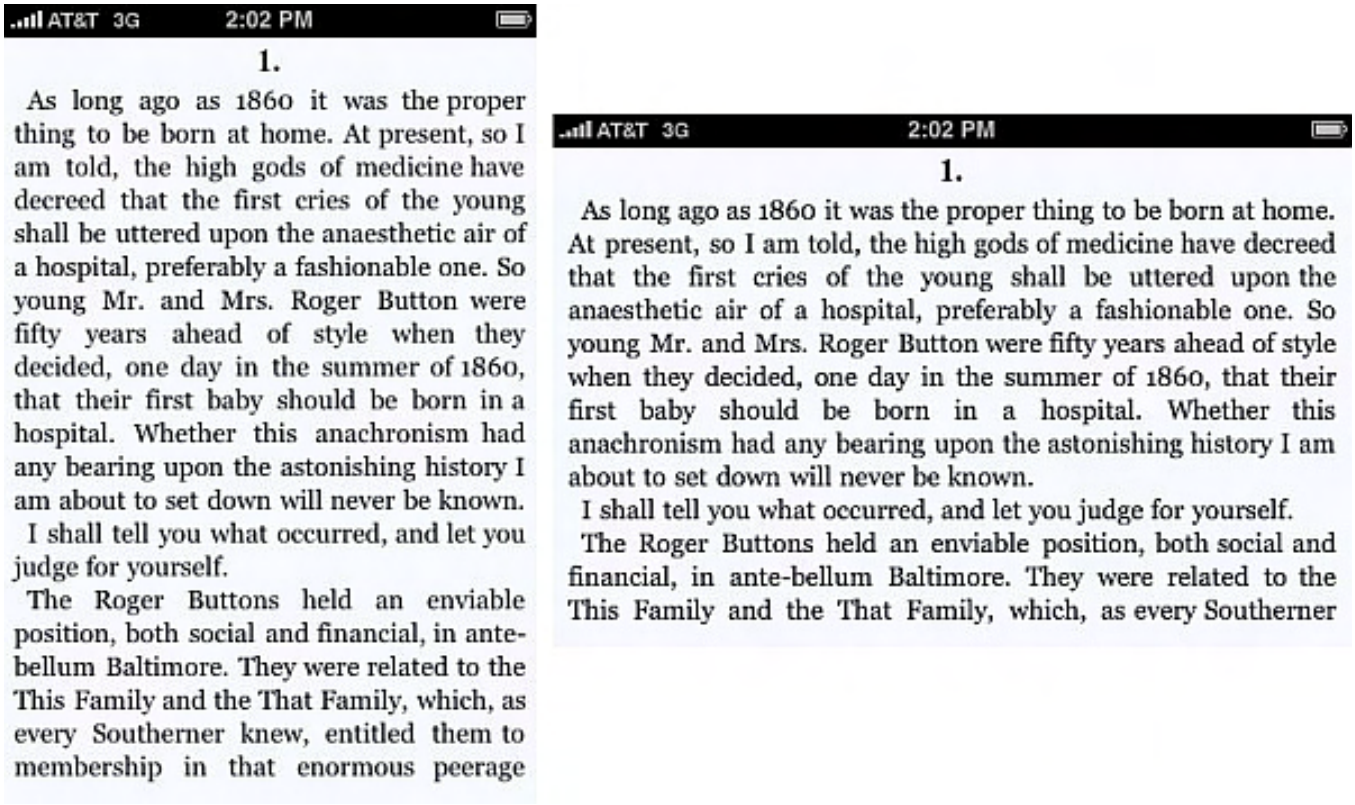

Figure 2. You can read text by holding the iPhone vertically or horizontally.

Swiping your finger horizontally across the screen slides the current page out of the way and displays the previous or next page. Tilt the iPhone sideways or upright, and you can read text in a way that's most comfortable for you. In case you don't like the default settings, modify them and change the background or text color, or font size.

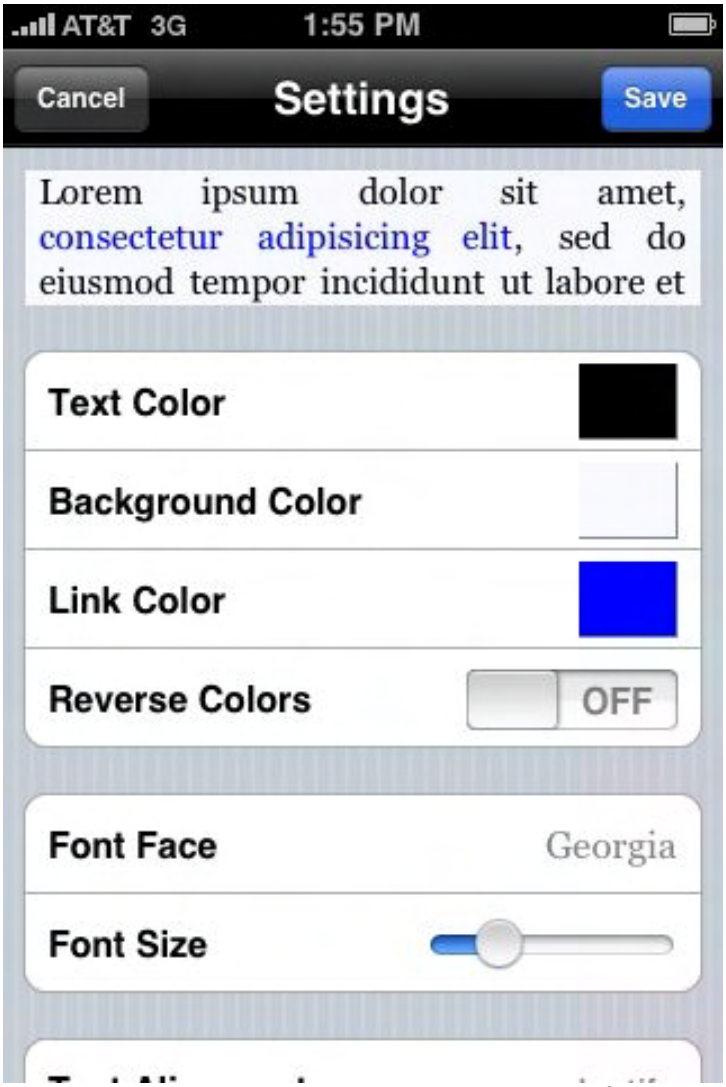

Figure 3. Customize the text appearance to make it easy for you to read.

Given a choice between paying $359 for Amazon's Kindle or getting Stanza for free on your iPhone, how much do you want to spend for the privilege of reading an e-book on the go?

* * *

When browsing the Web, you'll likely find a great Web site, click through different links, and then not remember how to get back to that great Web site you found originally. While you could backtrack through your list of previously browsed Web sites, a simpler solution is to use the SnapBack feature in Safari.

When you find a Web site that you want to store temporarily (not bookmark forever), choose History/Mark Page for SnapBack.

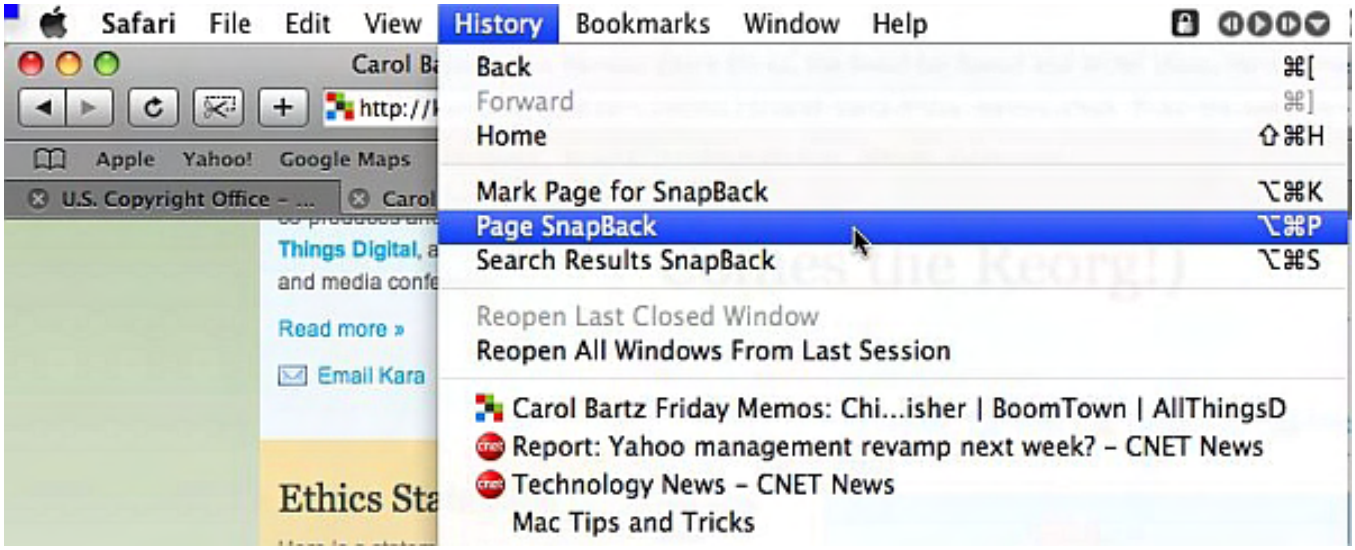

Figure 4. The SnapBack feature lets you return to a Web site without backtracking through multiple Web pages.

Now you can safely click and wander through as many links as you like. When you want to return back to the Web site you labeled with the "Mark Page for SnapBack" command, choose History/Page SnapBack, and you'll be back at your specified Web site right away.

