ComputorEdge™ Online — 04/17/09

This issue: PDF Files, Reading and Writing

PDF files are becoming the universal way to send and receive documents. How can you make the most of this tool?

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Digital Dave

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

A reader's screensaver is no longer working—does he even need it?; a reader wants to access his desktop's printer from a Wi-Fi-connected laptop; a reader wonders whether the folks at Microsoft can count.

Dear Digital Dave,

A few weeks ago, my screensaver stopped working for no apparent reason. I cannot recall adding or changing any programs that may have affected it. Is there a way of getting it back in operation, or do I really need it? I always remember reading about possible screen burn if the screen doesn't change. Is that still the case with the new monitors?

I have Windows Vista and have attempted to change the screensaver to a different setting and time before activation, but so far no luck. If I'm going to be away from my computer for any length of time, I turn off my monitor. Does turning it off and on, say three or four times a day, affect it in any way? Any ideas on how to correct this problem?
Paul Maruszak
Miesau, Germany

Dear Paul,

It does sound like something is interfering with your screensaver activating. One of the common problems with Vista and screensavers is the effect of some wireless keyboards and mice. Apparently, the wireless receiver convinces the computer that there is continuous user input; therefore, the screensaver won't activate. This could also be caused by a program that is running in the background and sending similar messages to the computer.

Microsoft has recognized the problem and offers a support page solution (*support.microsoft.com/kb/913405*). If this is the problem, then it could also affect the activation of the power settings that will turn off your monitor and put your computer in standby. Either the workaround or the "Microsoft HID Non-User Input Data Filter" update should help.

On the plus side, you're right that monitor burn-in is not a problem with the new LCD monitors. However, they can develop a symptom called persistence that is caused by the crystals remaining in the same state for too long a period of time. This could be caused by taskbars and menus that never change. While similar to burn-in, persistence is not a permanent state unless the monitor is on for inordinately long periods of time. (Even then it's thought that the crystals may recover eventually.) Turning off the monitor when your computer is not in use should be more than enough to protect it from any persistent effects.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I have been spending more time working at home on a laptop, so I took the plunge and bought a

wireless router and set it up at home. I have my desktop computer hardwired into the router, and have absolutely no problems connecting my laptop.

How do I make the printer connected to my desktop accessible from the laptop? It seems like it should be easy, right?

The router is a D-Link, and it came with a network program with a limited lifespan unless I pay for it. Since the computer is running Vista (Home Basic), it seems a shame to buy a program to do what Vista should be able to do. I would like to set up everything in Vista, even though the laptop runs XP Pro.

Any advice will be greatly appreciated.
Michael Bock
Oceanside, Calif.

Dear Michael,

You're right! You should be able to use the printer attached to the Vista computer over the wireless network. I do it all of the time.

First, you should ensure that both computers are on the same network. In your network configuration, make sure that you're using the same network name for both computers. You should be able to see the computers in the Network portion of Windows Explorer on each computer.

