

ComputerEdge™ Online — 03/27/09



This issue: Web Browser Plug-Ins

Your browser can be far more than just a tool for surfing the Web. A look at Google Toolbar, plus what you need to create your own Firefox extensions and "plug in" some extra functionality.

Table of Contents:

[Digital Dave](#) by *Digital Dave*

Digital Dave answers your tech questions. A reader wants a way to eliminate his cable bill and watch TV via the Internet; what is the best method for partitioning a hard drive?; a reader is having trouble finding a video card to suit a widescreen monitor.

[Exploring Google Toolbar](#) by Jack Dunning

Make your Web experience even better. There are many facets to Google Toolbar that could greatly improve the time you spend with your Web browser. It's worth a look in both Internet Explorer and Firefox.

[Firefox Extension Development Resources](#) by Michael J. Ross

Make a great Web browser even better. Firefox has been designed so that its functionality can be supplemented with "extensions"—small modules that can be plugged into it. So why not make your own extensions?

[Windows Vista Tips and Tricks](#) by Jack Dunning

Disabling Unnecessary Startup Programs
Disabling those startup programs that you don't need may significantly reduce your reboot time.

[Wally Wang's Apple Farm](#) by Wally Wang



(Click Banner)

Safari Plug-Ins

There are many plug-ins available for Safari that let you quickly start customizing your browser. Also, a look at using Wiretap Studio to record a phone call, along with some transcription programs; and a tip on right-clicking on an audio file to access the QuickTime Player.

[Little Linux Lessons: Tips and Tricks from Users](#) by ComputerEdge Staff

Linux users share ideas and ask for help. A tip on the use of curly brackets "{}", which can open a whole new way of looking at the command prompt.

[Rob, The ComputerTutor Does Visual Basic for Applications](#) by Rob Spahitz

Mailing List Database
After learning the basics of Access, it's time to spend a few weeks building a functional database to track our family and friends' information.

[Worldwide News & Product Reviews](#) by Charles Carr

The latest in tech news and hot product reviews. Tips, Tricks & Traps on Navigating Social Networks—Protect yourself while being social; Phone Data Makes Users Vulnerable to ID Theft—Mobile phone users are taking way too many security risks; La Crosse Technology Weather Direct—A review of the Weather Direct weather-checking Internet device; You'll See the Light—A review of the Fretlight FG-431 Vintage Electric from Optek.

DEPARTMENTS:

[EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher](#) by Jack

Dunning

Browser Plug-Ins
If you're looking to develop Web-based applications, then you may want to consider Chrome as a platform—especially if the entire world won't need to use it. Also, some ComputerEdge news, including relief for those with limited screen width.

[Editor's Letters](#) by ComputerEdge Staff

Readers write in with letters to the editor. "VB Made Easy," "Screen-Scrolling Problem Fixed," "Flash Drive Danger," "Windows 7 News," "What's New with the Mac"

If you're running out of power, space or HVAC, contact Castle Access

SAN DIEGO'S EXCLUSIVE BANDWIDTH NEUTRAL COLOCATION FACILITY

castle ACCESS
Enterprise Data Centers

CLICK HERE TO SEE INSIDE THE CASTLE

(Click Banner)

chips and memory.com

We'll Beat Any Price!
Computers From \$199

MotherBoards, CPUs
Hards Drive, Memory and More

(Click Banner)

Networking, Programming, Computer Repair and More!

See the San Diego Computer and Internet Services Directory

COMPUTEREDGE

(Click Banner)

OBL
CBL Data Recovery

America's trusted data recovery specialist

**FREE Evaluation
NO DATA, NO CHARGE**

1.800.551.3917
www.cbltech.com

(Click Banner)

Send mail to ceeditor@computoredge.com with questions about editorial content.

Send mail to cwebmaster@computoredge.com with questions or comments about this Web site.

Copyright © 1997-2009 The Byte Buyer, Inc.

ComputerEdge Magazine, P.O. Box 83086, San Diego, CA 92138. (858) 573-0315

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



Digital Dave

“Digital Dave answers your tech questions.” by *Digital Dave*

A reader wants a way to eliminate his cable bill and watch TV via the Internet; what is the best method for partitioning a hard drive?; a reader is having trouble finding a video card to suit a widescreen monitor.

Dear Digital Dave,

I recently noticed my monthly cable cost rose to more than \$100 per month, and frankly I just have trouble justifying that kind of expense in today's economy. I have seen there are Web sites where you can download episodes of shows from networks such as the Discovery Channel.

I am wondering if there is a way for me to eliminate my expensive cable service, increase my communication speed on my ISP, and find a "cable TV-like" monthly service on the Internet. Most of the TV on the Net I have come across doesn't provide packages, and I don't mind paying a fair price for the service I use. I would like to be more selective about what I spend my limited funds on each month.

Do you have any suggestions, recommendations, or ideas on this? Is there such a thing as cable TV over the Internet that is the opposite of the Internet over your cable? My ISP provider does not offer a cable option, and my leased townhome is not suitable for either of the "Dish" services. Any help would be most appreciated.

*Joe
Rockville, MD*

Dear Joe,

While there are many programs that offer Internet TV (download.cnet.com/1770-20_4-0.html?query=internet+television&searchtype=downloads&tag=ltcol), I'm not sure how well any of them work. (Maybe someone who watches TV over the Internet will give us some feedback.) There is no doubt that many businesses are looking at the Internet as an alternative method for delivering television. Many networks now provide Webcasts of their shows after they have aired on live television directly to your computer. However, there are both physical problems and political problems to overcome before Internet TV similar to current cable and satellite television is readily available.

First, as television trends toward high-definition (HDTV), the bandwidth demands are enormous—even with data compression. That means your Internet connection will need the biggest possible pipe to allow the required speeds. In many cases, the available Internet connections will not handle feeding the television without significant data compression and buffering. Usually to get the required response, a separate box is required to feed the television. This is going to cost you

in some manner.

Regardless of how you get your television programming, the ISPs will want to get their cut. There are already numerous cases of cable companies throttling the bandwidth of high-level users (i.e., BitTorrents). They don't want you to get your entertainment over the Internet without you paying them their piece of the action. All in all, it's a bit of a confusing mess with no resolution in sight.

You are in much better shape if you don't mind watching individual programs on your computer. Hulu (*hulu.com*) is a site that has been specifically launched to offer free television (limited commercial interruptions) over the Internet. Although some shows will air live (presidential speeches), you select specific programs of interest to you.

In the long run, the old concept of sitting in front of the television while watching one or two stations for an hour or so is probably on the way out. People get tired of the commercials and waiting for their favorite shows to air. DVDs, Digital Video Recorders (DVR), on-demand television services and Webcasts are all changing us into opt-in consumers of entertainment. With the exception of live events, such as the Super Bowl or American Idol, there is no need to be watching a show at a predetermined time.

Regardless, you will ultimately be forced to pay. If there are no commercials, then you will need to pay some sort of fee to someone. Netflix, the popular video-rental service, is now offering computer video viewing over the Internet. Netflix streaming is free with even the cheapest package it offers, which I think is \$5/month or so. (If you want to view the videos on your television, then you need a special box.) Maybe they are going to start bringing what you would like to see. However, there will still be a fee.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I'm about to buy a new computer, with two 160GB hard drives. The second hard drive will be used as a backup. I would like to partition one (or both) of the hard drives. I've heard there's a clever way of setting up the partitions, but I'm not sure what it is. I think some people put the operating system on the C drive, so that it is easy to reformat the drive when needed, without having to reformat the whole hard drive; and then put programs on another partition, personal files on a third partition, Internet temp files on a fourth, etc.

As I mentioned, I'm not exactly sure what the best method is. Do you have any suggestions? Of course, I'm interested in the best method for speed, ease of use and minimal defrag times.

Love your column!

Paul

San Diego

Dear Paul,

In my opinion, many people get carried away when they partition drives. More is not necessarily more.

There are two primary reasons for partitioning drives. The first is to allow the easy installation of

multiple operating systems (Windows, plus Linux, etc.). The second came about when hard drives outgrew the limitations of older operating systems. The only way to take advantage of the space on the entire drive was to create multiple partitions. Today, this is not much of a problem with most operating systems.

There is a benefit wherein if a part of a drive becomes corrupted, it will not affect anything but that partition. This does not negate the need for backups on important data, however, so it is a minimal benefit.

When you partition a drive (normally during the initial drive setup), you are physically setting aside a portion of the drive to act as if it were another drive—logically it is another drive. In Windows systems, the C drive is considered the primary drive where the Windows operating system will normally reside. (A and B are reserved for the old floppy drives.) If you do partition your first hard drive, then the second partition would be labeled D drive. Your second hard drive, if divided into two partitions, would be the E and F drives.

If it is a Vista machine, then you can find out how to partition a drive by going to Help and Support in the Start Menu, typing in "partition," and selecting "Can I repartition my hard disk?"

While it is true that you would be able to reformat the D partition without affecting the C operating system partition, I'm not sure that is enough of a reason to create a partition. You will not get any speed advantage, since all the data is on the same physical drive. It is unlikely that you will get much improvement in the defragmentation process, since the primary files that need defragmenting are the data files found on the D drive.

Plus, when you partition a drive, you will lose effective working and storage space. On any drive there will be a certain amount of unused space caused by the gap between the actual amount of programs and/or data stored and the physical limitation of the partition. You will never efficiently fill a partition. The more partitions, the more of these gaps. Although the space is still there, each partition will create this efficiency loss.

If you are planning to install alternative operating systems, then by all means partition your drive—although Virtual Machine software may be better at handling both the partitioning and multiple operating systems. Otherwise, I tend to leave the drive as one big partition without the self-imposed limitations of partitioning.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

My 8-year-old, 17-inch CRT monitor finally died. I need to replace it, but all I see on the market are widescreen LCD monitors. It appears my onboard video will not support widescreen resolutions, so I am searching for a video card that will not tax the 350-watt power supply, have Windows Me drivers, fit in an AGP 3.0 slot, and provide widescreen resolutions. I am finding very little helpful information on the Internet. Any suggestions?

Mike

San Diego, Calif.

Dear Mike,

You've done well to get eight years out of a computer. As long as it keeps running, I'm totally in favor of keeping it going. However, you will continue to have an increasing number of problems, since computers do not run forever and manufacturers eventually drop support for older systems.

There will not be Windows Me drivers for most modern cards, and I do not believe that existing Me drivers will support widescreen resolutions—that's if you can find a card to plug into your interface. You have are four options:

1. You can run at a non-native stretched resolution with your current card.
2. You can upgrade to a newer, better-supported version of Windows that has driver support for a large selection of video cards, and purchase the video card of your choice (from the now limited AGP selection).
3. You can upgrade your entire PC.
4. You can find a 4:3 monitor.

I prefer options two or three—especially three, as your PC is likely to be short on resources. Depending upon your current PC configuration, it may be difficult to upgrade your Windows OS. Newer versions of the operating system may be more demanding on your hardware than it can handle.

If you find either upgrading or buying a new computer too expensive or intimidating, I suggest that you look for a used replacement monitor. Many people are now dumping their old CRTs. I've noticed that quite a few people list old CRTs free-for-pickup on Craigslist. There is no resale market, and you're not supposed to toss them in the trash. There are many CRT monitors sitting in garages, although they are still in working order.

Digital Dave

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



Exploring Google Toolbar

“Make your Web experience even better.” by Jack Dunning

There are many facets to Google Toolbar that could greatly improve the time you spend with your Web browser. It's worth a look in both Internet Explorer and Firefox.

Browsing the Web has become one of the primary ways we use our computers. Most of the new computer pastimes, such as Web socializing, blogging and watching Web videos, all involve the use of a Web browser. For many people, their browser is their busiest software application.

Fortunately, almost all Web browsers are free. This makes it much easier to pick the one that suits you best. In fact, I'm a believer that a person shouldn't skimp when it comes to loading browsers onto their computer system. Each program seems to have its own unique strengths and weaknesses, so why not keep them all handy? When one package doesn't do the job, just load the nearest alternative.

Since we spend so much time living in our browsers, it's only natural that we would want to add accessories for an easier life. Fortunately, the Internet search-engine companies (and other interested parties) have come to our rescue with even more free software in the form of toolbars, add-ons and gadgets that attach directly to our browser. Google, Yahoo and other search-engine companies are motivated to offer more free toolbars because the software will point more people to their services. Many of the browser add-ons are even replacing applications once reserved for stand-alone computer programs.

Google Toolbar

As in the world of Internet searches, Google also leads in browser toolbars. Almost daily someone is adding more buttons to the list of available possibilities for the Google Toolbar (toolbar.google.com/). When added to Internet Explorer or Firefox, the Web-surfing experience can be greatly enhanced. (The latest version of Google Toolbar is available only for Internet Explorer and Firefox. Approximately 90 percent of ComputerEdge readers use one of those two browsers— Internet Explorer 54 percent, and Firefox 36 percent. Ironically, Google Toolbar is not available for the Google Chrome Web browser.)



A browser toolbar is not an entity unto itself, but rather a way to personalize your browser for how you use your computer with the Web. For example, I work a great deal with edit boxes when working with the ComputerEdge Web site. While I do use a number of other applications, virtually all of the editing can be done directly on the Web. One of the most valuable tools is the spell checker in Google Toolbar. There are many applications (almost all word processors) that offer spell checkers, but they're not convenient when working directly with Web content. (If you use a Macintosh, I understand that the built-in spell checker automatically works with all your applications, including Web editing.) For me, the spell checker in Google Toolbar has been a tremendous help.

Depending upon how you use your computer, Google Toolbar may, or may not, enhance your Web experience. If you want to find out if a browser toolbar will work for you, you need to try it. There are so many options in

“You won’t believe what’s been added to the new Google Toolbar!”

every browser toolbar that it takes a little time to evaluate what's useful and what's a waste of your time. In this article, I'll cover some of the major features of Google Toolbar—although new gadgets are being added

every day.

As can be seen in Figure 1, not all Google Toolbars are created equal. While there are many common features, the list on the right side of the features gives the IE and Firefox variations.



Figure 1. Google Toolbar features.

Adding Google Toolbar to Your Browser

To install Google Toolbar (toolbar.google.com/) in either Internet Explorer or Firefox, merely visit the linked site. Since download sites automatically detect whether you're using IE or Firefox, the correct version will be made available. The installation routine is fairly normal. You will need to restart your browser after installation of Google Toolbar.

Once loaded, you will want to tailor Google Toolbar to your needs. In Internet Explorer, a wrench icon is added to the toolbar for editing settings (see Figure 2a). While there is a menu item in the Tools menu for enabling and disabling add-ons (including Google Toolbar), the options for the toolbar can't be accessed without clicking the wrench icon.



Figure 2a. Accessing Google Toolbar settings in Internet Explorer.

In Firefox, Google Toolbar settings can be accessed by selecting Add-ons from the Tools menu. The Add-ons window will open (see Figure 2b). Selecting Options from the Google Toolbar add-on will open the Google Toolbar Options window.