In the early days, before Wally became an Internationally renowned comedian, computer book writer, and generally cool guy, Wally Wang used to hang around *The Byte Buyer* dangling participles with Jack Dunning and go to the gym to pump iron with Dan Gookin.

Wally is responsible for *Microsoft Office 2007 for Dummies*, *Breaking Into Acting for Dummies*, *Beginning Programming All-in-One Reference for Dummies*, and *Mac All-in-One Reference for Dummies* from *www.dummies.com*, as well as, *Steal This Computer Book 4.0*, *Visual Basic Express 2005: Now Playing*, and *My New Mac* from *www.nostarch.com*. He is also the co-author of *Strategic Entrepreneurism* from *www.selectbooks.com*.

Every Saturday morning from 9:00 am - 10:00 am in San Diego, you can hear Wally with fellow co-hosts Dane Henderson and Candace Lee, on the radio show CyberSports Today (*www.cybersportstoday.com*), which covers the video gaming industry on ESPN Radio 800 AM. Wally covers the military history side of the video game industry.

When not performing stand-up comedy or writing computer books, he likes to paper trade stocks with the video game Stock Reflex (*www.plimus.com/jsp/download_trial.jsp?contractId=1722712&referrer=wwang*).

Wally can be reached at *wally@computoredge.com*.

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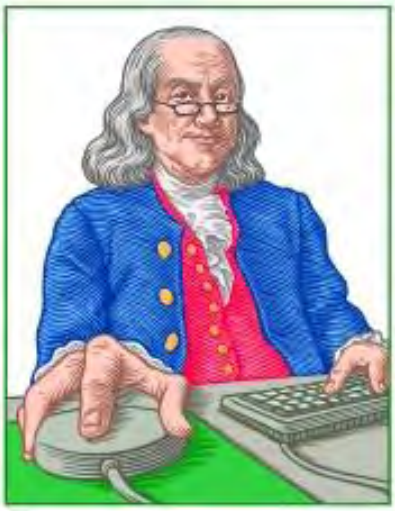

LITTLE LINUX LESSONS

"AN INVESTMENT IN LINUX KNOWLEDGE PAYS THE BEST INTEREST."

Little Linux Lessons: Tips and Tricks from Users

"Linux users share ideas and ask for help." by ComputorEdge Staff

A tip on using the tab key when working with the command prompt. Also, more tips and recommendations on distros for new users.

Tabbing Through Linux

If you're new to Linux, then you may not realize how useful the tab key can be with working with the command prompt. Not only can it make typing much less tedious, but it may just help you find the right command. (The examples used in this column are with the bash shell. Please let us know if there are useful variations in other shells.)

Many people know that the tab key can be used to complete words in the command line. For example, if you plan to change to another directory, then after starting with the cd command (change directories), entering a first letter, then tab, will auto-complete the directory.

```
$cd /h
```

Hitting the tab key yields:

```
$cd /home
```

Then, add /j and hit tab to get:

```
$cd /home/jack/
```

If the next directory is ambiguous, hitting the tab key again will list the available possibilities.

This also works for commands. Suppose you want to use the chown command (change ownership). If you enter "cho" and hit tab, you will get:

```
$chown
```

However, if you only use "ch" then one depression of the tab key yields nothing. That's because there are other commands that start with ch. To list them, hit the tab key again:

```
$ ch
chat          checkgid     chflags      chio         chkprintcap  chpass
cheatmake     checkmail    chfn         chkey        chmod        chroot
checkXML      checknr      chgrp        chkgrp       chown        chsh
$ ch
```

Now you can pick the appropriate command.

If you are just looking for a particular command, enter the first letter and hit the tab key twice. You will get a list of all the commands that start with that letter. (Caution: Before you use any command you may stumble across in this manner, it's recommended that you use the man command, i.e. "man chown," to determine its use.)

New to Linux?

Last week we had another question on recommendations for people new to Linux. Answers from a previous issue were referred, yet there are these responses to add:

I would not recommend Ubuntu at all. It's a heavily modified version of Linux. I've used it before, and trying to make sense of it (from a Linux professional's POV) was a challenge. It would have the same result in reverse, I would imagine. A new distro came out recently called Debian Lenny; this is supposed to be a very user-friendly version that lets you use a GUI (Graphical User Interface, like Windows) or a CLI (Command Line Interface, like DOS).

David Eddleman
Vista, Calif.

Your system is very similar to what I am running at this time. I am using Xubuntu 7.10 with 128GB of RAM. If you can get more RAM in it, so much better. I use Wicd1.5.8 for all my networking needs. After you install it, run the updates on it and you'll be fine. I do recommend adding OpenOffice Writer to your laptop. Go to System, then Add Remove Software, where you download OpenOffice Writer (2.3.0) to read Microsoft Word files and make Adobe Acrobat files (PDF) for free, instead of paying $440 in Adobe charges. *cdimage.ubuntu.com/xubuntu/releases/*

John Morgan

Looking for More Linux Questions * * *

*If you have an opinion on these or other Linux topics, then please let us know. Also, if you have another Linux tip that works for you and would like to pass it along (or have a question), please drop us a line at Linux Lessons (*ceeditor@computoredge.com*).*

This is a column for Linux and Unix-like operating system users. The goal is to give Linux users an opportunity to share tips, tricks and ideas with both fellow users and the *ComputorEdge* Linux newbies. Each week in this column, we will highlight the thoughts you submit to us. This is your column. As long as a submission is dealing with the Linux/Unix-like world, we want to share it.

The tips and tricks may be short or long, and can include graphics. If there is a little technique or program that you use on a regular basis, then we want to hear about it. You may also pose questions for other Linux users to answer. E-mail your ideas or questions to Linux Lessons (*ceeditor@computoredge.com*). Be sure to put the word "Linux Lessons" in the subject line so it won't get lost in junk mail. We depend upon you to make this column a success.

Jack Dunning
ComputorEdge

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Rob, The ComputorTutor Does Microsoft Access 2007

"Access 2007 Wrap-Up" by Rob Spahitz

In the final installment of the Access 2007 series, we'll take a look at a few more things that Access 2007 offers us.

There's plenty more that can be done with Access 2007 (or even the 2003 version). But we'll wrap up our database-design work today. Starting next week, we'll explore a lot more Visual Basic, since that's powerful enough that we don't need many of the features offered by Access to make it look like an application. Instead, we'll explore the idea of creating an application that uses a database. But that's not for several more columns.

So, what are a few more things that Access 2007 offers us?

Last week, we loaded a database from *www.dogopoly.com/ce* and opened it in Access 2007. We also explored the ribbon bar and how to switch between object views: tables, queries, forms, etc. We saw that when we switched, the ribbon bar gave us new options, and we looked at a table in Design View to see what was offered.

This time, let's explore a few other things. Open the My Mailing List database and proceed to the tables in the pane on the left end. Double-click on tblAddress to open a form in Datasheet View. You should see something like Figure 1.

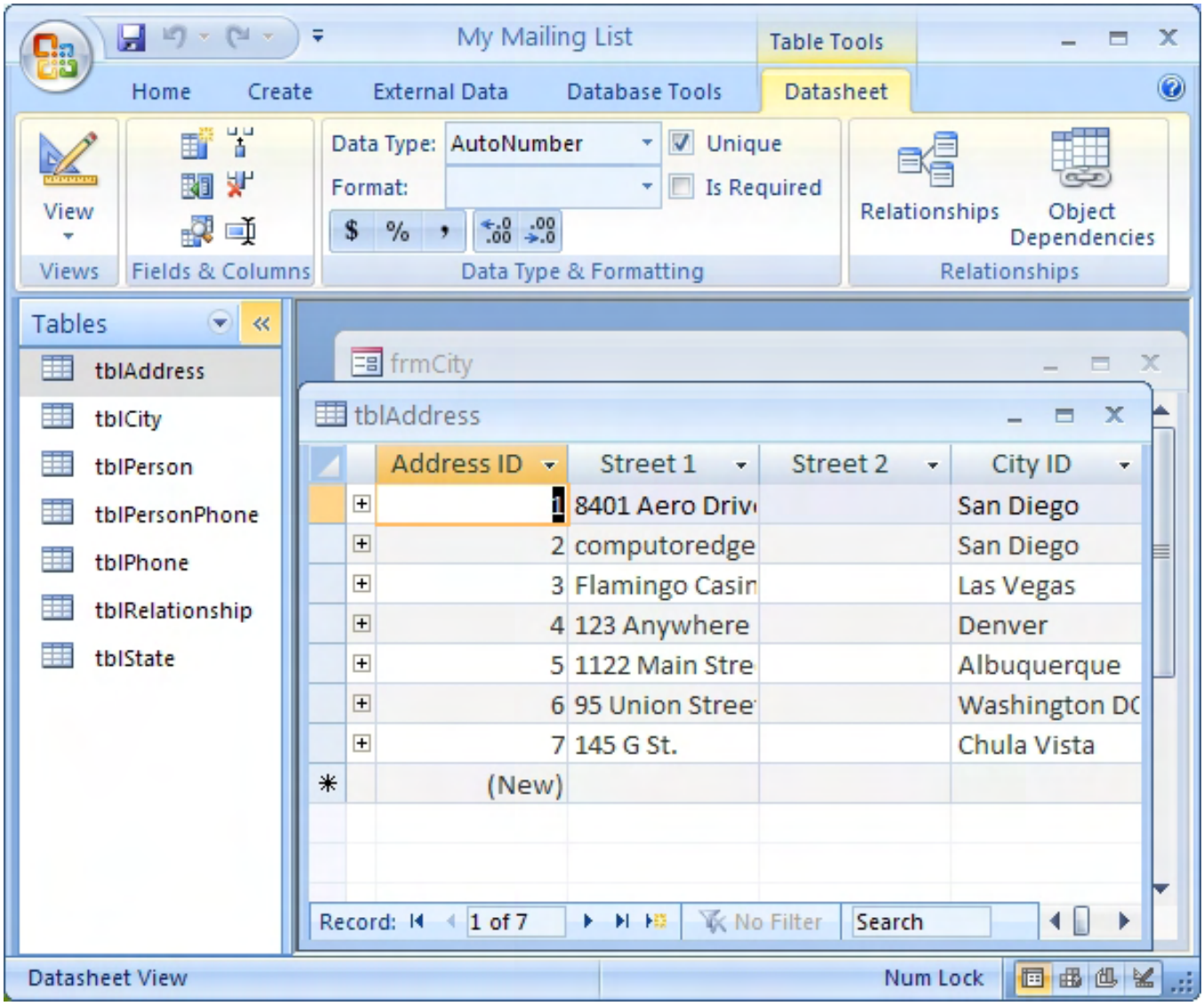

Figure 1. Table's Datasheet View.