Second, you need to share the printer on the Vista machine. That can be done by selecting Printers either from the Start Menu or Printer from the Control Panel. Right-click on the Printer icon and select Run as administrator/Sharing. You will see a window similar to Figure 1.
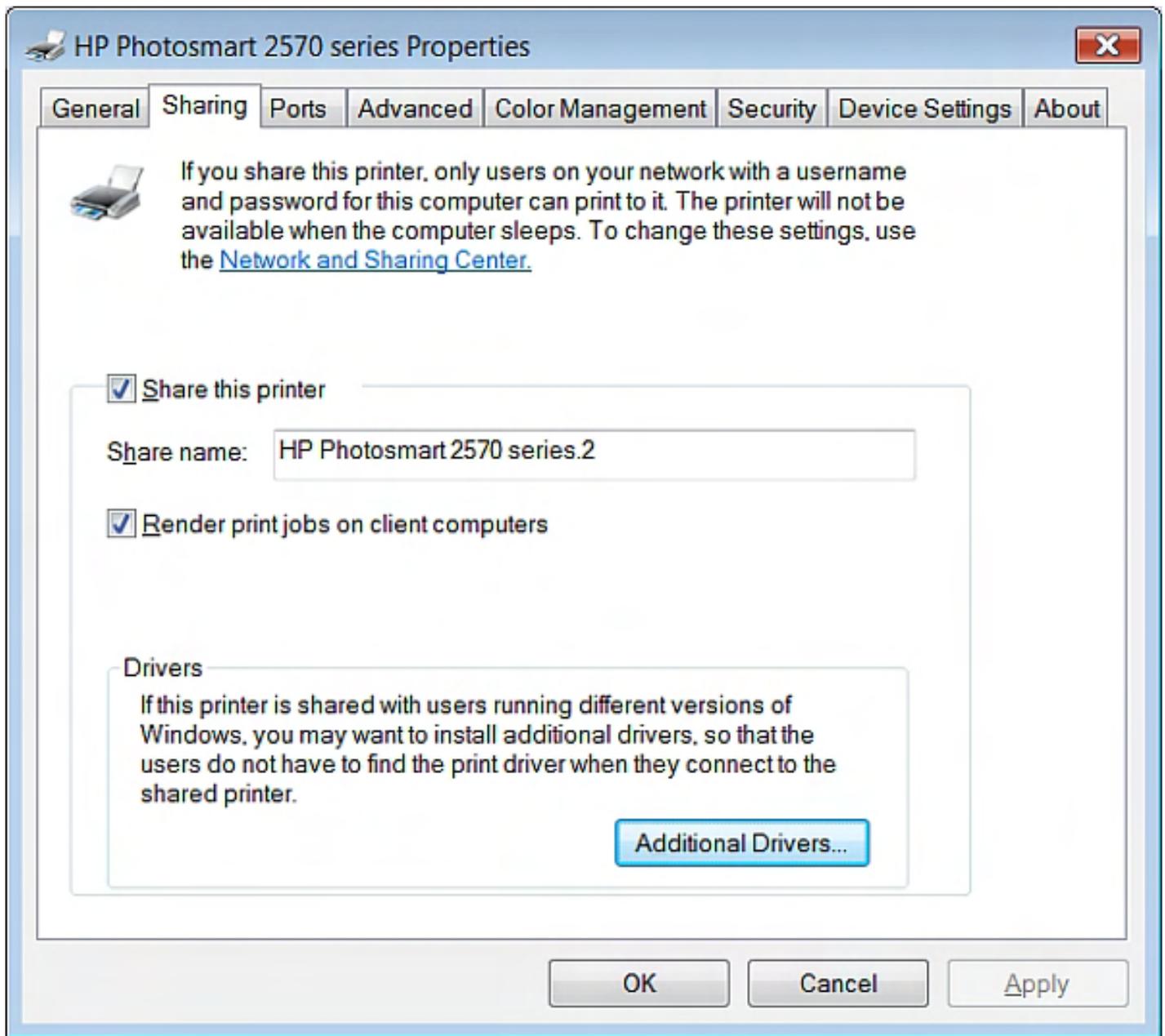
Figure 1. Sharing printers in Windows Vista.

Make the appropriate selections. If you have not used the printer with an XP computer before, it's possible that you may need to install additional drivers. In most cases, this shouldn't be necessary.

Once you've shared the printer on the Vista computer, you will need to add the printer to your XP laptop as an option. Open Printers on your XP (Start Menu or Control Panel) and select "Add a printer." You should be able to browse the network for printers and select the one connected to the Vista computer. In most cases, this should do the job.

Of course, something will act weird and make it all more difficult. This is common with Vista networking. If it doesn't work right away, try walking away and returning in a couple of hours. It may just magically work the next time you try it.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

It seems to me that Redmond can't count. Starting from the beginning, Windows 1.x, 2.x, 3.x, Windows 95 (should be 4.x), Windows 98 (should be 5.x), Windows Me (should be 6.x), Windows XP (should be 7.x), Windows Vista (should be 8.x), and now Windows 7 (should be 9).

I'm not getting into whether versions should *have been released when they were released (Vista—not ready), or should have been scrapped totally (Me—don't need to say more), I count eight versions of Windows, including the current.*

Usually software developers bump numbers up, not down. Am I incorrect in my evaluation?
Christopher Wadman
Spring Valley, Calif.

Dear Christopher,

Most likely, you are literally correct, although I've had trouble keeping up myself. However, Microsoft has sidestepped this argument by saying that 7 is not a version number at all. Much like Mickey Mantle's uniform number 7, it is merely an identifying label. It is not 7.0, and there will be no 7.1 or 7.0.1.

Over the years, Windows has always had an identity crisis. Originally, Windows came in version numbers (3.0), then it was years (95 and 98), then letters (Me, XP), then Vista. I believe that Microsoft settled for 7 out of frustration. After all, 7 is a lucky number.

Digital Dave

A Look at Adobe Acrobat

"Worth the money for file manipulation." by Jack Dunning

> If you need to manipulate PDF files regularly, there is no better program than Adobe Acrobat — despite its hefty price tag.