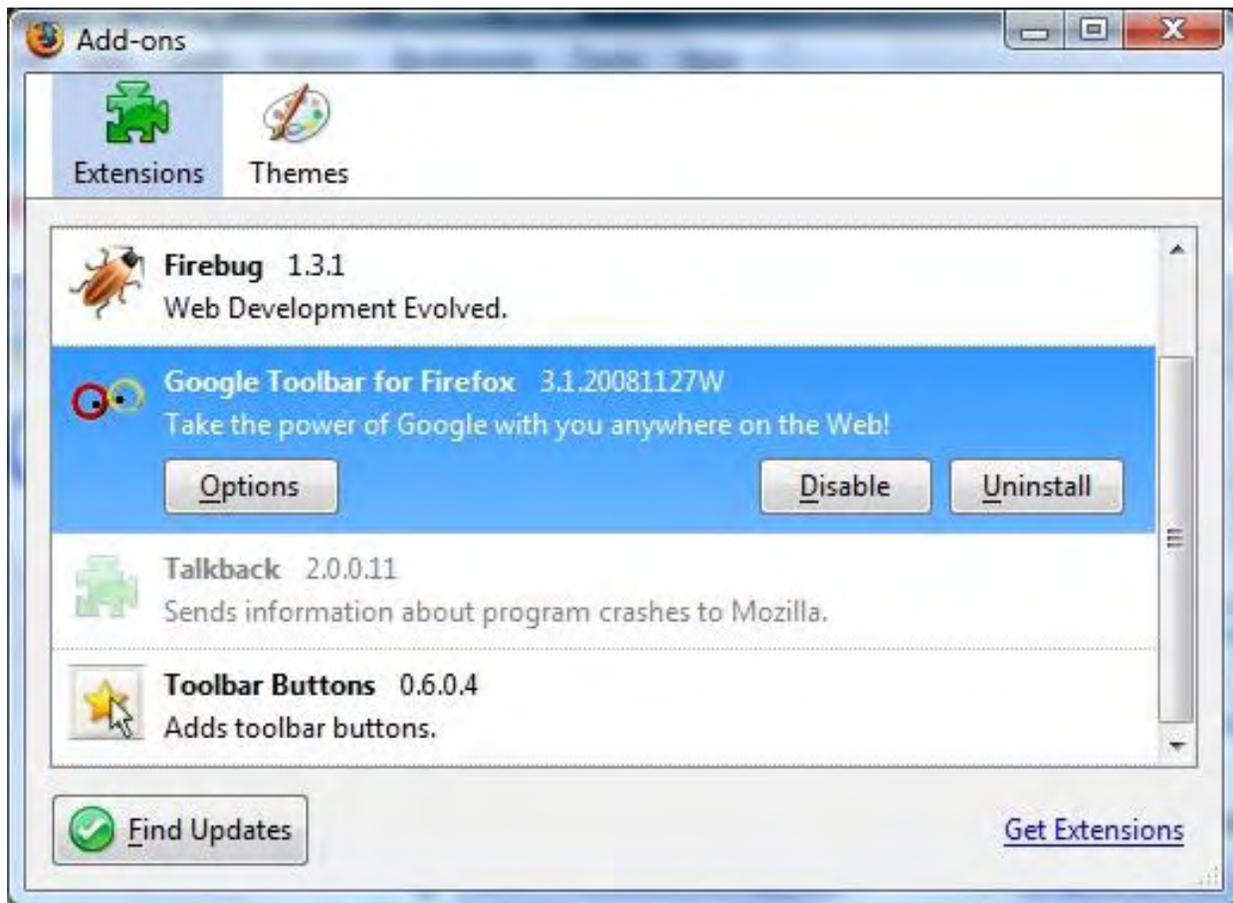


Figure 2b. Accessing Google Toolbar add-ons in Firefox.

The Options windows for Google Toolbar have similar settings, but they do not have the same look. A number of the features are located on different tabs and, of course, those capabilities are limited. Only one browser will appear for that type of toolbar. For the sake of saving space, only the Firefox Google Toolbar Options window will be displayed.

Google Toolbar Features

The Features tab of the Options window shows some of the primary functions that are included in Google Toolbar. If you're going to use the toolbar, your motivation for using Google Toolbar will probably be located in this area (see Figure 3).

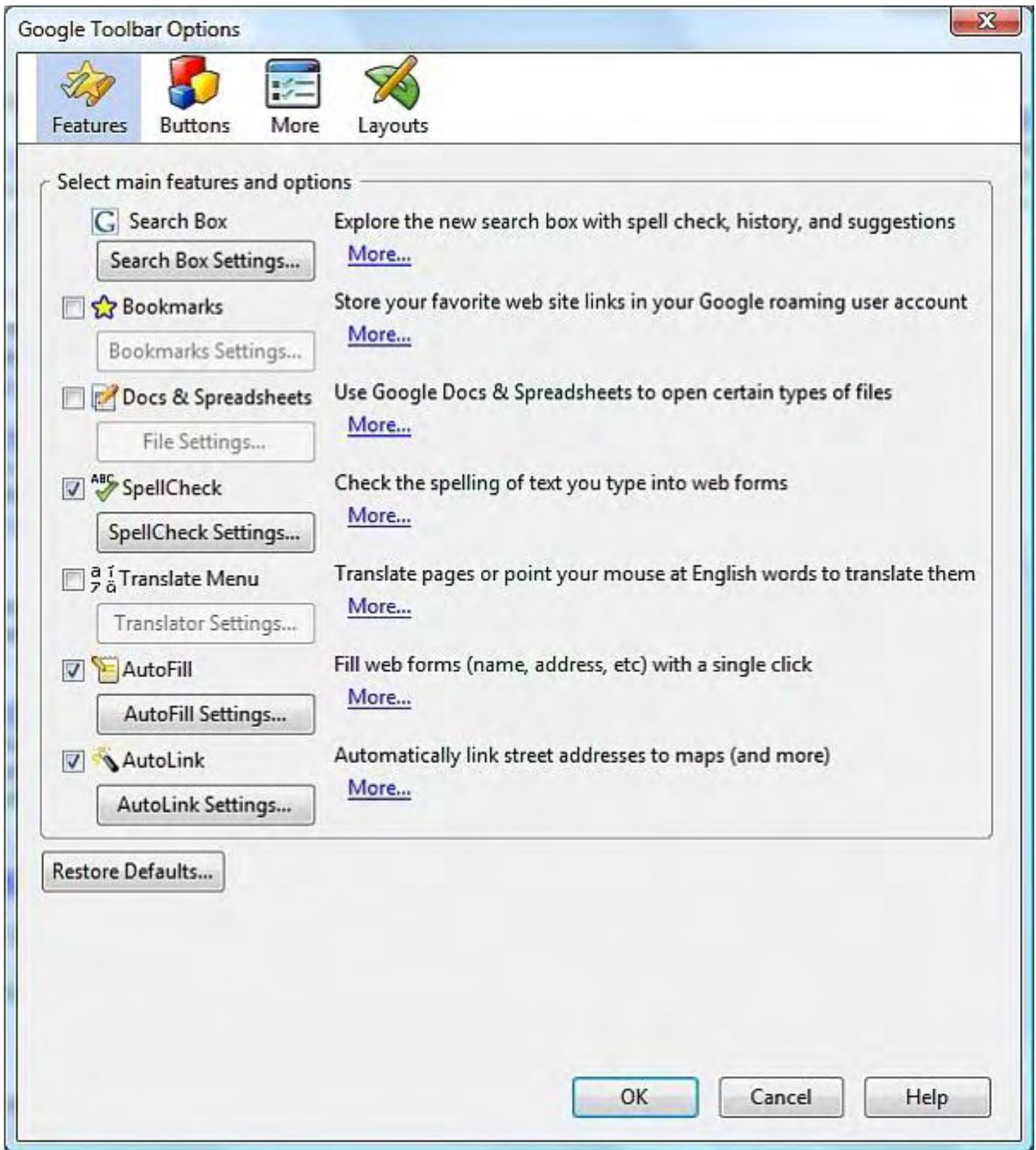


Figure 3. Google Toolbar Features window in Firefox.

While I haven't tested all of these features, of particular note are Bookmarks, Docs and Spreadsheets, Translate Menu, AutoFill, and AutoLink.

Bookmarks is useful because of the capability to save your bookmarks (favorites) for use on any computer. If you use multiple computers, then this could be an excellent help. You could save a favorite Web site on your work computer, and quickly recall it later when you get on your home computer.

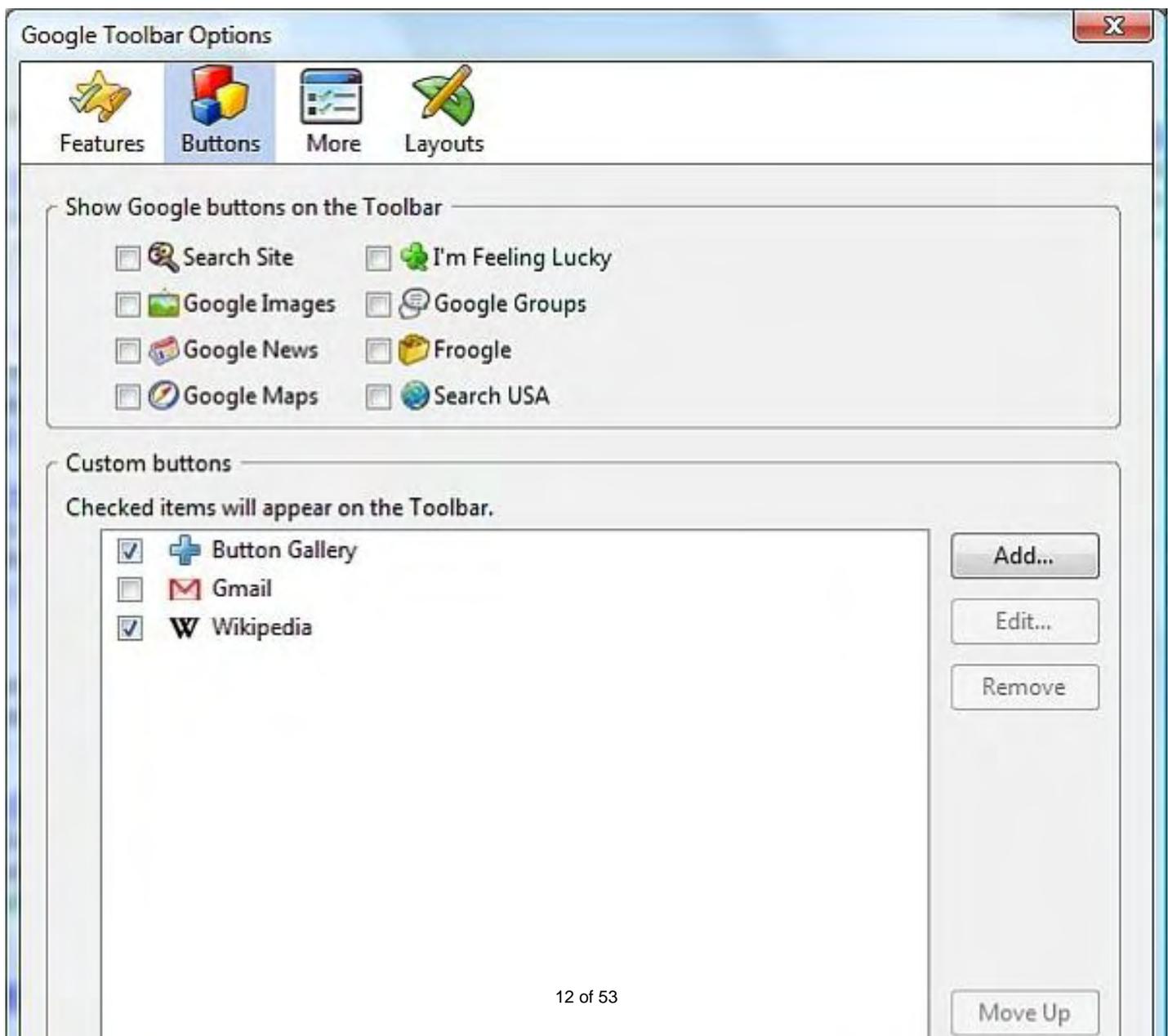
If you use Google Docs and Spreadsheets, then Firefox would be your Web browser of choice. The Google Toolbar capability of directly accessing Docs and Spreadsheets programs is available only for Firefox.

If you work with Web sites in foreign languages, then it appears that the Translate Menu feature could come in handy. When you highlight a word, right-click and select Translate, the Google servers will translate the word into your language. Entire Web pages can also be translated.

AutoFill allows you to save common information (password protected) required in Web forms for automatically filling in those forms. AutoLink will turn addresses on Web pages into links to Google Maps.

Google Buttons

Google Buttons are a way to add more functionality to your browser (see Figure 4). Some buttons are simple, such as offering quick access to Wikipedia. Google Toolbar offers a short set of default buttons to select, but there is much more available. Notice the blue cross icon called Button Gallery. Adding that button to the toolbar will give you access to many more buttons/gadgets. There are many gadgets available for adding/tailoring the Google Toolbar. However, many of those features (weather, traffic conditions, etc.) can be added directly to the computer desktop as a gadget without using a browser toolbar.