This view looks very similar to Access 2003. However, notice that the ribbon bar has a new entry along the top called "Datasheet." And within there you have a collection of menu boxes related to that. And remember that the appearance of the items in the boxes will vary depending on how much room you have. Therefore, my images may look a bit different from yours. If you have only icons and no text, simply hover your mouse over the item for a tool tip to help describe the item.

The first box, Views, has the typical things for looking at your table in Design View, Datasheet View or Pivot View.

Fields & Columns

The second box, Fields & Columns, offers a collection of new features. Let's look at these.

Click on the first item, New Field, and you'll get a new window on the right side, as seen in Figure 2, with a set of actions that can be applied to the table, including Single Line of Text, Date and Time, and Purchase Price, plus many more. You can either double-click an item to add it to the table, or click and drag to a desired location. This feature offers you a more graphical way to design a table. Close this window when you're done with it by clicking on the little black X in its top-right corner, or click on the New Field icon again.

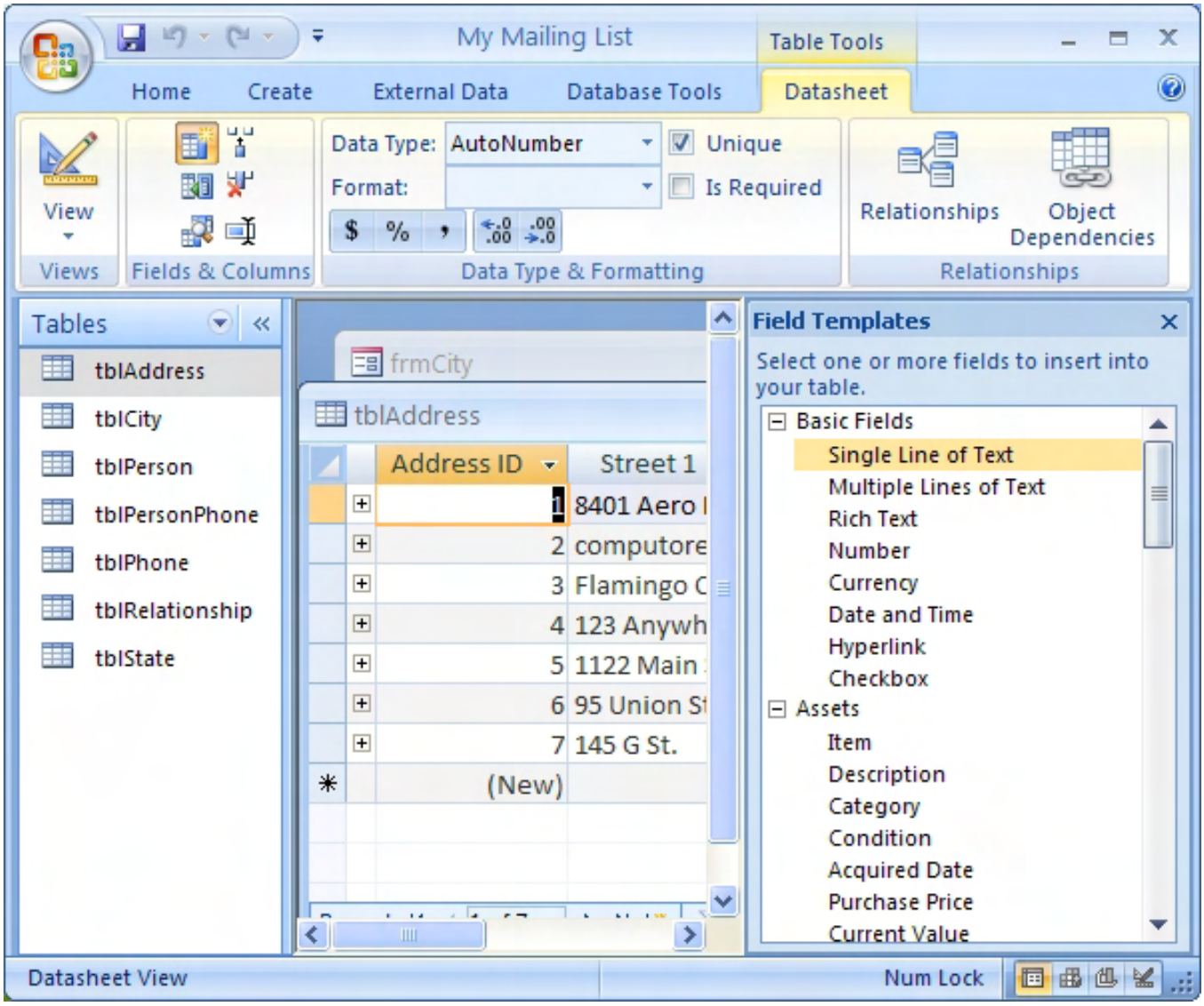

Figure 2. Field Actions.

Click on the second item, Add Existing Fields, and you also get a window on the right that shows you a list of fields in all tables, as seen in Figure 3. This is broken into two areas: one for tables that have a direct relationship to the current table, and the rest of the tables. In our case, the Address table uses tblCity and tblState to supply values to its fields through a lookup; and it's related to tblPerson by supplying a set of values to that table as needed. You can also drag fields from other tables into this one if you need to redesign your database. Note that this is probably not needed if you designed your database correctly from the beginning, but inevitably, new features will be added and you may need to make some minor changes as you go.

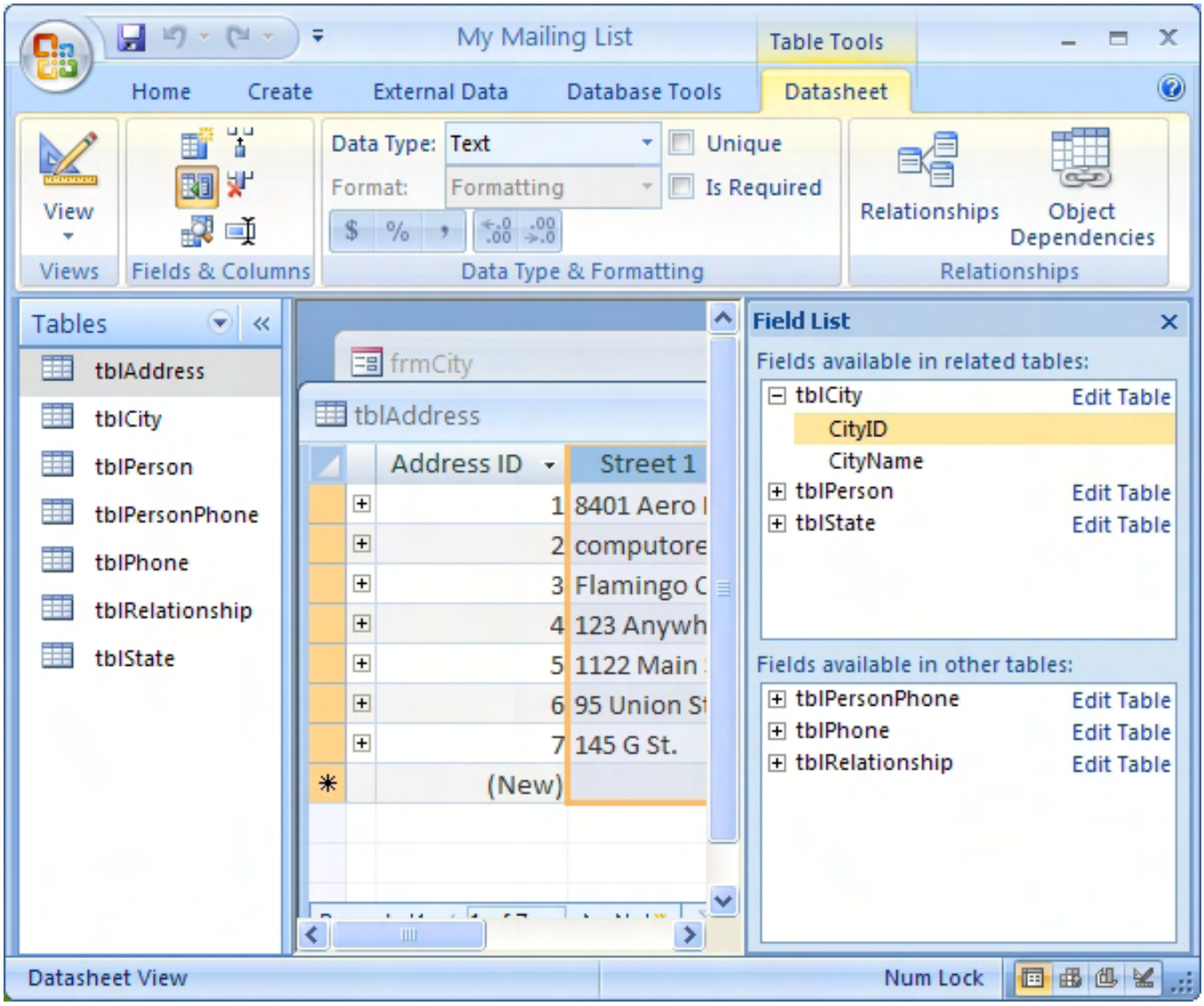

Figure 3. Field List.