When we start talking about PDF (Portable Document Format) (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pdf*) files, we think about Adobe Systems, the company that created the format, and its Adobe Reader (the free PDF file reader) and Acrobat (Adobe's PDF file-creation and manipulation program). One of the first features we notice about Acrobat is its hefty price ($299 for the standard version), then we start talking about the alternative PDF file-creation programs. For the average computer user, Acrobat's price alone is reason enough to use one of the other free or low-cost programs. However, if you need to manipulate PDF files regularly, I have not seen a better program than Adobe Acrobat (*www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/*).

I use Adobe Acrobat Professional almost on a daily basis. I don't use all of its many features, but I've become very familiar with its capabilities. I must admit that I still use version 8.1.4. I haven't upgraded to version 9, because I haven't seen any compelling reason to change. At this point, version 8 does everything I need. (As far as I can tell, the major change in version 9 was incorporating Flash video graphics—which I don't use. If someone knows of a reason for me to upgrade, please let me know.)

To understand the usefulness of Acrobat, you need to know that it is not a graphic design program. It is not a tool of creativity for producing artwork. Acrobat is a PDF file-manipulation program. While it does include some features that allow for a minimal amount of editing of files, its primary purpose is to create PDF files from other types of documents. If you're planning to produce documents from scratch, then you will need a separate page-design program, whether for artwork, desktop publishing, Web design or a simple word processor. Adobe's desktop publishing design program is called InDesign (*www.adobe.com/products/ indesign/*); for Web page design, it's Dreamweaver (*www.adobe.com/products/dreamweaver/*). Other than the PDF files I create for *ComputorEdge* archives and sponsors, I use Acrobat in conjunction with a couple of other programs primarily for graphic manipulation.

The primary work screen of Acrobat looks similar to that of Adobe Reader, except that there are more items than the menu bars across the top of the window (see Figure 1). These items give a good indication of how Acrobat is used. Create PDF and Export are two of the functions that I use most.
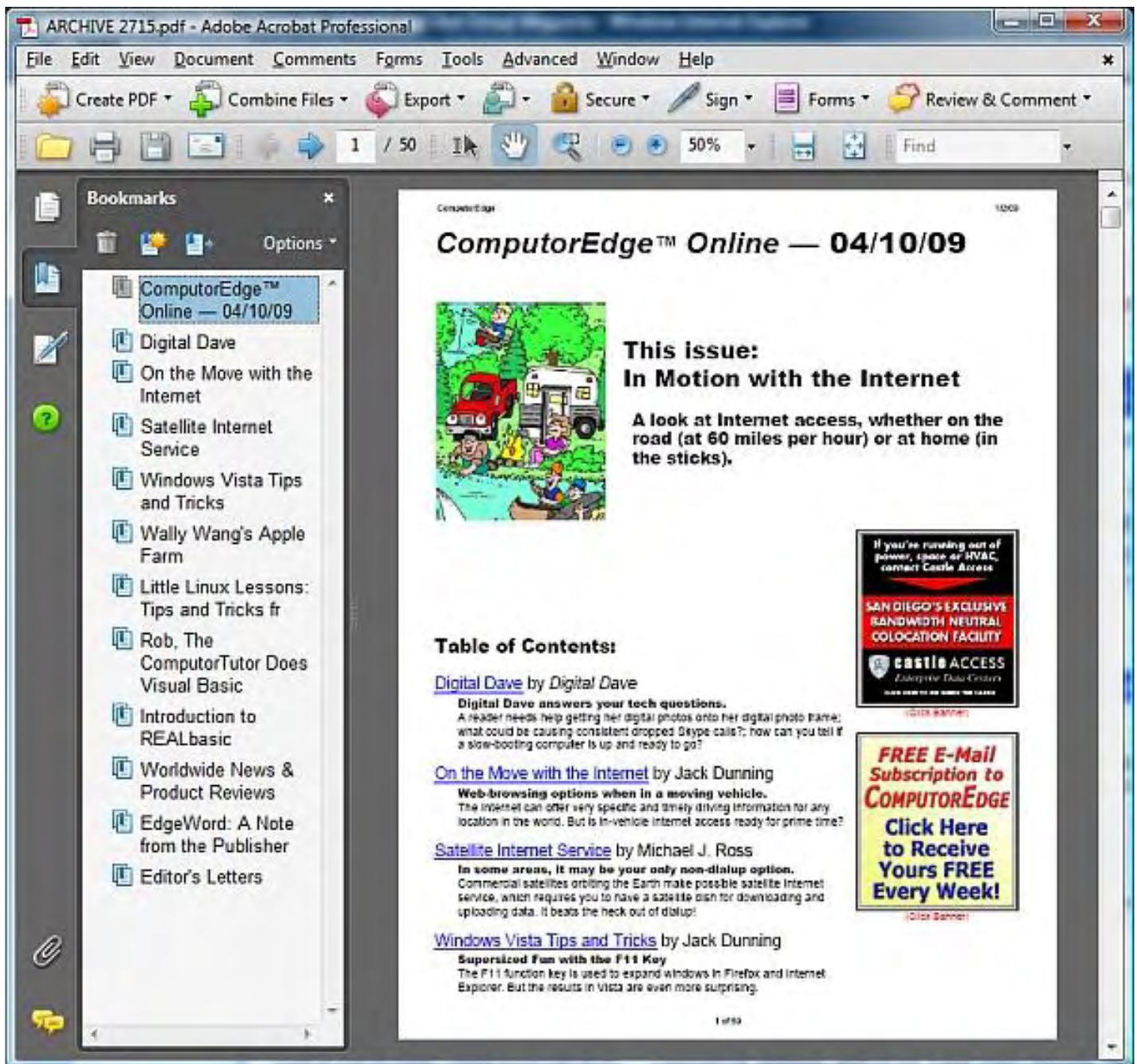
Figure 1. Adobe Acrobat screen showing ComputorEdge archive file made from a generated Web page.