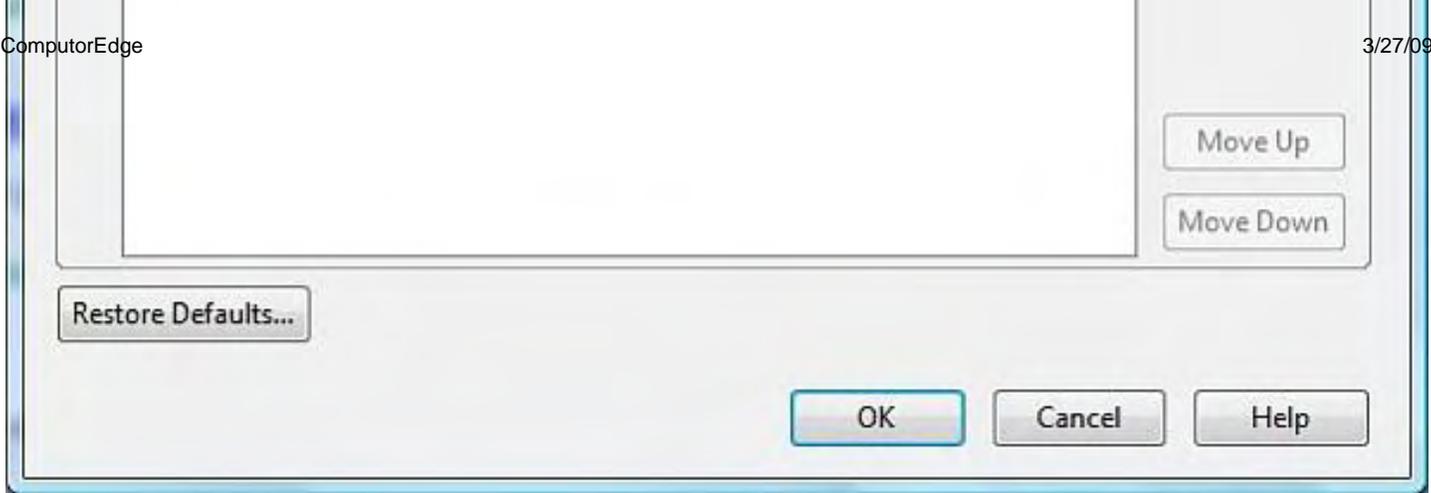
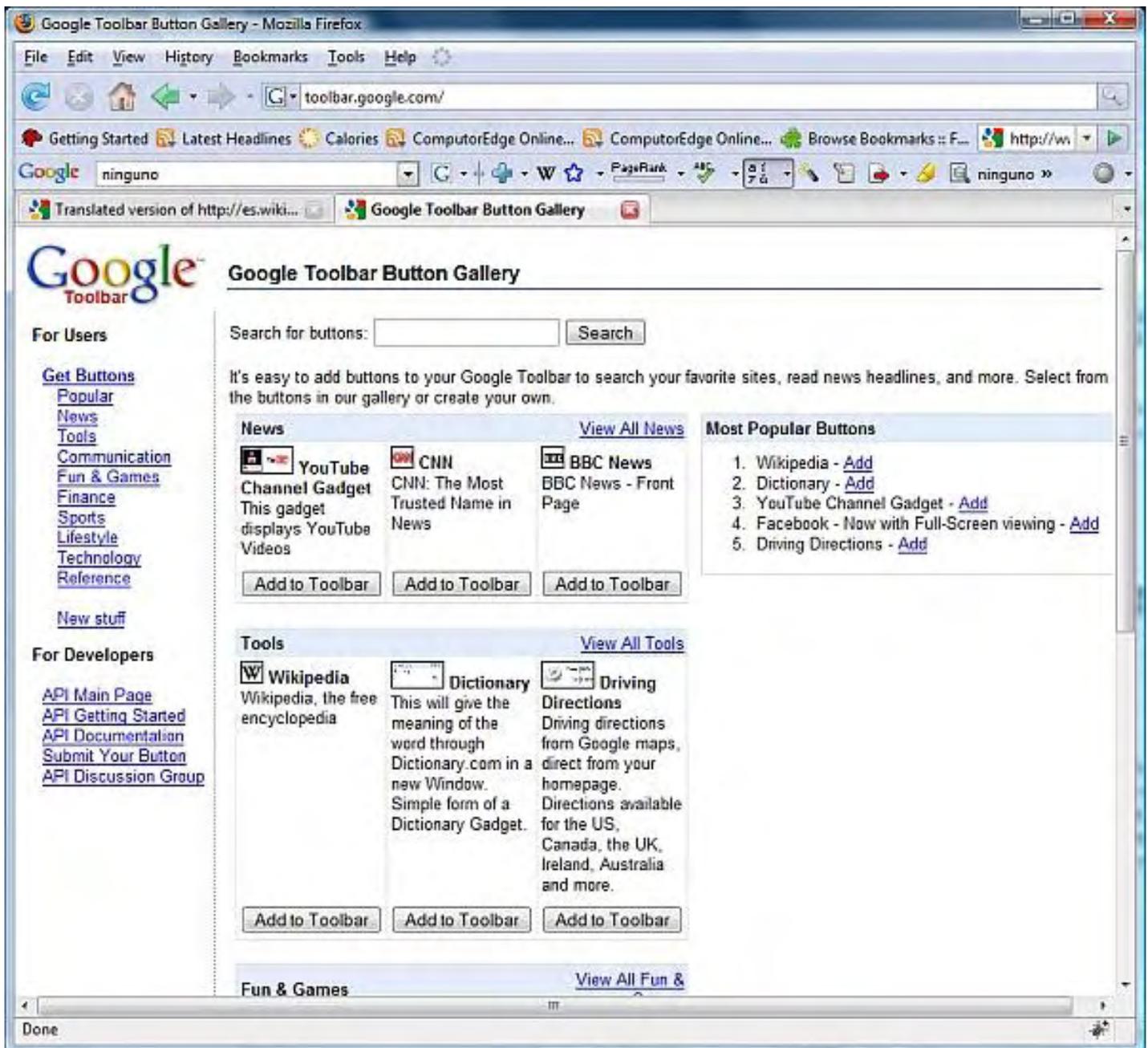


Figure 4. Google Toolbar Buttons.

To access the available buttons, add the Button Gallery icon to the toolbar, click OK, then click the icon from the toolbar (see Figure 5). The Web page that opens will give you many button options to explore.



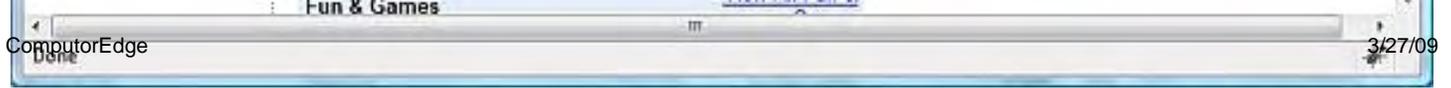


Figure 5. Google Toolbar Button Gallery.

There are many facets to Google Toolbar that could greatly improve the time you spend with your Web browser. It's worth a look in both Internet Explorer and Firefox. Take the time to explore. You may just find the tools you need.

Jack is the publisher of *CompuatorEdge* 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.compuatoredge.com. He can be reached at ceeditor@compuatoredge.com

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Firefox Extension Development Resources

“Make a great Web browser even better.” by Michael J. Ross

Firefox has been designed so that its functionality can be supplemented with "extensions"—small modules that can be plugged into it. So why not make your own extensions?

Even "out of the box," Mozilla Firefox (www.mozilla.com/firefox/) is, on balance, a better Web browser than Microsoft's Internet Explorer. But that is certainly not the end of it. Like so many other open-source projects, Firefox has been designed so that its functionality can be supplemented with "extensions"—small modules that can be plugged into it. This allows independent developers to extend the product with whatever functionality they would like to see, and it also allows end users to benefit from that new functionality, with no need for programming knowledge on their part.

There are many hundreds, if not thousands, of useful Firefox extensions that allow you to: block ads and Flash movies embedded in Web pages; change the styling of a page; add entries to your blog without having to navigate to the site; communicate using VoIP, SMS and instant messaging; manage multiple Gmail accounts; download and upload files; edit browser cookies; restore your browser sessions; customize the Firefox menus; manage tabs; control your multimedia player without leaving the browser; instantly look up dictionary and Wikipedia entries for words; read RSS news feeds; check for viruses and spoofed sites; manage Digg actions; share BitTorrents; and even change the rendering engine to Internet Explorer (which is very handy for Web developers who do not want to start up IE, but still need to check how IE would mess up the styling of pages they have created).

The above list merely gives you an idea of the impressive variety and usefulness of the existing Firefox extensions, which are growing in number every day. Furthermore, with the addition of another extension, Greasemonkey (www.greasespot.net/), you can have virtually complete control over the appearance and functioning of any Web page that you visit. Imagine being able to customize your favorite Web sites to look and behave exactly the way you want, without any of the annoyances that you have put up with in the past.

Despite the breadth of the available extensions, it is quite possible that you have some functionality in mind that you would like to see in Firefox, but no such extension currently exists. Why not create your own? If you have some knowledge of JavaScript and XUL (pronounced "zool"), or you are willing to gain that new knowledge, then you certainly can author your own extension, and then share it with the world. While the online resources for learning XUL may be much harder to find than those for JavaScript, they are certainly out there. You should also be familiar with XML and CSS, but you probably already are if you are willing to tackle JavaScript and XUL. Also valuable are the resources devoted entirely to Firefox extension development, discussed below.

Timely Tutorials

An excellent resource is the Firefox Extension Development Tutorial (www.rietta.com/firefox/), which features clear explanations and many screenshots, with the information divided into nine sections: overview, environment setup, configuration files, creating GUIs, back-end, preferences, localization, distribution and security. Some of the sections have links to other worthwhile reference materials on the Web. This is one of the more complete guides available.

PC Magazine offers a step-by-step tutorial, Make Your Own Firefox Extensions (www.pcmag.com/

[article2/0,1895,2147602,00.asp](#)), supplemented with screenshots, which together show how to take an existing simple extension (which searches Wikipedia for any text you have selected) and create your own based upon it. The discussion focuses on how to test and package your extension for release, but does not cover any details of the JavaScript and XUL programming you will need to do in order to add your own functionality. One flaw is that the tutorial does not contain much text, and yet PC Magazine manages to spread it over three Web pages, to force readers to see the unwieldy navigation elements that consume most of those pages, plus the advertisements.

Far less annoying is Lifehacker's article [How to build a Firefox extension \(lifehacker.com/software/programming/how-to-build-a-firefox-extension-264490.php\)](#), which is loaded with links to other tutorials, and contains a valuable warning concerning the backing up of your Firefox profile(s). The highlight of the article is some advice on how to get your head wrapped around XUL with the least amount of anguish.

One of the resources that it points to is Eric Hamiter's very readable tutorial, [How to create Firefox extensions \(roachfiend.com/archives/2004/12/08/how-to-create-firefox-extensions/\)](#), which is organized into a dozen sections: an illustrative example; implementing a simple "Hello, world!" extension; inside the XPI; reconfiguring your extension's installation; Firefox chrome; skin files (and no, they have nothing to do with pornography); packaging an extension using a GUI or using the command line; how to start over if you inadvertently corrupt your Firefox profile; installing your new extension on a local Web server; links to outside resources; and feedback from other readers of the article. Even though it was published in December 2004, the bulk of the information should still be applicable, or at least point you in the right direction. The article has screenshots and sample code. A later article by the same author explains how to enable extension updates ([roachfiend.com/archives/2005/03/09/enabling-extension-updates/](#)).

Born Geek offers a [Firefox Toolbar Tutorial \(www.borngeek.com/firefox/toolbar-tutorial/\)](#) that focuses on how to create a toolbar extension, but contains useful information on extension development in general. The material is somewhat dated, but is quite extensive and certainly worth reading.

Going to the Source

Mozilla ([www.mozilla.com/](#)), the parent company of Firefox as well as the outstanding e-mail client Thunderbird ([www.mozilla.com/thunderbird/](#)), provides to developers a number of online resources worth investigating. Perhaps the best starting point would be the home page of their extension development documentation ([kb.mozillazine.org/Extension_development](#)), which is organized into half a dozen sections, most of which have a number of links to other resources, including tutorials outside of their Web site. The first two internal resources to consult would be the article on setting up an extension development environment ([developer.mozilla.org/en/Setting_up_extension_development_environment](#)) and getting started ([kb.mozillazine.org/Getting_started_with_extension_development](#)). Also check out their sample code section ([kb.mozillazine.org/Category:Example_code](#)).

The Mozilla site also has a section on extensions ([developer.mozilla.org/en/Extensions](#)), which offers more general information on Firefox extensions and their development, including information on setting up your environment, an FAQ, links to code snippets, installing extensions, upgrading them and more. They have a section on XUL ([developer.mozilla.org/en/XUL](#)). What is not immediately clear is how much of the information in their Developer Center, if any, duplicates what is found in the Knowledge Base section mentioned in the above paragraph.

Sharing information with other developers is the best way to get your tough programming questions answered, and also hone your knowledge by trying to answer other people's questions. The Mozilla site

provides an extension development forum (forums.mozillazine.org/viewforum.php?f=19), where you can get support from fellow extension builders, and read the answers provided in response to other people's questions. Most encouraging is the fact that almost none of the post questions have received no replies. (The health and usefulness of technical forums can be quickly judged by the ratio of posts that have received one or more replies.)

Odds and Ends

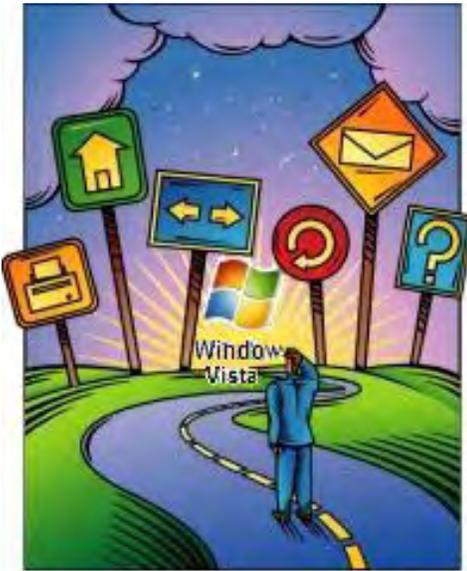
Even though there are countless articles and entire Web sites that explain the fundamentals of JavaScript, Mozilla has its own JavaScript section (developer.mozilla.org/en/JavaScript), which offers over a half dozen links to quality JavaScript resources, including a complete reference, the Mozilla coding guidelines, features added to JavaScript versions 1.6 through 1.8, and other information of interest to the budding JavaScript developer. The site also has a JavaScript style guide (developer.mozilla.org/en/JavaScript_style_guide).

Last and certainly not least, the Firefox/Thunderbird Extension Wizard (ted.mielczarek.org/code/mozilla/extensionwiz/) is a free online tool that greatly eases the process of packaging up a new Firefox or Thunderbird extension, for distribution to others.

The aforementioned resources should be valuable to you should you choose to develop your own Firefox extension. Doing so will undoubtedly require some time and effort, but it could be quite rewarding. Also, you end up with an extension that does exactly what you want. After all, in some cases, to get a job done right, you have to do it yourself.

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.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



Windows Vista Tips and Tricks

Windows Vista Tips and Tricks

“Disabling Unnecessary Startup Programs” by Jack Dunning

Disabling those startup programs that you don't need may significantly reduce your reboot time.

One of the primary causes for a slow-starting computer is programs that are automatically loaded at startup. Windows Vista has many systems to load when starting up, but there are other programs, usually third-party apps, that assume you will need them every time your computer is turned on. You may not even realize that some of them are loading and slowing things down.

In addition to using Startup in the System Configuration window, discussed in the November 14, 2008 Vista Tips and Tricks column and the August 1, 2008 Vista Tips and Tricks column, there is another way to check what is being loaded at startup. Disabling those startup programs that you don't need may significantly reduce your reboot time. The main program for changing your startup settings is Software Explorer in Windows Defender. (Note: The startup programs in System Configuration and Software Explorer may not always match. I don't know why, but if you're attempting to disable something, you should check both methods.)

To open Windows Defender, type "windows" or "defender" into the Start Search field of the Microsoft Start Menu. Select Windows Defender from the Programs list at the top of the menu (see Figure 1). (You may also click "Change startup program" in the Control Panel—or double-click Windows Defender in Classic View of the Control Panel.)