The next item is the Insert Lookup Column Wizard. We've seen this before in the Design area, so you should already know how to use it.

Next is Insert Column, which simply adds a new default column, Delete Column and Rename Column. These are pretty much what you'd expect.

Data Type & Formatting

The next block, Data Type & Formatting, as seen in Figure 4, is primarily used to view information about any selected field. For example, the primary will probably show that it is an AutoNumber field and is Unique, while the CityID field is simply a Number field since it is a foreign key to another table's primary key. If you would like to add special formats, like commas in the thousands places, or a certain number of decimal places, this is the place to do that.

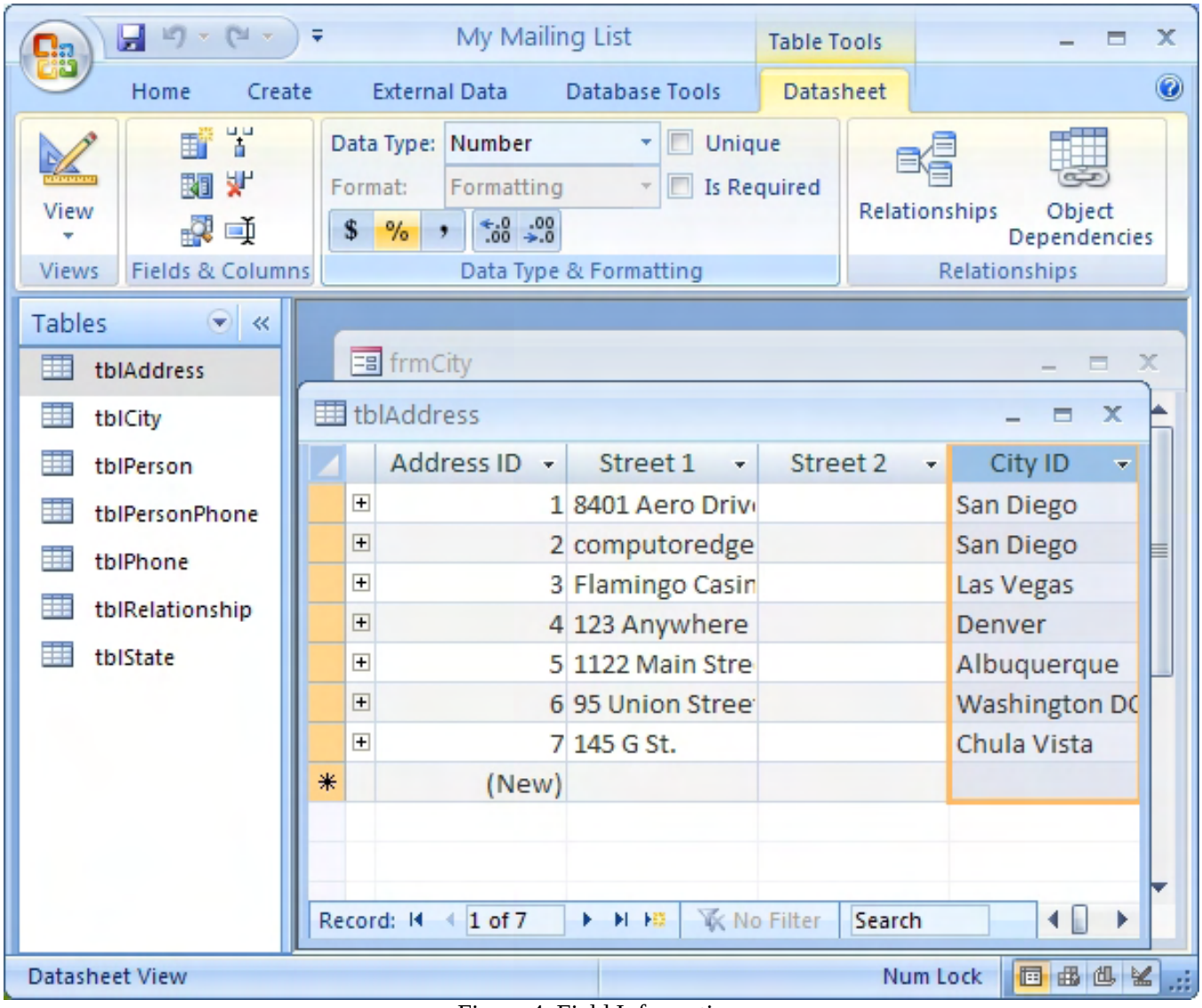

Figure 4. Field Information.

Relationships

The last box, Relationships, lets you see how your various tables are related. We've seen this in Access 2003, but now when you click on the Relationships item, the ribbon bar shows you additional relationship information, as seen in Figure 5. Relationship Report lets you see a printable version of your relationships. When you're done, click on the big red X on the right of the ribbon bar boxes, and you'll return to Table Tools.

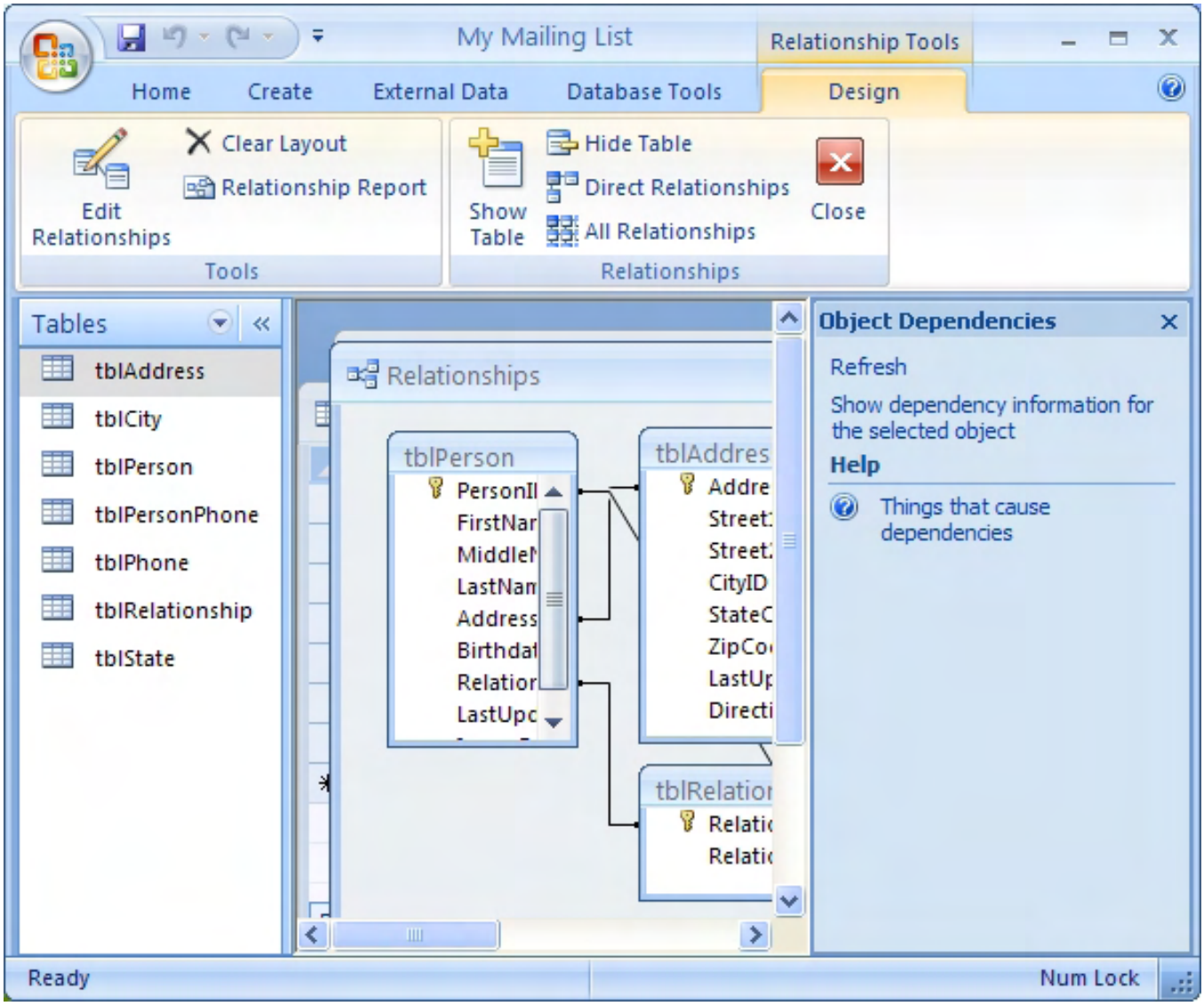

Figure 5. Relationship Items.