A PDF can be created from one file, a group of selected files, a Web page, a scanner or a clipboard image. The files do not all need to be of the same type. Most graphic formats, Web formats, Microsoft Office formats (DOC, XLS, PPT, etc.), Adobe's own InDesign format and a few others are supported. Rather than creating individual PDF files from the Print menu in other programs, Acrobat is capable of pulling together files from various formats into one PDF.

Adding Editing Comments

Although I can see tremendous value in them for certain applications, there are a few features in Acrobat that

I have used only sparingly. The first is the ability to attach editorial comments to documents before returning them to the creator (see Figure 2). Comments is a set of tools that make it possible to review and remark on a document without actually changing the original—which is usually controlled by, and remains with, the originator.

Figure 2. PDF file with comments added and showing Comments & Markup toolbar.

If a document needs to be reviewed by a number of people, then it could be sent in a serial fashion to each reviewer for comment. When the first is finished, the PDF file with comments would be sent to the next person for further review. Eventually, the document is returned to the originator for final incorporation of all the comments. As you can see by the Comments & Markup toolbar and the scratching on the image in Figure 2, there are many ways to add comments to a document.

Making Forms

The one feature of Adobe Acrobat that does allow for some level of design is the forms creator. When a new form is created, a program called Adobe LiveCycle Designer loads (included in the Professional and Profession Extended versions), shown in Figure 3.
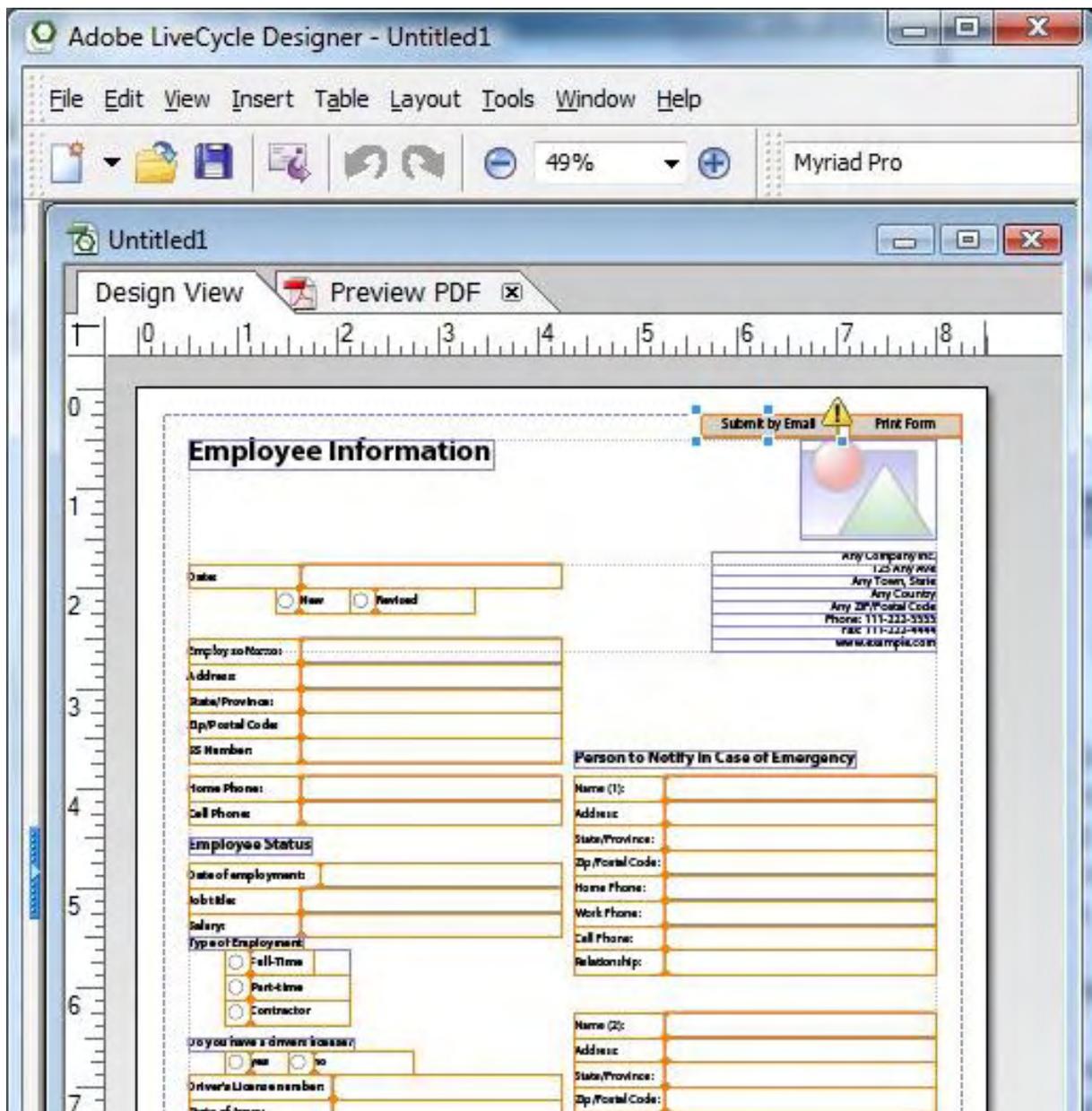
Figure 3. LiveCycle Designer for creating interactive PDF forms.