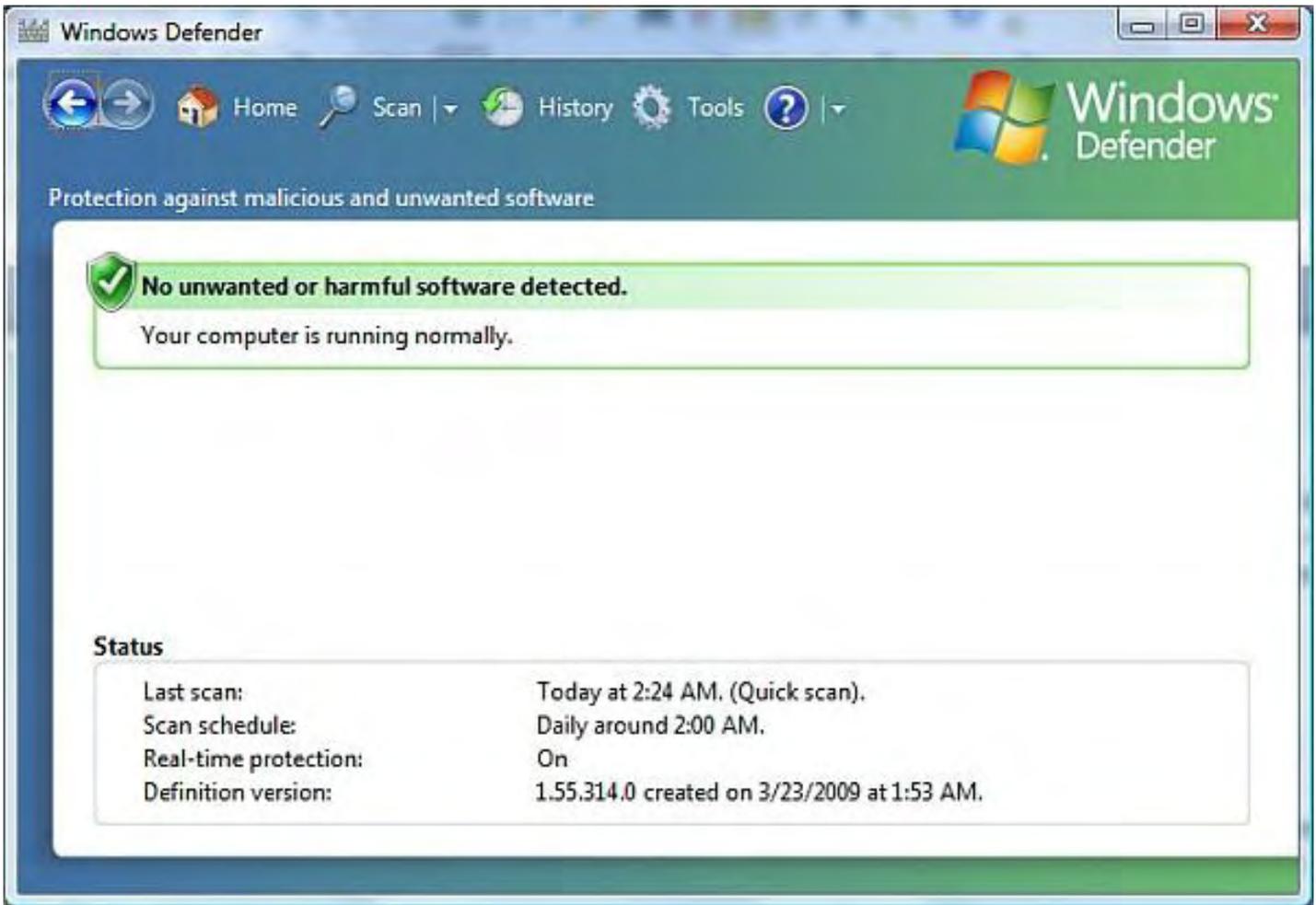


Figure 1. Windows Defender in Windows Vista.

To find the startup programs, click Tools and select Software Explorer. (If you clicked "Change startup program" in the Control Panel, Vista view, then Figure 2 with Startup Programs selected should appear.) Select Startup Programs from the Category drop-down menu.

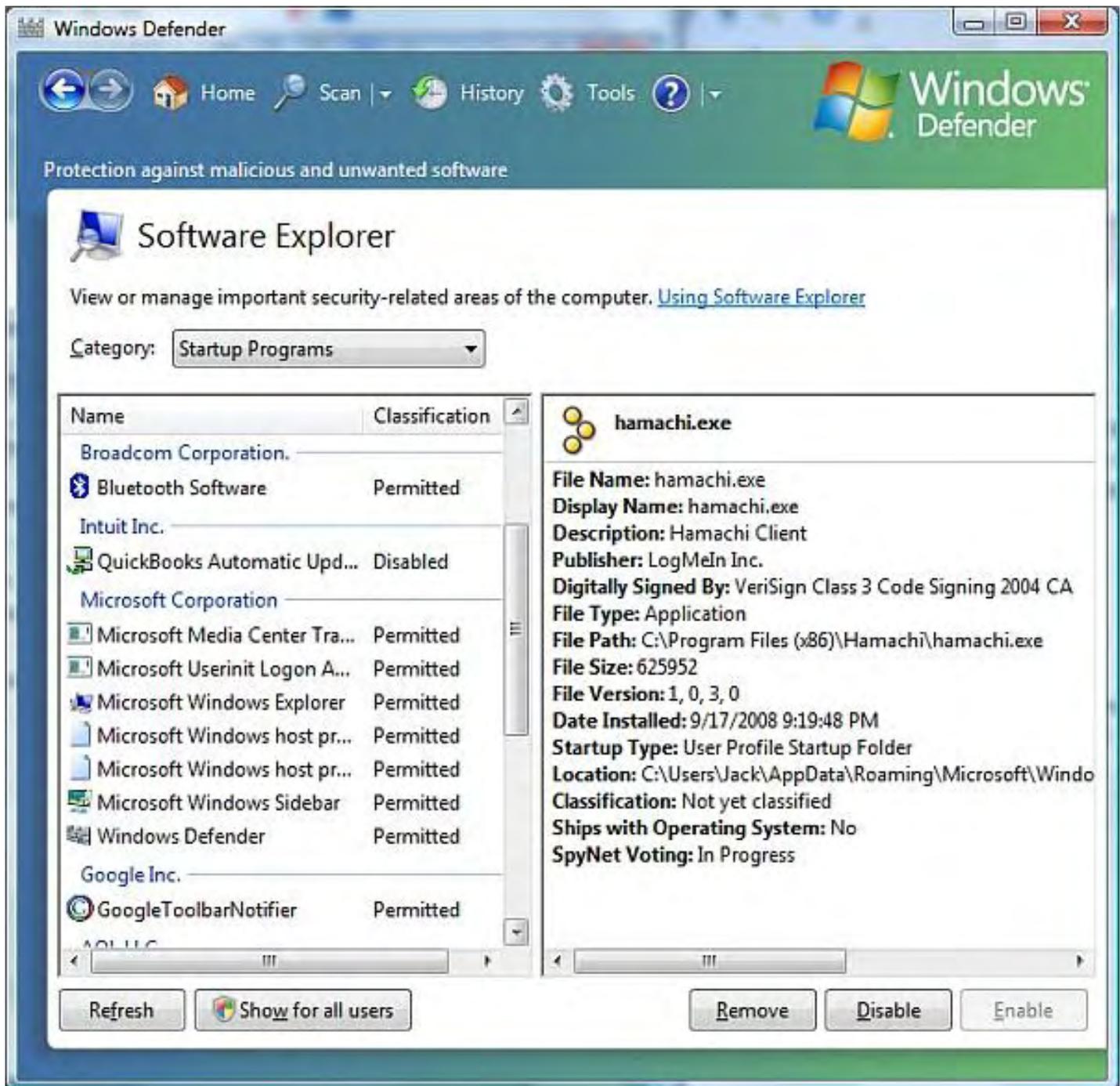


Figure 2. Software Explorer with Startup programs selected.

Highlighting individual programs will display information about the software in the right-hand pane. In most cases, you should be able to determine if you need a program to load at startup. For example, the QuickBooks Automatic Update program shown in Figure 2 didn't need to be loaded, plus there was a touchscreen program loading when I don't have a touchscreen.

There are two options. One is to disable the startup feature and the other is to remove it from the startup list. By far the safest move is to disable a program. Then, if you find you need it, you can always go back and enable it again. Some programs, such as the Microsoft Windows host process, look suspiciously like they are needed for the operating system to run properly. I wouldn't disable anything unless I knew that I won't need it.

Sometimes you may see that a program that you disabled or removed reappears in the Startup Programs of Software Explorer. This may be caused by a setting in the program itself that orders it to automatically load on startup. For example, after disabling AOL Instant Messenger in Software Explorer, when I loaded AIM manually, it inserted a new startup into the system. Until I deactivate the automatic startup setting in AIM, AOL continues to defeat my intentions.

Jack is the publisher of *ComputerEdge* 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

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



Wally Wang's Apple Farm

“Safari Plug-Ins” by Wally Wang

There are many plug-ins available for Safari that let you quickly start customizing your browser. Also, a look at using Wiretap Studio to record a phone call, along with some transcription programs; and a tip on right-clicking on an audio file to access the QuickTime Player.

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

One problem with the Internet is that it's now overrun with advertisements. While ads help pay for the content you see scattered around Web sites, you may not want to see intrusive ads getting in your way while you're trying to read something on your favorite Web site.

To block out ads, grab a free copy of GlimmerBlocker (glimmerblocker.org), which plugs into Safari. This program lets you define your own filters for blocking ads from certain advertising companies, such as DoubleClick.

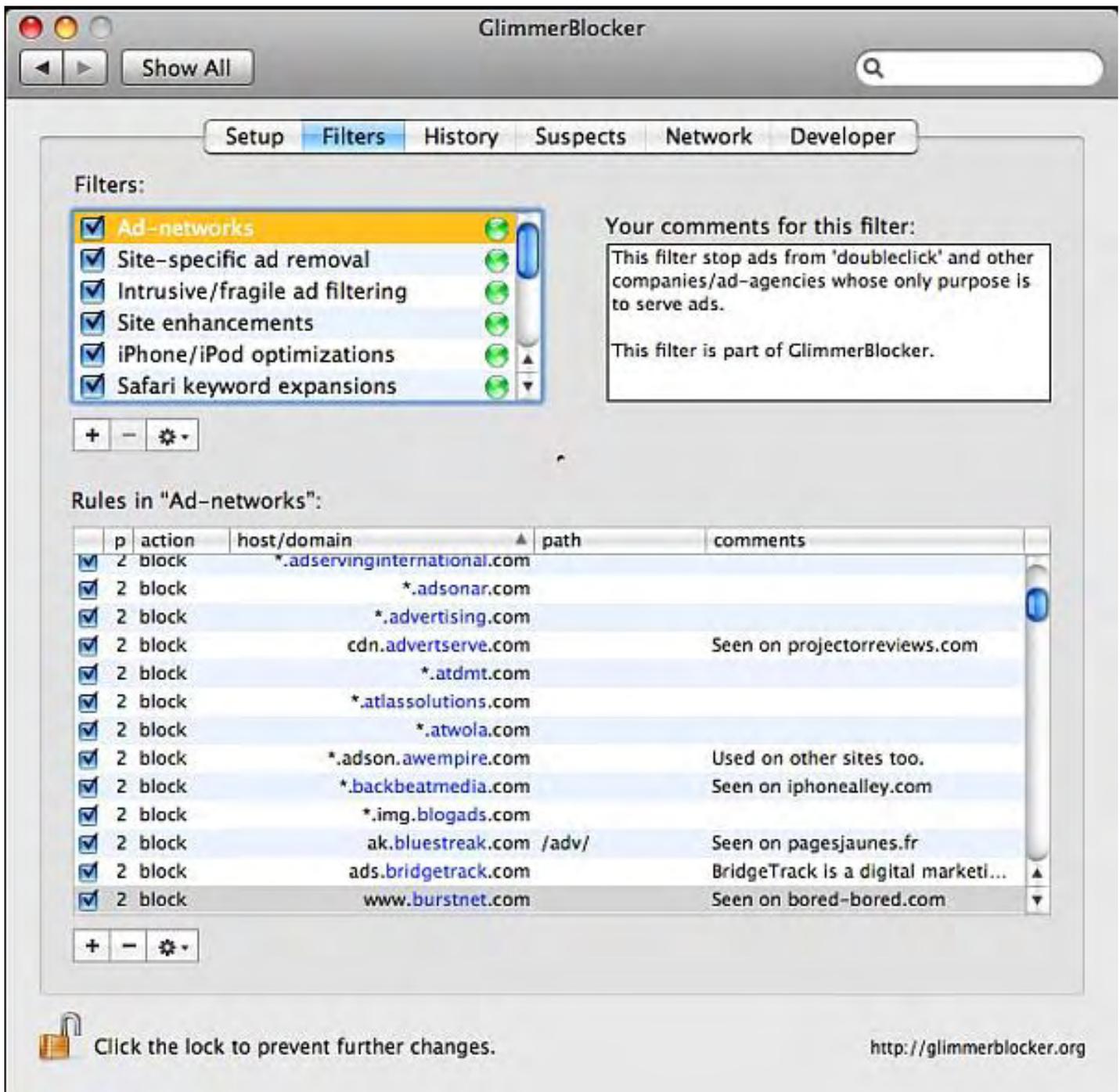


Figure 1. GlimmerBlocker can stop ads from specific advertising companies.

Besides blocking different advertising companies, GlimmerBlocker can also let you specify individual Web sites where you want to block ads. Now if you like a particular Web site but hate its obtrusive ads, you can keep them from appearing.

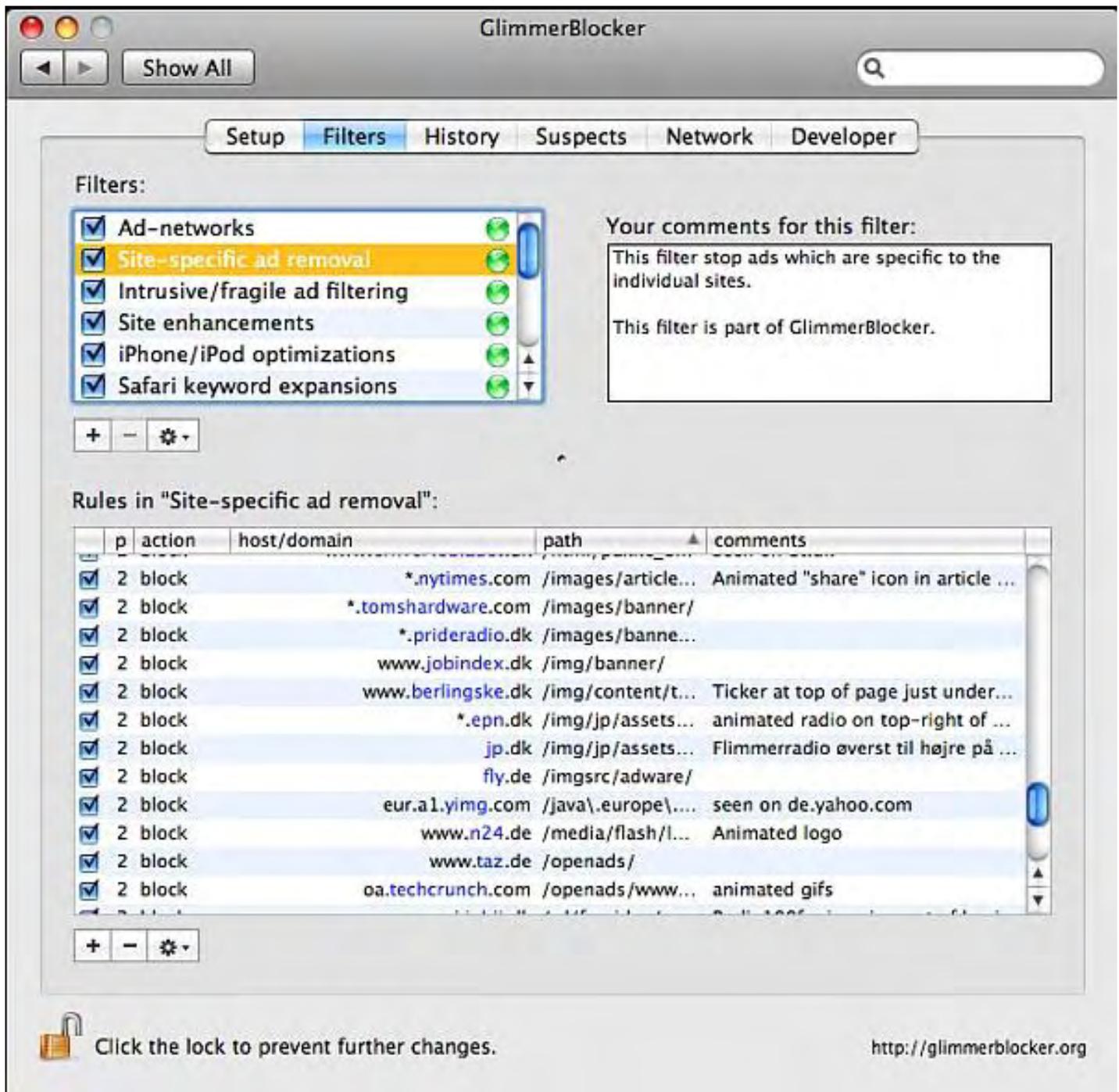


Figure 2. You can block ads from appearing on your favorite Web sites.