Other Features

Although there are many other new features in this new version, let's wrap it up with some things that will help us when we return to Access 2003 and VBA next week. Click on the Database Tools menu tab. On the far left you see the Macro box with Visual Basic in it. That will be a quick way to manage our database's VBA portion.

Next, open the frmAddress form by going to the left panel and clicking on the arrow pointing down, then selecting Forms. Note that if you click on the double-left arrow in the top-right corner, it collapses this window, which is nice if you need to gain some working space.

With a form selected, click on the Design tab in the ribbon bar. You'll see a whole collection of items, as seen in Figure 6, that can be used to work with a form or report.

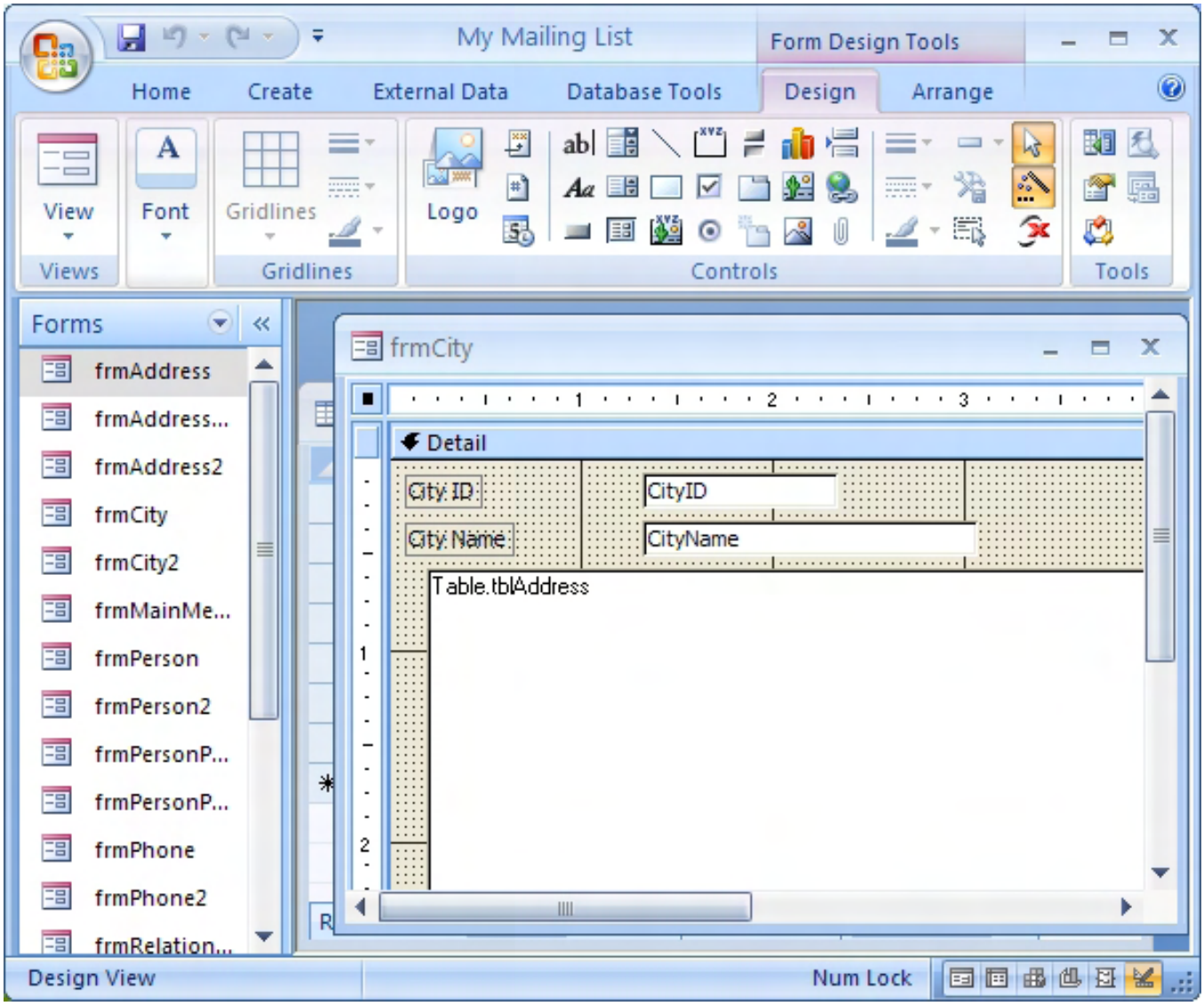

Figure 6. Form and Report tools.

Next week we'll return to Access 2003, since more people are using that. If you have only Access 2007, everything should work pretty much the same.

So next week we'll focus on each of the items in the toolbox, see how they work, and see how they can be programmed to make an awesome database application. And, as mentioned at the beginning, we'll start transitioning toward the current version of Visual Basic (which is a free download from Microsoft), so that we can start creating applications that use a database rather than a database that acts like an application. In doing so, we'll have much more flexibility and potential to create fantastic tools and even games that could be sold for profit.

Stay tuned and feel free to pass along your questions. (Check below for ways to contact me and how you can support more of these columns.)

Rob has been in the computer industry for over 25 years and is currently a part-time teacher, offering classes in Excel, Access, Visual Basic, and a variety of other technical tools. He has loved *ComputorEdge* since 1990 and can be contacted at *RSpahitz@Dogopoly.com*.

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Worldwide News & Product Reviews

"The latest in tech news and hot product reviews." by Charles Carr

Cutting Tech Costs Without Cutting Effectiveness: Moving to a Web-based model greatly reduces your overall costs; Online Resources Every Woman Should Know—Some favorite Web sites for busy moms; Working with Adobe Premier Pro CS3—A look at the powerful video-editing tool.

Cutting Tech Costs Without Cutting Effectiveness

Steve Adams, vice president of marketing for MyFax (*www.myfax.com*), makes the case for Web-based services over traditional software/hardware solutions:

In any business, large or small, there is one mantra that gets chanted over and over anytime the economy goes even a little weak: cut costs. Of course when the economy completely tanks and ordinary citizens start wondering if they should keep their money in their mattresses instead of the major banks, the mantra does seem to get noticeably louder.

Generally speaking, cutting costs is good advice in any economy. Even when times are flush, you really shouldn't be paying for things you don't need, or paying more than necessary for the things you do need. But when money gets tight, you want to be sure you're using what you have more efficiently.

One strategy that has had a major effect on businesses of all sizes is moving away from purchasing technology that requires software and/or hardware. Web-based services are a "pay-as-you-go" model that eliminates the need for huge up-front capital expenditures, high maintenance costs and ongoing support costs. All while assuring the technology you're using has all the latest features and upgrades.

Here's how it works. Let's say your business relies on faxes, and you send and/or receive enough that you need a dedicated line for your fax machine. Then one day the machine finally gives up the ghost. Normally you would head to the local office-supply store or other electronics retailer and purchase a new machine. Of course you'll also need a spare toner or two, which adds to the cost. And you'll then have to set up and install the new machine as well as find a place to dispose of the old one.

Your other option when the old machine goes is to sign up for an Internet fax service. With that service you can send and receive faxes on your PC, laptop or mobile device—no additional machine required. So you can eliminate the cost of the machine and the toner. You can also eliminate the cost of the second phone line, since all faxes will be sent and received over the Internet connection you already have. Since the files come in electronically, you'll be able to cut way back on your paper costs as well; you print only the pages you choose to print.

Larger, more complex applications such as a contact management or e-mail campaign management system provide even greater opportunities for savings because you're eliminating the need to maintain both hardware and software.

Typically when you purchase a business application, you have to install it onto a server or servers (depending on the application and the size of your organization). Once it's up and running, one or more IT people are required to keep it running at peak efficiency. That's an expense, whether it's internal or external. Then there are the monthly maintenance costs most software manufacturers require as part of the license. If there is a significant software upgrade there is another cost, and you again have to call on IT to complete the process. If the server goes bad there's an additional cost to replace the hardware.

Moving to a Web-based model greatly reduces your overall costs. The big up-front cost for hardware and software is replaced by a small monthly fee. In most cases you don't even need any involvement from IT to get the service running—it's all self-contained. The same goes for hardware and software maintenance. It all happens behind the scenes, saving time and money while assuring you're benefiting from the software's latest features. Should a technical issue arise, one call to the supplier's tech-support group generally solves the problem—again at no cost to you.

This move to Web-based services isn't just for "outlier" applications anymore, either. Even core applications, such as your office productivity suite, are now moving away from the traditional client/server model to being Web-based. The reason is simple: Because keeping applications running is their primary business instead of a utility, service providers dedicate considerably more resources to that function than internal IT departments, resulting in greater uptime.

If you're looking for ways to reduce your own business costs—and who isn't these days?—consider moving some of your applications to the Web. It's a great way to cut costs without cutting effectiveness.

Online Resources Every Woman Should Know

The personal tech support hotline BluePhone (*www.bluephone.com*) tells us about some of their favorite Web sites for busy moms.

1.) Online Organizing (*www.onlineorganizing.com*)

If "getting organized" has been at the top of your to-do list, but you haven't tackled it yet, check out OnlineOrganizing.com. Billed as "the first truly comprehensive, one-stop shop for Web-based organizing tools," its goal is to "bring professional organizers, product managers, and the general public together in one common forum."