GlimmerBlocker is just one of many plug-ins you can install with Safari. For a variety of other Safari plug-ins, visit Pimp My Safari (pimpmysafari.com) and start customizing your copy of Safari. Most of the plug-ins on this site are free, "donation ware" (where the developer requests a donation) or shareware, so you can try each one, see what you like, and uninstall and delete the plug-ins you don't need.

* * *

I do a lot of interviews through Skype for two reasons. First, making calls from computer to computer through Skype is free no matter how long you talk. Second by using a program like Wiretap Studio (www.ambrosiasw.com/utilities/wiretap), I can record the entire conversation and save it as an MP3 audio file.

To use Wiretap Studio, you just need to specify where you want to record sound, such as through a particular program (Skype) or through a specific source (such as the built-in microphone on a MacBook).



Figure 3. Wiretap Studio can record any audio playing through any program on your Macintosh.

Recording a telephone conversation lets me replay that conversation and transcribe the spoken words into text. Of course, constantly stopping, rewinding and typing can get tedious real fast, so one solution is to use a special transcription program like Express Scribe (www.nch.com.au/scribe).

The main advantages of Express Scribe is that it offers the ability to play audio files slower than normal, such as 67 percent of its normal speed. This lets you listen to an audio file and type quickly enough without having to constantly stop, pause, rewind and play over and over again.

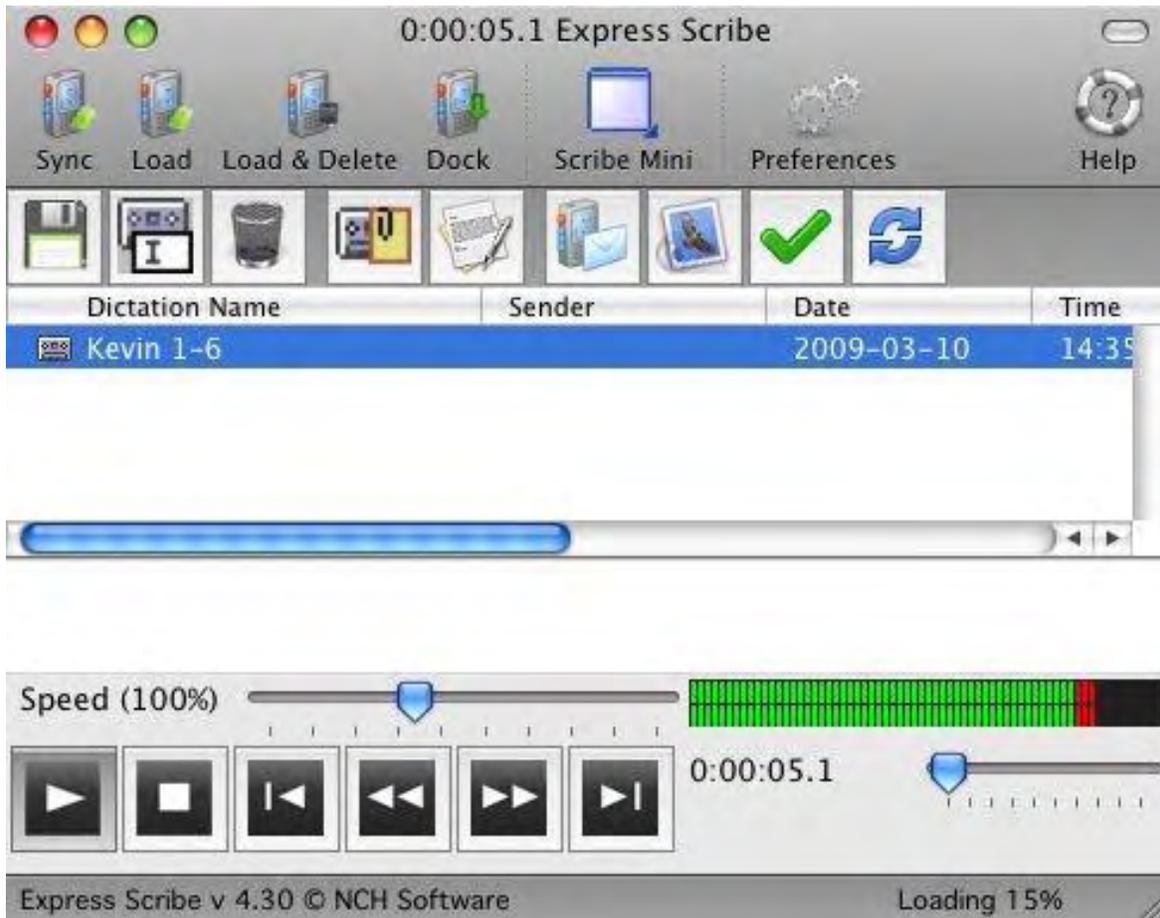


Figure 4. Express Scribe lets you control the playing of an audio file.

You can also adjust the rewind and forward buttons to define how far back and forward they advance with each click. Now you can click once to move back a fixed number of milliseconds so you can replay portions of an audio file until you can type it down.



Figure 5. You can adjust the Rewind and Fast Forward buttons.

You can also buy special foot pedals that plug into a USB port so you can rewind, pause and play an audio file in Express Scribe by using your feet. That way you can keep your hands on the keyboard so you can keep typing.

While not a dedicated transcription program, Adobe's Soundbooth (www.adobe.com/products/soundbooth/) does offer a primitive transcription feature. Just load an audio file containing spoken words and let the program try to transcribe text automatically. If you download and listen to the Strawberries.mp3 (www.computoredge.com/images/2713/StrawBerries.mp3) file, you can hear the actual spoken poem and compare it to the following Soundbooth transcription (which bears little resemblance to the transcribed text):

"It's not a scholar of strawberries when you need places where strawberries group in music we're treating it helps that prudence often melodies and rhythms alarms this week's Riyadh case I went into the Strawberry Fields in the news it uses duty from my home and baseball are here to do notes The last case for a new growing detainee I really do English we're strapped areas close to music the truth is coming really and then Momo is open and ready to see you and my tears are hearing that news each of the growing Munoz Sure stopping us."



Figure 6. Soundbooth attempts to transcribe spoken words into text.

Of course, Soundbooth's transcription abilities aren't close to perfect, but it can often be enough to get you started, so you just need to edit and fill in the gaps where Soundbooth mangled the words.

One particularly handy feature of Soundbooth is its ability to search an audio file for specific words. For example, click on the word "strawberries" in Soundbooth's transcription, and the program highlights the exact spot in the audio file where that word appears. By using this word-searching feature, you can find and listen to specific portions of an audio file without guessing and wasting time rewinding and fast forwarding.

Soundbooth's transcription feature also understands French, Spanish, German, Italian, Korean and Japanese. If you need to transcribe audio files in different languages, Soundbooth is an amazingly useful, if inaccurate tool.



Figure 7. Soundbooth can transcribe audio files from a variety of common languages.

While you may need to wait until a new version of Soundbooth for more accurate transcription features, you can still use Soundbooth for editing audio files. Editing is as simple as selecting part of an audio file and then choosing a command to modify the sound, such as removing tape hiss, clicks, or background noise.

If you just take a few minutes to use Soundbooth, you can edit audio files competently. If you can devote more time to learning Soundbooth's features, you can turn a mediocre audio file into a crystal-clear version suitable for distribution. If you're a recording artist, you can use Soundbooth to minimize background noise and maximize your singing and instrument playing.

Without Soundbooth, audio editing can be intimidating. With Soundbooth, you may not develop the capabilities of a professional audio engineer, but you can definitely improve any audio file simply and easily all by yourself.

* * *

A quick way to play audio files within the Finder is to right-click on an audio file. When a pop-up menu appears, click Open With to open a submenu, and then click the QuickTime Player option.

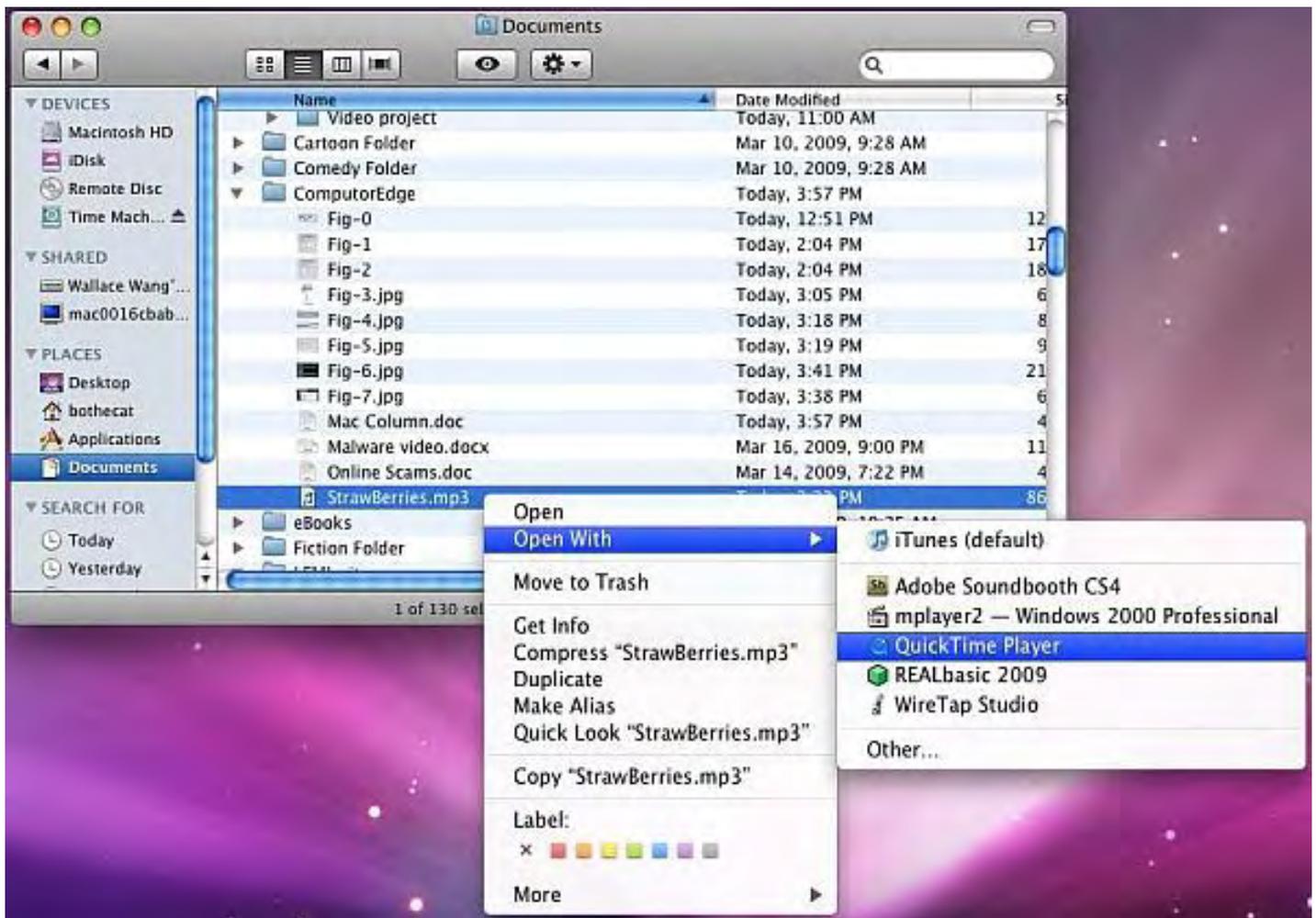


Figure 8. Right-clicking on an audio file can access the QuickTime Player.

If you simply double-click on an audio file, your Macintosh will likely start up iTunes and load the file into your iTunes library at the same time, which may not be what you want.

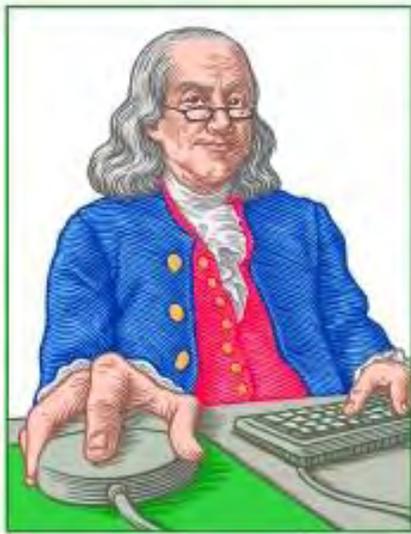
In the early days, before Wally became an Internationally renowned comedian, computer book writer, and generally cool guy, Wally Wang used to hang around *The Byte Buyer* dangling participle with Jack Dunning and go to the gym to pump iron with Dan Gookin.

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.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



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
ComputerEdge Staff

A tip on the use of curly brackets "{}", which can open a whole new way of looking at the command prompt.

Sometimes you learn a trick and it opens a whole new way of looking at the command prompt and scripts. In fact, some tricks make you realize that you can do some things through the prompt that are extremely difficult in a graphic interface. One such technique is the use of curly brackets "{}".