The site provides a wide assortment of solutions to everyday organizing problems—both at home and at work. OnlineOrganizing.com offers an online destination where users can learn and share ideas about how to better use our time and space—and reduce clutter-induced stress. The site offers tips, products and services to organize project management, closets, goal setting, memorabilia and photos, retirement, time management, mobile office, travel, shipping/mailing, labeling and much more.

2.) Home Inventory (*www.knowyourstuff.org/*)

It's much easier to document your possessions before you suffer a loss from a fire, hurricane, burglary or other disaster! Sponsored by the Insurance Information Institute, this software makes creating a home inventory fun, easy and up-to-date. Know Your Stuff software is free to download and use, but once your inventory is stored on your computer, they encourage you to keep a back-up copy (for example, on CD, memory stick, or even a printed copy). The site provides the option to sign-up with Vault 24—a secure online storage facility—for a nominal fee. With Know Your Stuff you can create a room-by-room inventory of your personal possessions. And with the click of a mouse, you can update this list as you buy or eliminate personal possessions.

For example, if you've been setting up a household, starting a home inventory can be relatively simple, and the site suggests attaching recent wedding registries to substantiate new possessions. Or, if you've been living in a house for many years, "set aside an afternoon and get your entire household involved, it can be an enjoyable experience."

3.) Busy and Working Moms (*www.bizymoms.com/*)

We know firsthand how hard it can be to get an at-home business off the ground! As one of the largest online work-at-home mom sites, Bizymoms.com has helped thousands of moms find and start a home business since 1997. Bizymoms.com "believes all a woman needs to make her home business dream a reality is determination and an idea"—and offers free resources like chats, message boards and support articles, as well as career kits, e-books and

online classes for purchase.

For example, Career Kits include everything a mom needs to start specific businesses. There are three workbooks, an easy-to-use Web site, and online support during the startup months, and depending on the career kit purchased, additional software features are given to help moms market the business to its fullest potential.

4.) Mom's Refuge (*www.momsrefuge.com/*)

We all know how hard it is to manage work and raising a baby while still finding time for yourself—if you're a new mom, this site targets women who "juggle babies and dinners and work and sanity."

The site encourages moms to "come share with us your tales, your tips, your questions ... you can talk to other Moms on the lists and you can always blow off steam on the rant boards."

MomsRefuge.com also includes sections on single moms, career, family, news and telecommuting. And of course a recipe section!

5.) Blue Suit Mom (*www.bluesuitmom.com*)

Another great site for helping moms juggle the demands of everyday life is BlueSuitMom.com, one of the premier online resources of work and family balance information—targeting executive working mothers and their employers. It offers advice on parenting, career advancement, the balancing act, meal planning and family health and fitness—delivered in a format that nurtures respect for professional mothers.

It is the mission of BlueSuitMom.com to "provide the tools and information necessary for a woman to reach her full potential as a mother, professional, business owner, spouse or woman." In addition, the site offers a newsletter, an "Ask the Expert" column, and a "Daily Stops" section highlighting its picks for the best of that day's news and articles. BlueSuitMom.com is affiliated with Mom Talk Radio, "the first radio talk show dedicated to real-life moms," hosted by BlueSuit.Mom.com founder Maria Bailey who is also a mother of four.

6.) Fun and Games (*www.smilebox.com/*)

Smilebox makes it easy to connect with friends and family in a more creative and compelling way by making it super easy to create slide shows, e-cards, scrapbooks, photo albums and postcards—using your own photos and videos.

According to the site, Smilebox "creates a new category of service called 'creative messaging,' which draws elements from photo services, scrapbooking and e-cards to deliver a new medium for communication unparalleled in its ability to convey mood, thought and emotion."

Unlike other "first generation" solutions that focus on organizing, editing, and sharing photos or sending prepackaged e-cards, Smilebox enables users to create something truly powerful by choosing from hundreds of unique multimedia designs, easily personalizing them with photos, video, music, words, and style and sharing them via e-mail, blog or print. Smilebox is free, but offers a premium service if you join Club Smilebox.

Working with Adobe Premier Pro CS3

I come from the days when editing movies meant cutting and splicing film on my trusty Super 8 reel-to-reel editor. The first time I edited footage electronically was at a cable TV station where I worked after graduating college. I soon grew to appreciate the convenience of editing footage by electronically shifting scenes around. That appreciation continues today with my use of Adobe Premiere Pro. I've worked with the CS3 version of Premiere ($400-$600 street price) since its release in 2007 and have found it an effective tool for perfecting my videos.

Video-editing software falls into three general levels: 1) Basic. Free tools like Windows Movie Maker and iMovie

on the Mac offer a simple and limited set of features for quick and dirty editing; 2) Intermediate. Programs like Pinnacle Studio and Adobe Premiere Elements feature a more sophisticated palette of tools; 3) Pro. Software such as Apple's Final Cut Pro and Premiere Pro provide the highest level of editing features for advanced amateurs and professionals. A program like Premiere can be intimidating to beginners. But for me, the effort of learning the software has resulted in a stylish look to my videos.

To start off, the Premiere interface is logically organized, sporting panels for the timeline, source and preview windows, and other functions (see Figure 1). I do most of my work directly on the timeline where I can edit, cut, move and apply various effects to each clip. I can adjust certain effects in my video relatively quickly on the timeline. I can sharpen, blur, change the color and contrast, and apply a variety of other effects. From the timeline, I can work with other specific effects. One effect called Time Remapping lets me speed up or slow down any selected clip in my video, even to the point where I can change speeds within the same clip. Another is Opacity, which lets me darken any clip. A third effect is scaling, which allows me to shrink the frame size of a clip.

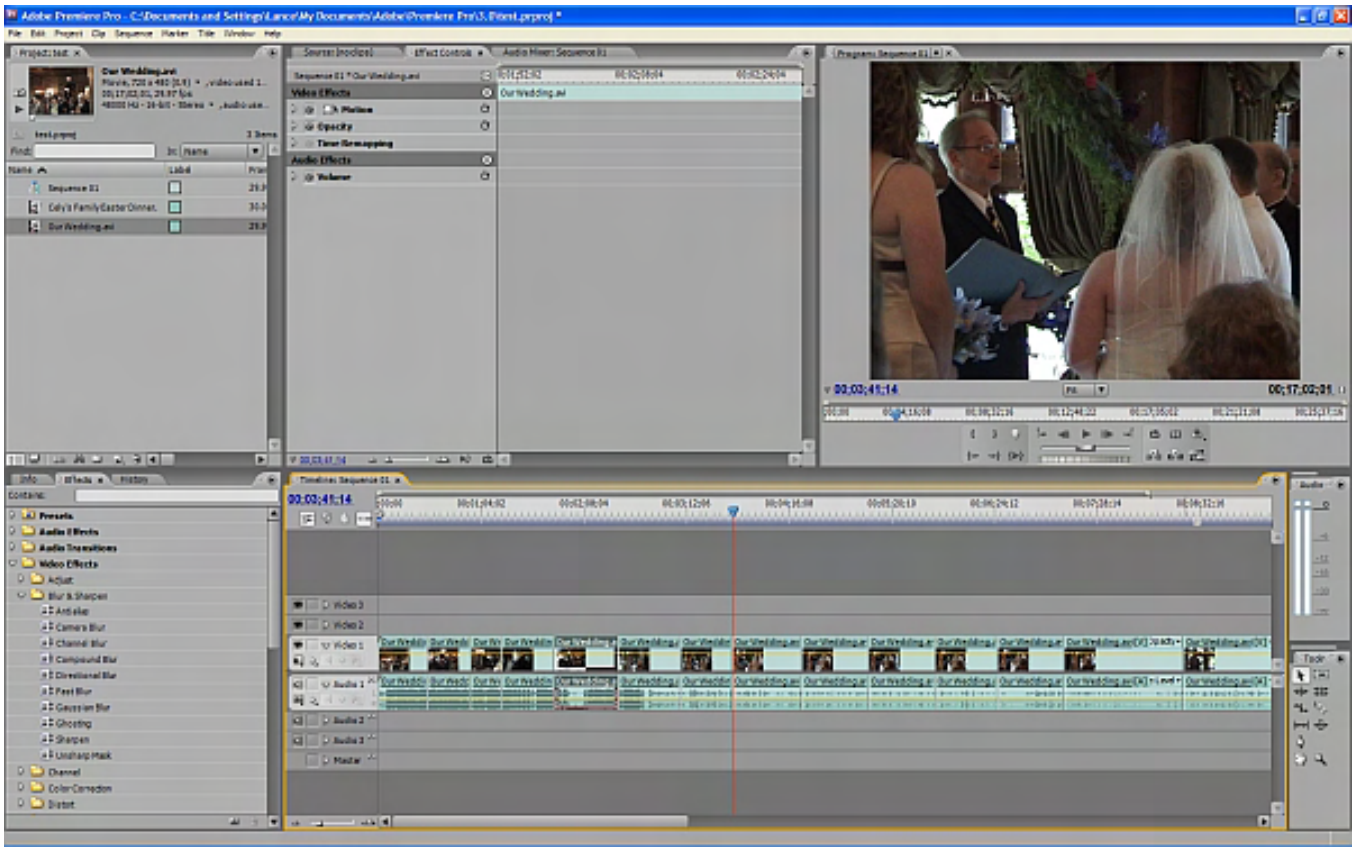

Figure 1. Premiere Interface.

One feature I especially like in Premiere is the Title Designer (see Figure 2). I can easily create titles for my video using a variety of different fonts, properties and other elements. I can set my titles to be still, roll, or crawl along the screen. Creating titles this way adds a very slick look to my videos.