Curly brackets are for creating lists to be used in conjunction with commands. For example, the ls command will display a list of files in a directory similar to the following:

```
[/var/log]$ ls
Xorg.0.log                ipfw.yesterday          security
Xorg.0.log.old            ipfwcheck                sendmail.st
auth.log                  lastlog                  sendmail.st.0
auth.log.0.bz2           lpd-errs                 sendmail.st.1
auth.log.1.bz2           maillog                  sendmail.st.10
auth.log.2.bz2           maillog.0.bz2           sendmail.st.2
auth.log.3.bz2           maillog.1.bz2           sendmail.st.3
auth.log.4.bz2           maillog.2.bz2           sendmail.st.4
auth.log.5.bz2           maillog.3.bz2           sendmail.st.5
cron                      maillog.4.bz2           sendmail.st.6
cron.0.bz2               maillog.5.bz2           sendmail.st.7
cron.1.bz2               maillog.6.bz2           sendmail.st.8
cron.2.bz2               maillog.7.bz2           sendmail.st.9
cron.3.bz2               messages                 setuid.today
debug.log                messages.0.bz2          setuid.yesterday
dmesg.today              messages.1.bz2          slip.log
dmesg.yesterday          messages.2.bz2          userlog
httpd-access.log         messages.3.bz2          wtmp
httpd-access.log.bz2    messages.4.bz2          wtmp.0
httpd-error.log          messages.5.bz2          wtmp.1
httpd-error.log.bz2     mount.today             wtmp.2
httpd-ssl_request.log    pf.today                wtmp.3
httpd-ssl_request.log.bz2 ppp.log                 xferlog
ipfw.today               samba
```

```
[ /var/log]$
```

But suppose you only want to see the files that start with a, m and se? You can use the curly brackets to make the ls command only with those letters:

```
[ /var/log]$ ls {a*,m*,se*}
auth.log          maillog.2.bz2      messages.3.bz2    sendmail.st.3
auth.log.0.bz2    maillog.3.bz2      messages.4.bz2    sendmail.st.4
auth.log.1.bz2    maillog.4.bz2      messages.5.bz2    sendmail.st.5
auth.log.2.bz2    maillog.5.bz2      mount.today       sendmail.st.6
auth.log.3.bz2    maillog.6.bz2      security          sendmail.st.7
auth.log.4.bz2    maillog.7.bz2      sendmail.st       sendmail.st.8
auth.log.5.bz2    messages           sendmail.st.0     sendmail.st.9
maillog           messages.0.bz2     sendmail.st.1     setuid.today
maillog.0.bz2     messages.1.bz2     sendmail.st.10    setuid.yesterday
maillog.1.bz2     messages.2.bz2     sendmail.st.2
[ /var/log]$
```

Only those files that start with a, m or se are displayed. The asterisk "*" is a wildcard substituting for all the characters after the letter(s). Check it out with other commands.

* * *

Give Us Your Linux Tips and/or 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 *ComputerEdge* 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
ComputerEdge

ComputerEdge 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.

If you want to submit a short "ComputerQuick Review", or yell at us, please e-mail us at ceeditor@computoredge.com.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



Rob, The Computer Tutor

Rob, The Computer Tutor Does Visual Basic for Applications

“Mailing List Database” by Rob Spahitz

After learning the basics of Access, it's time to spend a few weeks building a functional database to track our family and friends' information.

Now that we've gone through enough of the basics of Access, let's spend a few weeks building a functional database to track our family and friends' information.

First we'll identify all of the pieces we want, then assemble them into tables, then build some forms to make it useful. Later we'll build some forms to make it more useful. Eventually we'll add some VB code to make data entry easier.

Let's start. Here are the fields we'll use, as previously discussed: First Name, Last Name, Address, Phone Number, E-Mail, Date of Birth, and Relationship. For Address, we'll break that down into House Number and Street (one field), City, State, Postal Code (ZIP) and Country. For phone number, we'll want to allow multiple numbers. We'll also want to create a way to tie multiple people to this person, such as spouse or kids. We'll probably find a few more as we go.

Organizing these, we get the following:

tblPerson: PersonID, autonumber primary key; FirstName, 50-character text; LastName, 50-character text; AddressID, foreign key to tblAddress (so go build that before finishing here); EMailAddress, 100-character text; DOB, Date; RelationshipID, foreign key to tblRelationship.

tblAddress: AddressID, autonumber primary key; Street1, 100-character text; Street2, 100-character text; CityID, foreign key to tblCity; StateCode, foreign key to tblState; PostalCode, 10-character text.

tblCity: CityID, autonumber primary key; CityName, 50-character text; StateID, foreign key to tblState.

tblState: StateCode, 2-character primary key; StateName, 20-character text; CountryID, foreign key to tblCountry.

tblCountry: CountryID, autonumber primary key; CountryName, 50-character text.

tblRelationship: RelationshipID, autonumber primary key; RelationshipName, 100-character text.

tblPhoneNumber: PhoneID, autonumber primary key; AreaCode, foreign key to tblAreaCode, PhoneNumber, number, integer, input mask 000-0000.

tblAreaCode: AreaCodeID, autonumber primary key; AreaCode, number, integer.

tblPersonPhone: PersonPhoneID, autonumber primary key; PersonID, foreign key to tblPerson; PhoneID, foreign key to tblPhone.

With these tables set up, and the relationships established (foreign keys using the "lookup" data type to link to the appropriate table), you should have something like Figure 1.

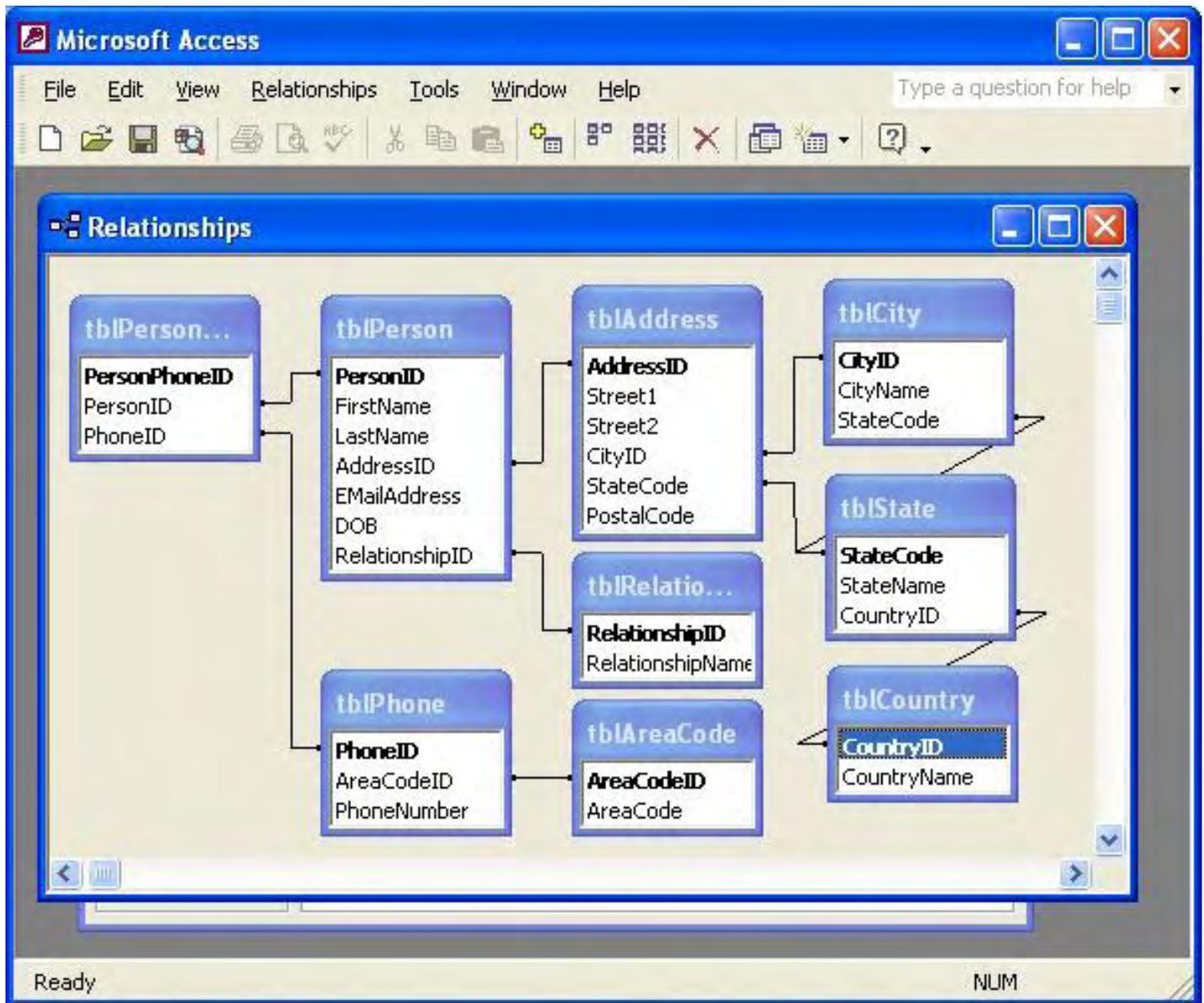


Figure 1. Table Relationships.

With all these in place, go into each table and create a quick form for each using the AutoForm tool, as seen in Figure 2, and name them with frm prefixes.

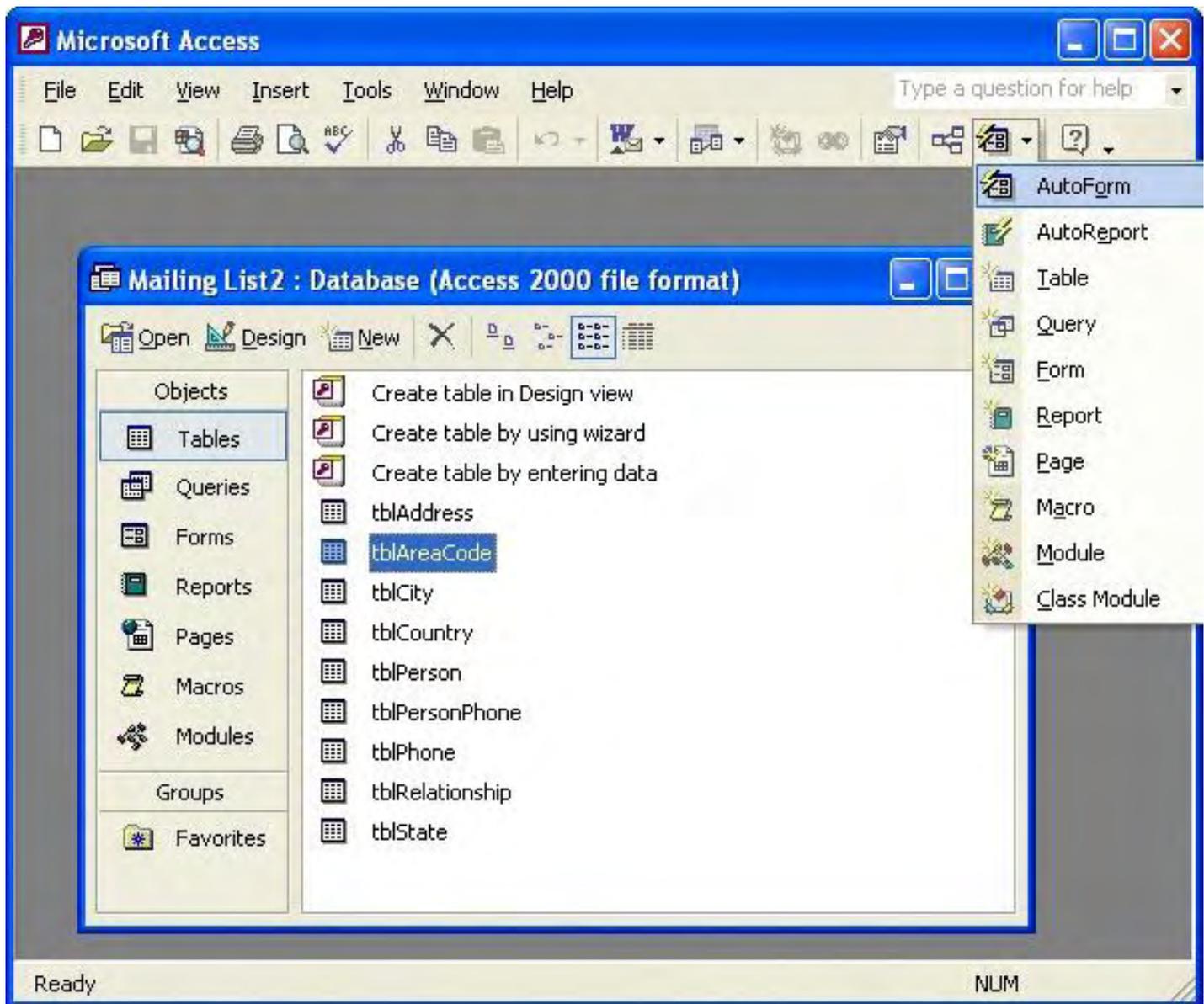


Figure 2. AutoForms.

A few other things you may want to clean up are the table properties for each foreign key field, so that they do not have default values of zero. And you may want to adjust the lookups that you created when you used the lookup wizard (in the Data Type column.) These lookups could be improved, as we've done in previous articles, to do things such as show the person's combined first and last names when looking up the Person ID.

Importing Data

Some of the things in our database are commonly found elsewhere, somewhere in the universe. One of your goals with the database should be to reduce the chance of human error with data entry. If the data can be found elsewhere, the only chance of human error would be while creating a process to import and possibly transform the data to match the requirements of your database. For example, suppose that you have a list of friends' names located in a text file, showing them as First and Last Name. You could import the contents of the file, but then you'd have to figure out a way to split the names to fit into the FirstName and LastName fields.

So let's get some data imported. If you go to the Web page AnyWho (www.tollfree.att.net/area_codes.html),

you can see the area codes and the list of states. This will give us the chance to fill two tables: tblState and tblAreaCode.

The first problem we encounter is that the page contains a lot of data. It includes things we want and other things we don't. This leads to some issues because we can't simply copy and paste the page, or even just parts of it, without a lot of effort. The idea with computers is that they are supposed to make things *easier*, not harder.

Sometimes you can use built-in features to solve your problems, and sometimes you have to create your own solutions. If you use built-in solutions, you may not have all of the features you want, but it may be close enough that you need only minor changes to get it right. If you create your own solution, you can get exactly what you want, but the design and development phase of that process can be longer than expected and filled with potential problems, as things don't quite work right away the way you hoped. And, of course, you can hire a consultant to do the work for you, but that can be expensive, and you still have no guarantee that the job will be done right. Let's start with the preferred choice, which is to see if the built-in solution gets us close enough.

Let's try to use the import feature. Go to menu File/Get External Data/Import, and in the Import window, try to paste the above link, since that has the information we're trying to import. Also make sure to use File type HTML, as seen in Figure 3.

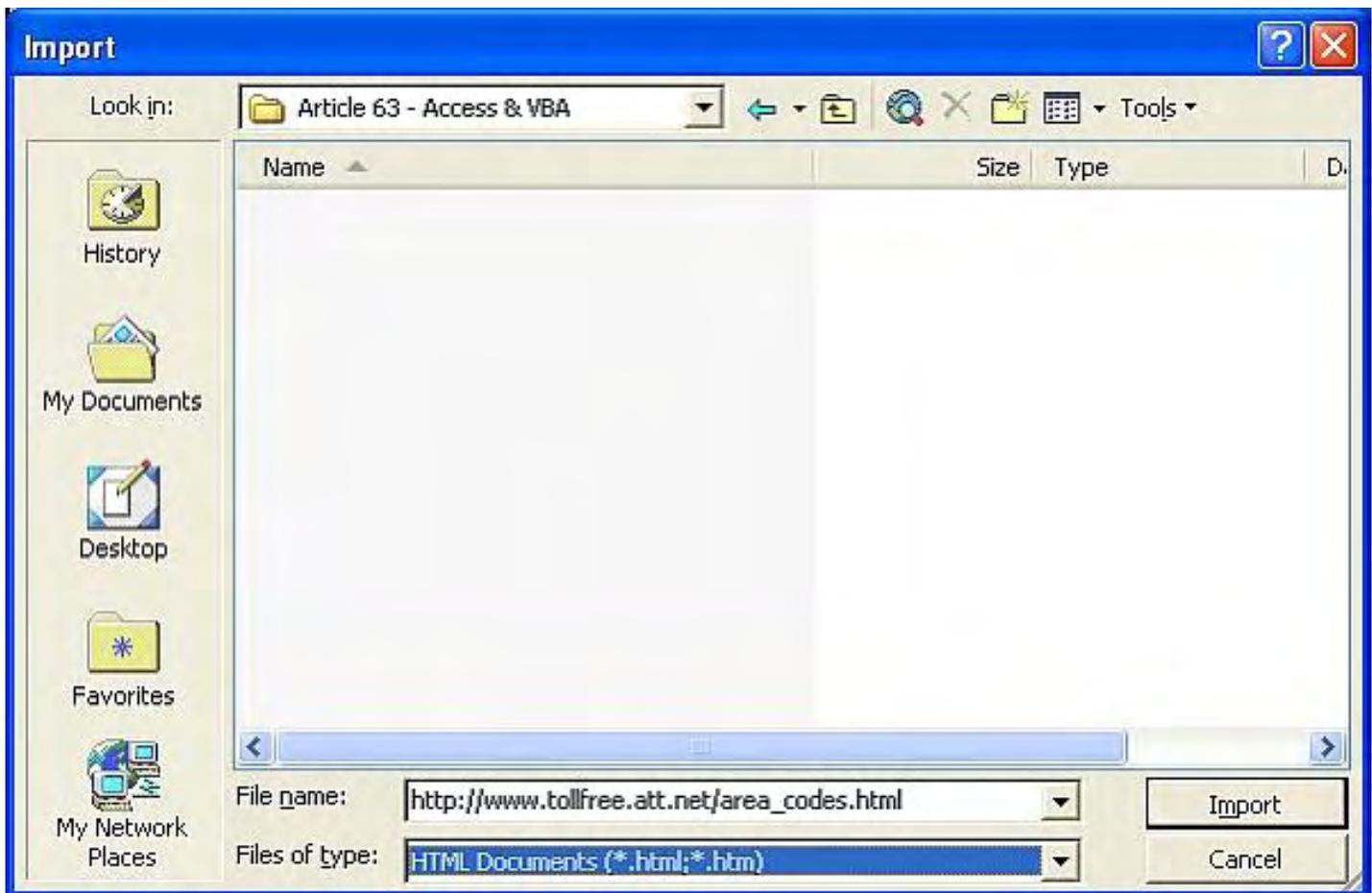


Figure 3. Importing data from a Web page.

When you click the Import button and wait a while (a *long* while), you get an error message, as seen in Figures 4a and 4b, indicating that it was unable to figure out how to grab the data from that Web site and

that it couldn't find the file you specified.



Figure 4a. Failure getting data from Web site.



Figure 4b.

This time, let's create a "local" version. From your Web browser, use the Save function to save the page locally. I suggest menu File/Save into the same directory where you will be saving the database. If you use Internet Explorer or Firefox, it will create an HTML file plus a directory with other files. We're mainly concerned with the HTML file.

Repeat the above import process, but this time select the HTML file that you just saved on your local machine. When you click on the Import button, you get the HTML import wizard, as seen in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Import Wizard.

In this case, because of the way the Web page is set up, the data we are seeking is located inside one of the tables. If you click down the items in the list, you find out that the data is located in the item named Area Codes on AnyWho4.

Since we don't want the data in the third column, we could use the Advanced button to exclude that, as seen in Figure 6, but since we have a table for cities, we may decide to use this data at a later time to populate tblCity with a set of cities. Since we probably don't want all of the cities in a simple database of friends, that might be overkill, but we'll keep it there until we decide if there's a simple way to pull out the cities we want.

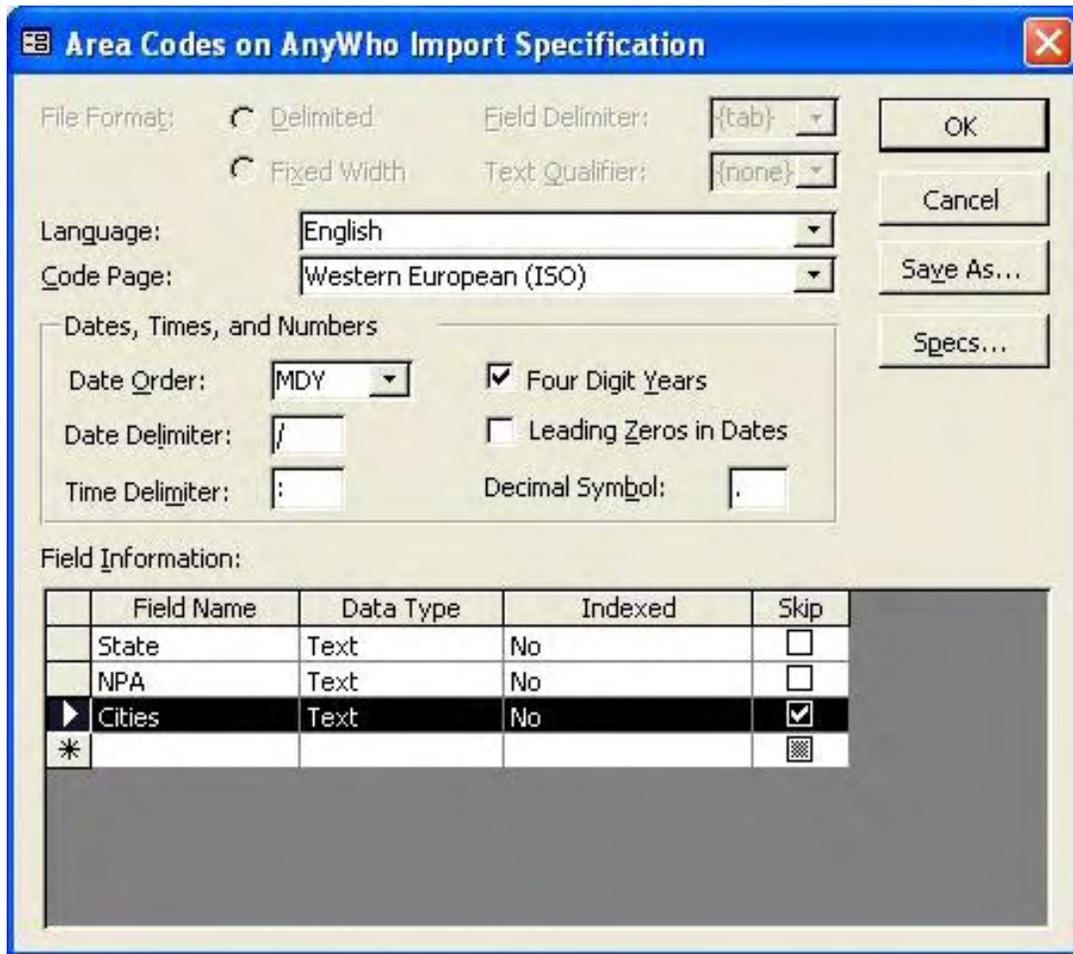


Figure 6. Advanced import options.

Continuing with the Import Wizard, when you click on the Next > button, it asks if we have headings, which we do, so select the checkbox at the top and click on the Next > button.

The next window asks where you want to store the imported data. Although we could try to store it directly into our City or Area code table, we have several problems. One problem is that we are importing extra data that would cause the import to fail. Another problem is that we can import into only one table at a time, so we would have to run this import twice to get the data into the two tables. Instead, we'll just import into a new table, and then use an Access Append query to transfer just the necessary data to the correct tables. So simply keep the choice to store "In a New Table" and click on the Next > button.

Now, because it recognizes the data as text, you get the typical text-import window to specify what columns you want to keep and what type of data you want them to have, as seen in Figure 7. This is similar to the Advanced button's features, so again, we'll keep everything. Just click on the Next > button.



Figure 7. Import column selection.

Now you are asked how you want to manage the primary key. Since this will just be a temporary table for us to transfer data to other parts of the database, we don't really need a primary key. If you were to keep this table, you'd probably keep the default option to "Let Access add primary key," but we'll just choose "No primary key." Click the Next > button to proceed to the final window.

The last window asks for the name of the new table. Enter tbl_Import_AreaCodeInfo. Now when we try to manipulate the table, it should be easy enough to determine which table to use.

At the end, a message appears indicating that some of the data was not imported, as seen in Figure 8. In this case, part of the message indicates, "Not all of your data was successfully imported. Error descriptions...can be found in the...table 'Area Codes on AnyWho4_ImportErrors1.'"

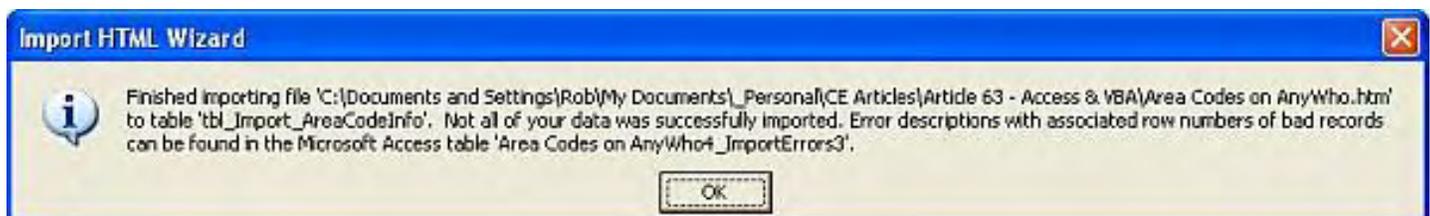


Figure 8. Import completion message.

When you go to look for that table, you may see other error tables. In this case, when you view these error tables, you can see that there is nothing of concern. Check our import table, and you'll see that everything we want is there, so the import was a success (although it also brought in things we don't want.)

Next week, we'll continue building this new database and figure out how to complete the import process by transferring the data from this table to the new one.

If you'd like to take this interim database, proceed to my server at www.dogopoly.com/ce.

See ya next week!

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 *ComputerEdge* since 1990 and can be contacted at RSpahitz@Dogopoly.com.

Looking for a great boardgame? Grab a copy from DOGOPOLY.com (dogopoly.com) and have a dog-gone great time.



[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Worldwide News & Product Reviews

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



Tips, Tricks & Traps on Navigating Social Networks—Protect yourself while being social; Phone Data Makes Users Vulnerable to ID Theft—Mobile phone users are taking way too many security risks; La Crosse Technology Weather Direct—A review of the Weather Direct weather-checking Internet device; You'll See the Light—A review of the Fretlight FG-431 Vintage Electric from Optek.

Tips, Tricks & Traps on Navigating Social Networks

BluePhone (www.bluephone.com), an online computer-support company, has some tips about social networking for us:

Lately, it seems difficult to turn around without hearing about social networks, whether it's a friend talking about the hilarious video they saw on Facebook, the latest news surrounding a "vulnerability" concern, or something about "twittering" with the growing site Twitter. With so many new sites out there to navigate, it's wise beforehand to have a bit of extra knowledge to maximize fun and avoid unnecessary tricks and traps.

There are social networks for just about anything these days. Wikipedia lists more than 130 different Web sites, from general sites like Facebook and MySpace, to job-related social networks like LinkedIn to assorted special-interests like cigars.

So before uploading photos, posting comments, writing blog entries, or accidentally "friending" the universe, take a look at these suggestions from BluePhone online computer-support experts so that social-network experience is a fun experience:

Smart Security

Users can control "who sees them" and how much information is revealed by choosing from a number of criteria. It's easy to manage how much of a profile is visible to the public, and how easy someone's profile can be found. Search settings can limit people to searching only by e-mail address, so that a profile cannot be found simply by knowing their name. These security settings are usually set conservatively by default, but it doesn't hurt to know exactly who can see what.

Friend Control

It's best for someone to keep their friend lists to people they know well and to be careful of which circles of friends are allowed in. Most social networks have a tool to invite new friends from an e-mail address book, and while it's a quick way to add a good number of friends, it's also an easy way to invite people who would otherwise remain uninvited. So always be conservative when inviting or accepting friends. They can always become a friend later.

Time Patrol

No one with any semblance of a social life can reasonably keep up with every social network they're invited to join. It's easy to get caught up, and lose track of time. An easy fix is to keep the number of social networks you are involved with to a lower, manageable number. If someone is prone to social-networking marathon sessions, they might consider setting time limits, and if they really space out, an alarm clock might help.

Audience Awareness

It's important to consider who could read what is posted to a social-networking profile, and who could see photos that are uploaded and shared. It could be a boss, a coworker, a distant relative, or a friend of a friend, but probably a better way is to assume that everyone will see what is posted online. Make sure to think of every possible person who could see a particular profile, and make sure it's OK if everyone sees it.

Linking Lessons

It's good to keep firm boundaries between work and play, if there's any question at all. LinkedIn is a valuable place to network for jobs, but be careful linking a professional profile like LinkedIn to a more social site like Facebook. At least consider what information and photos will be posted and shared before giving coworkers and bosses access to things that would otherwise be kept among friends.

Most importantly, don't get too tied up in social networking. If things get out of control with too many unidentifiable friends, close the account and start over.

Phone Data Makes Users Vulnerable to ID Theft

According to the findings of a survey by endpoint data-protection security experts Credant Technologies, 80 percent of phone users store information on their phones that could easily be used to steal their identities. The research surveyed 600 commuters at London railway stations about their mobile phones, typical usage and the types of sensitive information stored on them. The results were horrifying:

- 16 percent have their bank account details saved on their mobile phones
- 24 percent their PIN numbers and passwords
- 11 percent keep Social Security and inland revenue details
- 10 percent store credit card information
- Alarmingly, 40 percent naively fail to protect their devices with a password

Further investigation reveals the information stored is not restricted to personal details, as most users also use their personal devices for business use:

- 99 percent of people use their phones for some sort of business use—even though 26 percent have been instructed by their employer not to do so
- 35 percent receive and send business e-mails

- 77 percent keep business names and addresses
- 30 percent use them as a business diary
- 17 percent download corporate information, such as documents and spreadsheets
- 23 percent store customers' information



When you consider that 4 out of 10 people are not password-protecting their devices, it makes many millions of users seriously exposed to the trappings of mobile phone criminals and opportunists who can use this information to clone someone's personal, or even corporate, life.

According to Paul Huntingdon—public-sector director at Credant Technologies and adviser to many government departments and large corporations, "Once you have access to someone's e-mails, passwords, birthdays, business diary, documents, children's names and pets you can easily masquerade as that person, sending out e-mails under their name, read all their corporate data and get to see every personal detail of their life. People are ignorant to how easy a professional thief could take over their life and effectively destroy it. It is therefore imperative that all mobile phone users, even with the most basic handset, password protect and encrypt them."

Steve Gold, telecoms journalist and IT expert, adds, "People can be destroyed when their phone gets into the wrong hands—for example blackmail, abuse and threats, just by leaving it accessible without password

protection. Imagine how easy it would be to assume or destroy the life of a colleague just by stealing their phone—if it was the company chairman's phone, you could send e-mails from him announcing his resignation—a practical joke with serious consequences."

La Crosse Technology Weather Direct

In January 2008 I attended a CES press briefing by La Crosse Technology on a new product that was in development called Weather Direct. It was an exciting concept. Weather and other information was received over the Internet to a gateway unit attached via CAT5 cable to your router. The gateway then transmitted the information to a battery-operated receiver, which could be located anywhere in your home. This year I stopped by the company's display and requested an evaluation unit.