Figure 2. Premiere Title Designer.

The integration with other Adobe apps is a big plus in Premiere CS3. Using the Adobe Clip Notes feature, I can export a video sequence to a PDF file where it's embedded as a QuickTime or Windows Media clip. The recipient of the PDF can view the embedded video and even add comments about the clip. I can also import Photoshop and Illustrator files directly into my video and, in the case of Photoshop, edit the imported image by calling Photoshop from Premiere (see Figure 3).

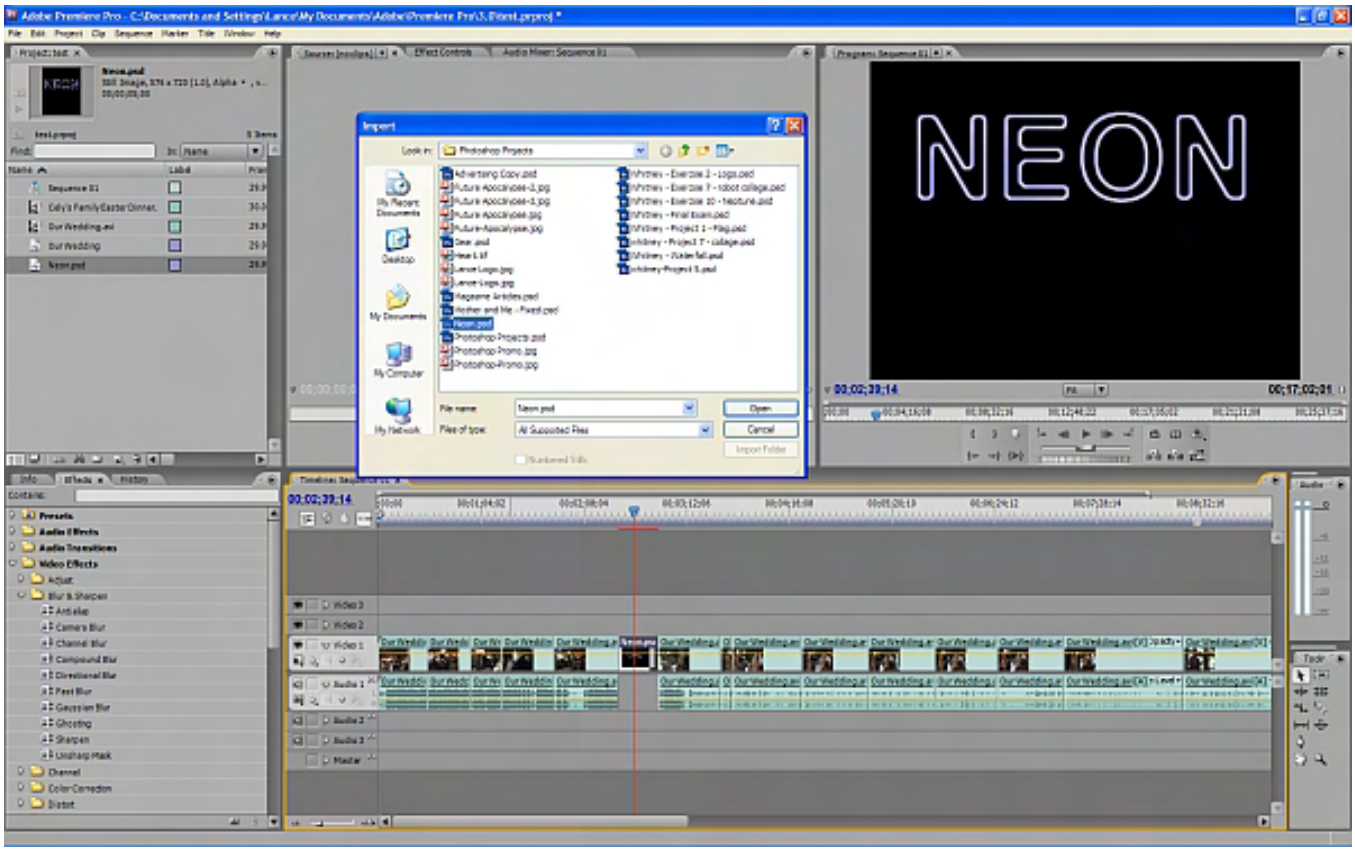

Figure 3. Premiere Import.

When I'm done with my video project, I can export it using the Adobe Media Encoder tool. I can choose from a variety of formats, including Windows Media, QuickTime and Flash Video. I can also preview the video in the Encoder window (see Figure 4).

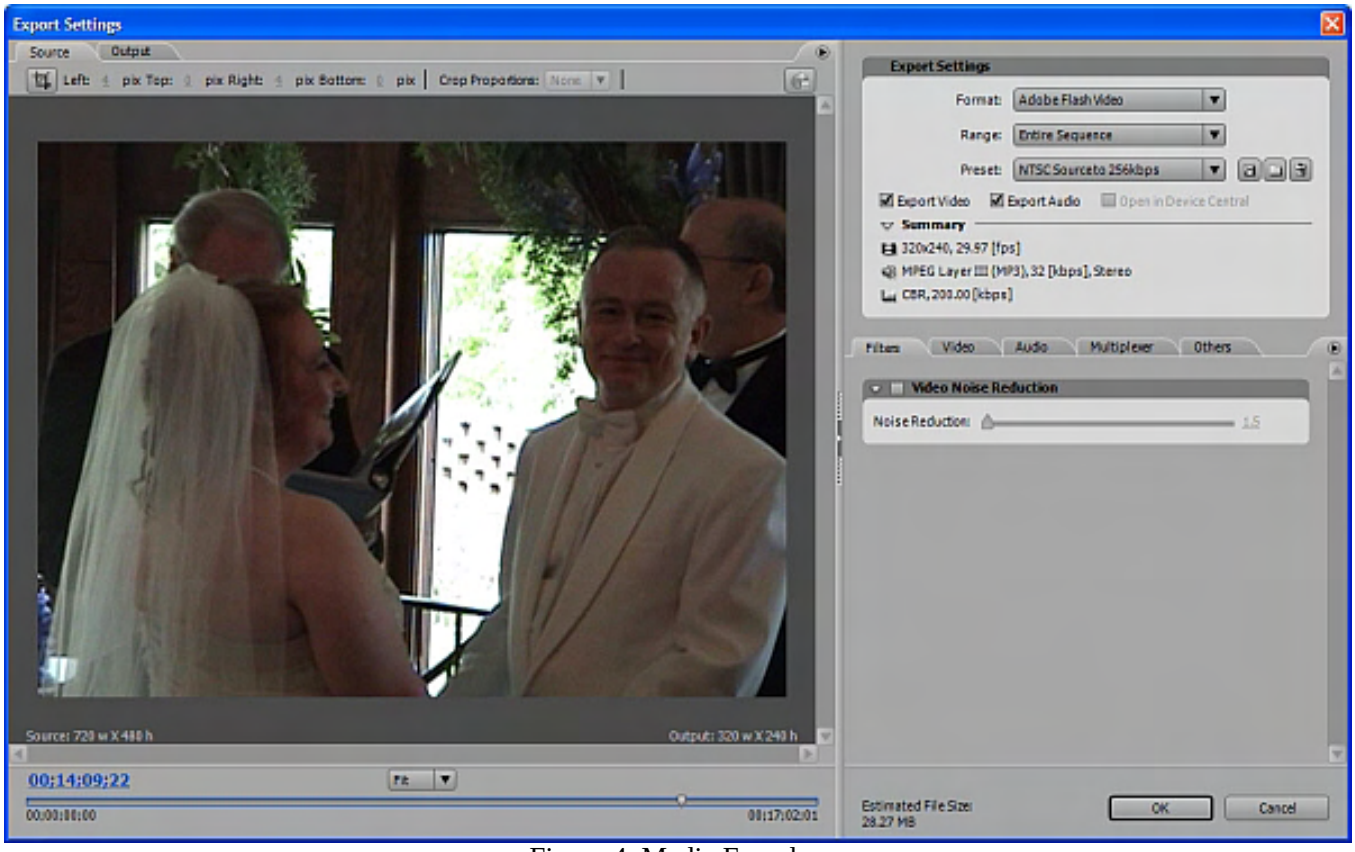

Figure 4. Media Encoder.

Included with Premiere are several extra tools. Adobe OnLocation can record video directly to my hard drive, allowing me to monitor my footage as it's shot. Adobe Encore is a superior DVD-authoring program, which I've found a welcome relief after using less advanced authoring software. Premiere is also part of Adobe's Production Premium Suite, which includes After Effects, Ultra and Soundbooth. With After Effects, I can create cool visual effects and motion graphics to easily integrate into my videos. Ultra lets me add different virtual backgrounds to my videos, while Soundbooth is a hefty audio editor.

Adobe Premiere is a sophisticated and powerful program. I'm still a novice at using its more advanced features, but the tools I can tap into now already have given my videos a polished look. I'm eager to see what the CS4 version will hold in store for me.

In addition to being an editor and columnist for *ComputorEdge* and *ComputerScene* Magazines, where he has written hundreds of feature articles and cover stories over the past decade, Charles Carr has also penned well over 1,000 non-tech newspaper and magazine articles and columns for various publications, including two widely-read columns each week for San Diego's *North County Times* newspaper.

Carr has covered such diverse topics as pesticide use in area schools, invasive background checks for county

volunteers, asthma awareness, the debate over standards-based grading, potential vulnerabilities in electronic voting machines, and Southern California's devastating 2003 and 2007 wildfires. He has also written many humorous pieces.

Carr has also edited dozens of stories and articles written by others which have appeared in major publications and web sites across the country.

He has been a contributor and technical advisor to *L.A. and San Diego Parent* magazines and receives dozens of requests a year to appear on Southern California television and radio stations to talk about important events in the tech world.

Carr has judged many writing competitions including San Diego Press Club and Time-Warner Communications contests and was sole judge for the national NAPPA Tech Toys awards for five years (which his kids really appreciated). He was recently a judge for the national "Poetry Out Loud" competition.

He has won many writing accolades, including Press Club awards for Best Column Writing, Consumer Writing and Best Arts and Entertainment, and has repeatedly taken top honors in San Diego Songwriter's Guild competitions for his original musical compositions.

Carr will soon publish his first book, *What a World*, a collection of his best writings.

Learn more at *www.charlescarr.com*.

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EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher

"True Financial Oversight?" by Jack Dunning

How did we get in this financial mess—and how can technology get us out of it?

There is an excellent article in *Wired Magazine (*www.wired.com/techbiz/it/magazine/17-03/wp_quant*)* that goes a long way toward explaining how the financial system became the mess we see today. It seems that there is a formula that was devised for calculating risk for the complex securities being manufactured by financial institutions. It simplified the risk decision-making process. It was used almost everywhere to evaluate complicated packages. The formula was fatally flawed.

The problem is that the risk involved in these complex mixes of financial instruments have too many dependencies on seemingly unrelated events to properly evaluate them. The fact is that the vast majority of people, including the "financial analyst," didn't have the math skills to evaluate the paper they were trading. The formula was used as the panacea. While the times were good, it seemed that the financial markets could do no wrong—and the formula seemed to work. But once there was a kink (bad mortgages), the house of cards collapsed. The formula is now useless, and there is nothing to replace it—yet.

Most of the problem paper in the financial markets does not have a value of zero, but banks are reluctant to buy or sell them precisely because they don't know how much they are worth. The buyers don't want to pay too much, while the sellers fear getting too little. Part of the complication is the fact that even individual mortgages have been divided between numerous packages. If you tried to track down who actually owns the mortgage on your house (not the bank who collects the payments), you could find that pieces of your mortgage are in hundreds, if not thousands, of different securities.

People are screaming for more government oversight, but there is no evidence that hiring more civil servants will help resolve anything. It's been admitted at the SEC that once they get information, they often don't know what to do with it. Nor is the problem the lack of information. It's been argued that there is so much information available through regular mandated disclosure that the useless boiler plate overwhelms the buried, more vital figures. The government has mandated transparency through disclosure, yet the mountains of disclosed data overwhelm analysis. Who is capable of sifting through it all?

A companion article in the same issue of *Wired (*www.wired.com/techbiz/it/magazine/17-03/wp_reboot*)* argues that the only real requirement for fixing the financial mess is full disclosure of all the data, not to the government, but to the public. Once the data gets into the hands of geeks and nerds everywhere, the process of turning it into useful information begins. No oversight body will ever have the wherewithal, or talent, to provide information that will actually protect the public from the stupidity of financial institutions. There will always be ways for financial managers to beat the government regulations and march down a lucrative, yet dangerous, road.

Last week's column by Dawn Clement about the massive networks of home computers chugging away in kitchens all over the world working to solve complex problems may demonstrate a model for future financial analysis. If the government tries to do it, it won't get done—although they will spend billions while not doing it. Plus, the task may be too daunting and expensive a proposition for private enterprise. A distributed system of home computers each doing its piece of a financial analysis problem could provide more computing power than the biggest supercomputer, while offering up true transparency to those who really need it—the people. All that is required is for the data to be made available to everyone. Someone will start doing something with it. Then the oversight of our financial and securities markets will truly come from the people.

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Editor's Letters

"Readers write in with letters to the editor." by ComputorEdge Staff

"Power Supply Question?," "Switching to Firefox," "Thunderbird for Desktop E-Mail," "Trashing Windows," "Adventures in Malware"

Power Supply Question?

[This letter is in regard to Digital Dave's February 13 column, where Dave addressed this reader's PC power-supply rebuttal.]

You still haven't learned to listen! It is very difficult to deliver high power, low voltages like 1.3-1.1 volts without having the final stages be linear, i.e., transistors. If you are driving them with anything like even the other lower voltages in a PC supply, the percent of power lost in the transistors is not tolerable mostly because of *heat*!

Again I challenge *you* to list enough 12-volt devices to put in a modern PC to abuse that supply!

-Michael J. Viehman, Julian, Calif.

I'm not an expert on computer power supplies, but the latest back-and-forth between Dave and Michael got me intrigued. In the course of searching the Web for opinions, I came across an article in *Power Computer User* on power supplies (*www.computerpoweruser.com/editorial/article.asp?article=articles%2Farchive%2Fc0705%2F31c05%2F31c05.asp*). It was one of the best that I saw. In any case, Michael challenged Dave to build a machine that would "list enough 12-volt devices to put in a modern PC to abuse that supply."

Unless I'm misreading the article, the example of a system that they give at the end of the article could use 30.1 amps at 12 volts max. That would equate to 361 watts at 12 volts. Jay in his original question only had 18 amps at 12 volts from his power supply, 216 watts. Jay seemed to have a similar CPU, although his video card didn't appear to draw more than 8.75 amps. The article states that it would be unusual for all the devices to draw more than two-thirds of the maximum, and Jay's card would draw about 80 watts less than the example video card. All of that brings it down to a total average of about 187 watts, within the specification of 216 watts for Jay's supply.

Yet, if Jay puts in a higher-power video card, or for some reason the power draw is closer to the max, then it would seem foolish for Dave *not* to advise a power supply the meets the manufacturer's recommendation at the 12-volt level of 312 watts, just to be safe.

-Simon Colgan

Dear Digital Dave,

Regarding the article about [power supplies] and Simon's and Julian comments, there are numerous Web sites dedicated to help you select the proper PSU wattage. It's a very common practice for IT guys to do this, since PSU is a critical part of those reliable systems. In this page (*web.aanet.com.au/SnooP/psucalc.php*), you can input different hardware configurations and get a recommendation about the PSU you will need to run your system stable.

Simon recommended an article (really good), but following the link I was not able to read it completely [as it required payment]; a little search and [I] found it here (*kaiser.dreamhost.com/OT_stuff/cpu_mag_psu_overview.pdf*) in PDF.

I like your column a lot.

-Silverio Reyes,Tijuana, BC

"Switching" to Firefox

[This letter is in regard to Michael J. Ross' January 9 article, "Firefox Web Browser Extensions."]

I "switched" to Firefox largely as a result of the constant badgering of Leo the Tech Guy. It is now my browser of choice, but I ran into a problem *no one* ever talks about. There are Web sites I use in my business that just plain do not work in Firefox. So I found it necessary to maintain a working and updated copy of IE7 for those.

A non-business Web site that won't work is Roger Hedgecock's radio show chat room. It opened in Firefox after a short time, [but] the delays are so long it is useless. Why doesn't anyone talk about this? Seems the promoters have their heads in the sand on the banks of deNile.

-Bill of Poway, Poway, Calif.

Thunderbird for Desktop E-Mail

[This letter is in regard to Michael J. Ross' February 13 article, "Thunderbird for Desktop E-Mail."]

Very intriguing and enticing. Sounds too good to be true. But I am anxious to try it, since Outlook Express is unsatisfactory and has caused us problems.

-Jerry Albert, San Diego, Calif.

Enjoyed your article about Thunderbird. I've been using it for quite a while and I like it. I've been using YPOPS along with Thunderbird to download and manage my Yahoo mail. This arrangement is subject to frequent problems when Yahoo tweaks its program and YPOPS doesn't.

Do you know of a more reliable method of funneling Yahoo mail through to Thunderbird?

Regards,

-John Huegel, Bethany Beach, Delaware

Thanks for your article on Thunderbird. I have used it exclusively for quite some time now, at least two to three years if my memory serves me correctly.

I write this because I have found myself more and more dissatisfied with Thunderbird's formatting bugs.

There are many little nuisances I have discovered while editing and formatting messages that cause the text to do weird things. I have learned to apply a few little workarounds, but it's still a nuisance. I presume it is because the underlying HTML encoding is not as transparent as it should/could be.

Thunderbird definitely needs some fixing along these lines. I keep waiting, expecting new versions to be fixed, but not so. My programming ability is of "yesteryear" variety, so I am not able to fix the open-source code by myself, [or] else I would do it.

Comments? Suggestions?

-Ron Myers, San Diego

Trashing Windows

[This letter is in regard to Wally Wang's February 13 Apple Farm column.]

It was good until you started trashing Windows for the [heck] of it. Not everyone sees their OS as a religion.

-Natcho, Austin, Texas

Adventures in Malware

[This letter is in regard to Dawn Clement's January 20 column, "Adventures in Malware."]

Regarding Dawn Clement's desire to convert music files—I've found that NCH Software's audio programs are very good. I've used several of their programs for quite some time. Some have both free and paid versions; others just have paid versions. One called Switch (*www.nch.com.au/index.html*) converts audio files from one format to another. I can't guarantee that it would do the precise type of conversion that she's looking for, but it's worth a try.

-Daniel Tapio, Colorado Springs, Colorado

ComputorEdge always wants to hear from you, our readers. If you have specific comments about one of our articles, please click the "Tell us what you think about this article!" link at the top or bottom of the article/column. Your comments will be attached to the column and may appear at a later time in the "Editor's Letters" section.

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