It arrived on a recent Friday. It was a model WA-1440U that included audio. Some units have audio, others do not. The system included an outside-temperature sensor. I had some trouble getting it set up and needed technical-support help. It was unavailable on the weekend, so it wasn't until Monday that I managed to get help. I called the support line and had to leave a message. Being impatient, I called the sales assistant who had sent me the unit and managed to get someone in support to call me. It turns out that the online setup instructions were less than clear, at least in my humble opinion.

Once set up, it displays the time, date and a four-day forecast. I had the Colorado Springs weather displayed. I checked the four-day forecasts against the Weather.com forecast I got on my computer and from my satellite receiver. The high temperatures differed by as much as eight degrees and the lows by three degrees. The worst I saw was on February 22. The forecast was 53 degrees. By mid-afternoon it was 68 degrees. I reported the discrepancy to the product's support. They confirmed the error and asked their weather provider to tune its forecast adjustments in my area. They said the adjustments should be made in eight or nine weeks. I loaded Raleigh NC, Portland, OR, Las Vegas NV, and Quebec, Canada and saw some minor errors in temperatures as well.

It is a bit hard to quantify the differences, as Weather Direct predicts the high and low from 7 a.m. one day to 7 a.m. the next, unlike Weather.com, which, I believe, uses midnight to midnight. Suffice to say, there were some differences. The actual weather forecasts, for the most part, were like those of Weather.com.



WA-1440U and WD Gateway

Like my La Crosse atomic wristwatch, the unit has no backlighting. A temporary backlight when you press the snooze button to get the outside air temperature would be nice so you can see what the temperature is when you wake up and it is still dark. While La Crosse argues that backlighting would reduce battery life, a simple five-second LED light to see the outside air temperature shouldn't use up too much power since it is powered by three C cells. Since this unit has "I Talk," they could at least have the unit say the temperature!

Speaking of the outdoor temperature sensor, be careful where you mount it. My first placement apparently caused its signal to be blocked. I thought it wasn't working. After moving it to a new location, it worked fine.



You set up your preferences at the Weather Direct Web site. In addition to the weather, the basic unit includes three buttons that will broadcast information from the following sources: Associated Press, E Max Health, Farmer's Almanac, HULIQ.com, NetFlix, and Science Daily. Most of the sources have sub-feeds. You can assign up to three feeds to each button.

You get forecasts for one location with the unit. For a one-time fee of \$10, you can add forecasts for four other locations. Other add-ons range in price from \$10 to \$40. These are subscriptions to various services for one or three years. These add-ons include custom forecasts and severe weather alerts, with \$39.95 buying all the enhancements for three years. You can learn more about these additional services at the URL listed below.



I'm still impressed with the concept, but the temperature forecasting needs some tweaking.

There are a number of units to choose from ranging in price from \$45 to \$150, some with audio and some without. You can see them and learn more about the various units at: weatherdirect.com/products.aspx.



Review contributed by Joe Nuvolini

You'll See the Light



The Fretlight FG-431 Vintage Electric (www.fretlight.com) from Optek (\$529 list, some models as low as \$399, interface works with both PCs and Macs) comes in natural and classic jet-black finishes and looks and sounds one heck of a lot like the original vintage guitar, the Fender Telecaster. But this baby does stuff a 1950s Tele couldn't even dream of: connect via USB cable to a PC or Mac and give lessons watching a DVD while the instrument's light-up fretboard shows precise finger placements for chording and even entire solos. The company likens the process to a sort of musical paint-by-number.



Some stats: The fretboard has a 25 1/2-inch scale length with a Telecaster-style ash body, two single-coil pickups (just like a Tele), a Fretlight bolt-on neck with a head that (in my opinion) is a better-looking head than a Telecaster's, and features six very smooth direct drive sealed tuning machines. Controls include master volume and tone controls, a three-way selector switch and a 1/4-inch output jack. The Fretlight FG-431 Vintage Electric also features a string-thru body design with a fixed bridge and fully adjustable saddles. The big difference, the fingerboard, is Optek's proprietary advanced polymer fretboard (patent pending) with LEDs under every string along 21 frets.



Included are a 10-foot Fretlight guitar-to-USB cable, a CD-ROM with the Fretlight Lesson Player with 31 free lessons, a "Getting Started with Your Fretlight" DVD and other free trial software, installation instructions, and a neck truss rod-adjustment tool.

As a longtime professional guitarist, my only suggestion would be that, even though the guitar is extremely well-made, more experienced players might be put off buying an instrument that has an unabashed learner image. The company might be able to greatly increase the guitar's "coolness factor" by creating a small plug-in module that made the fingerboard LEDs—normally used for teaching—flash onstage in unique ways. It would be a real showstopper—and might capture a whole new market for Optek.



In addition to being an editor and columnist for *ComputerEdge* 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.

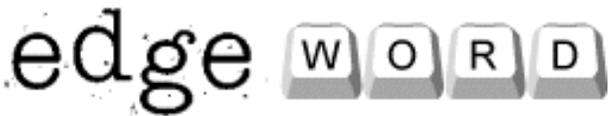
Carr will soon publish his first book, *What a World*, a collection of his best writings.

Learn more at www.charlescarr.com.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher

“**Browser Plug-Ins**” by Jack Dunning



If you're looking to develop Web-based applications, then you may want to consider Chrome as a platform—especially if the entire world won't need to use it. Also, some ComputerEdge news, including relief for those with limited screen width.

The article this week by Michael Ross about building Firefox extensions brings out the nerd in me. I have a pretty fair understanding of the basics of JavaScript programming, but I've never even looked at XUL. I suppose that it's pretty similar to most other programming languages, with an emphasis on integration with Web browsers. I resisted the urge to look up XUL resources. I'd like to build a browser plug-in, but I'm short on that most precious resource—time.

Part of my interest in Web browser plug-ins relates to my belief that browsers will become increasingly important in most computing applications. As Digital Dave has pointed out, that's why Google developed its open-source Chrome browser. The plan is for the Chrome Web browser to become a primary platform for all types of applications. However, one of the early complaints about Chrome is its lack of support for plug-ins. (Even Google Toolbar isn't supported in Chrome.)

From Google's perspective, it's early days yet. Despite the chatter to the contrary, Chrome is not meant to be a replacement for other Web browsers. Google continues its financial contributions to Firefox. Chrome as an open-source program is designed to morph into whatever the market wants. In some cases, Chrome may be a tailored application used only within specific targeted environments. Ultimately, it will be up to the application designers and developers to decide how to use Chrome. Firefox or another stable browser will continue to be the browser of choice for the average Internet consumer. So, what about the lack of Chrome plug-ins?

The plug-ins and extensions are coming. People are digging away at the problem. I managed to find at least one person who has a handle on writing Chrome extensions (www.mattcutts.com/blog/write-chrome-extension/). This is another topic that I would like to dig into deeper, but again it won't fit on my plate. Suffice it to say, if you're looking to develop Web-based applications, then you may want to consider Chrome as a platform—especially if the entire world won't need to use it.

* * *

If you are planning to build your own applications, then you may want to take a look at REALbasic. Wally Wang gave us a peek at it in his February 13 column. Starting next week, Wally will be doing a four-part series introducing REALbasic programming. If you're want to learn more about REALbasic, or you're just curious, then check it out.

* * *

While many people have moved to widescreen monitors with higher resolutions, there remain a number of older systems with limited screen width. This smaller screen space has create a problem for those readers of *ComputerEdge* articles—especially when there are graphics in the article. A scroll bar appears at the bottom of the browser, forcing the reader to move the page back and forth while reading—very annoying! While the problem can be resolved by reading the print version (links at top and bottom of the article), it was time to

offer another solution.

There is now a link that will temporarily close the navigation menu (Close Nav Menu) at the top and bottom of each article (see Figure 1). When you click the link, the navigation menu closes. If you want to return to the Table of Contents page, click the Theme link at the top of the article. To restore the navigation menu, either click the *ComputerEdge* logo or reload/refresh the page.

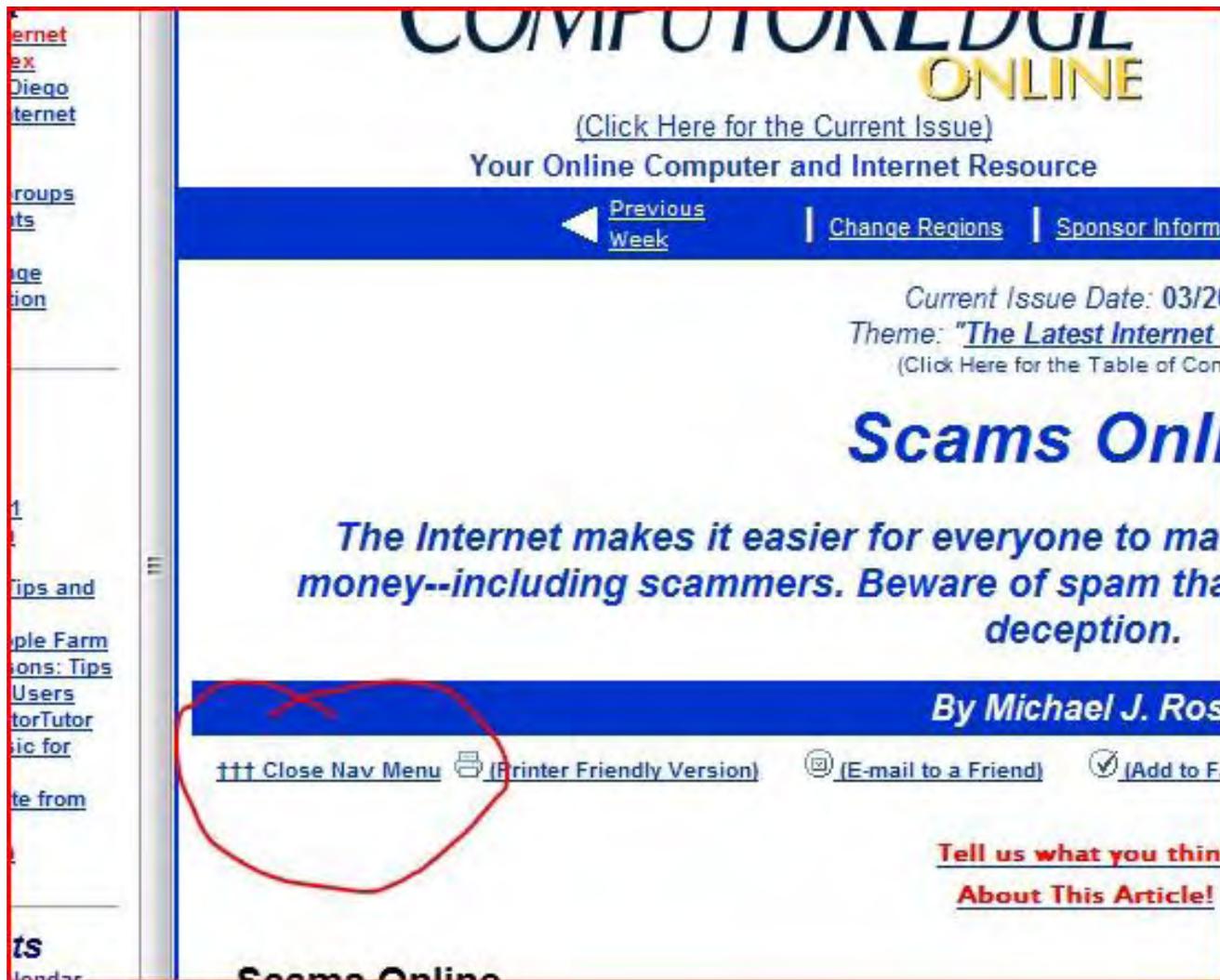


Figure 1. Click the link to close the navigation menu.

It didn't take me that long to add the link, which makes me wonder why I didn't do it sooner. I could turn the link into a toggle, opening and closing the navigation menu—maybe I'll do that in the future. Part of what added to the programming time is that I initially programmed it for Internet Explorer, but it failed in Firefox. I needed to completely change the JavaScript code for it to operate properly in both. Next time, I'll start with Firefox.

Jack is the publisher of *ComputerEdge* 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

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



Editor's Letters

“Readers write in with letters to the editor.” by
ComputerEdge Staff

"VB Made Easy," "Screen-Scrolling Problem Fixed," "Flash Drive Danger," "Windows 7 News," "What's New with the Mac"

VB Made Easy

[This letter is in regard to Rob Spahitz's March 13 column, Rob, The ComputerTutor Does Visual Basic for Applications.]

Well-explained box and buttons!

Look forward to your column every week.

-Bob, San Diego

Screen-Scrolling Problem Fixed

Like a lot of other folks, I have been a loyal reader and fan since the paper days. I got my first computer in 1995, and Digital Dave and the rest of you folks taught me how to use it.

I don't remember when the paper left us, but I too have had a chronic problem with trying to read anybody except Digital Dave and Jack Dunning. Their columns fit the page very nicely, and I can read the entire article along with the directory on the left. Everybody else is cut off on one side or the other. It is irritating to the point of frustration when, for every article, I have to press and hold that little slider bar at the bottom of the screen and go back-and-forth, back-and-forth, just so I can read the page!

Hey, you said I could yell at ya! Look, I really wouldn't mind—honest, I really wouldn't—having to go to another page to read the directories currently on the left side of the screen. Why don't you take that thing off so we can read the whole story? *Please?* Like they say in the newspaper, *"Just fix it!"*

Ahhh, now I feel better. :-)

Until next Friday,

-Rory

[Your point is well taken. We've added a link at the top and bottom of each article to close the navigation frame. For more specifics, see this week's EdgeWord. —Editor]

Thank you for the prompt response and fix. Gee, I kinda feel like "all ya had to do was ask." Be well.

-Rory

Flash Drive Danger

[This letter is in regard to Michael J. Ross' March 13 article, "Linux on a Flash Drive."]

Don't run any executables including *.pdf on your flash drive in any public library computer! Public library PCs have software on it that will scramble or format the flash drive!

-Walter, San Diego, Calif.

Windows 7 News

[This letter is in regard to Annie Blevins' March 13 article about the new features of Windows 7 in the ComputerQuick Reviews column.]

Great article! Very informative! Thank you for providing this detailed article on Windows 7!

-Susan Mendoza, Modesto, Calif.

What's New with the Mac

[This letter is in regard to Wally Wang's March 13 column, "New Macintosh Models."]

This issue's article on the new Macintosh releases from [Apple] is great. After years of becoming a techno-nerd in order to keep my Windows PC working, I have started to read *ComputerEdge* articles on Macs, so I can take it easy for a while. I am close to purchasing a Mac (the coupon is a nice invitation), and I will wait until *ComputerEdge* tells me when the right combination of features is available. I get your magazine online; it is wonderful. Been reading it for years and years.

-Aimee Squires, Bonita, Calif.

ComputerEdge 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.

If you want to submit a short "ComputerQuick Review", or yell at us, please e-mail us at ceeditor@computoredge.com.

Send mail to ceeditor@computoredge.com with questions about editorial content.

Send mail to cwebmaster@computoredge.com with questions or comments about this Web site.

Copyright © 1997-2009 The Byte Buyer, Inc.

ComputerEdge Magazine, P.O. Box 83086, San Diego, CA 92138. (858) 573-0315