The purpose of LiveCycle Designer is to create interactive PDF forms that can be filled in on any computer or on the Web using the PDF Reader, then printed or saved for e-mailing. There are numerous templates and sample forms for use with LiveCycle.

Optical Character Recognition

I tested the optical character recognition on a scanned document, and it did an excellent job of converting the image into text. I was able to export the text to a Word document or a text file. It seems that if you had a great deal of text that needed to be scanned and converted—say from an old book—then, as long as the font isn't too unusual, Acrobat should be able to do the job.

An Example of Acrobat Tricks

Every week a PDF file of the entire issue of *ComputorEdge* is created for those people who like to download the week's editorial content. Once downloaded, individual articles (or the entire issue) can be printed for reading when away from a computer and/or the Internet. Creating this PDF is a process that could be quite time consuming and tedious without a program such as Acrobat. In fact, it was the need to create this weekly archive that was my primary motivation for purchasing Acrobat. Not only does Acrobat handle it fairly well, but when combined with the database capabilities of the Web site, it takes very little time.

While there are a number of ways to create PDF files with Acrobat, I decided to use the "Create PDF from Web page..." feature. The content already existed on the Web, so making the archive from the Web only made sense.

First, I wrote a program in the language used on the Web site that combines all of the editorial for a current issue of *ComputorEdge*, including the Table of Contents, from the Web database into a single Web page. As you may have guessed, it is a very long Web page. I almost never load the page itself into a browser, since its only purpose is to create the archive PDF. Once the program was written, I only needed to ensure that all editing was completed before running the program. Creating the PDF content Web page is the last thing done on the Thursday before the issue is published to the Web.

The next step is as simple as opening Adobe Acrobat, selecting "Create PDF from Web page...," then entering the URL of the combined Web page. Acrobat takes 20 to 30 seconds to create the PDF while it reads in all the articles from the Web, including each of the graphics that come from an alternate location.

Note: This process was a little more iffy when I was running it on a slower Windows XP machine. I think that the processor couldn't keep up with the downloading graphics, and it would occasionally omit some of them. Since moving to a dual-processor Vista machine, I haven't had a problem.

At this point, the PDF could be posted with all the content available. However, since Acrobat is making allowances for different graphics and various article lengths, a few strange thing may happen. To a limited extent (within the editing capabilities of Acrobat), I attempt to correct obvious problems. I move window lines and delete the extra pages. Occasionally, a graphic or cartoon will be forced to split between two pages. This situation is almost impossible to satisfactorily correct in Acrobat, so I usually just live with it. (Or I should say, whoever downloads the PDF lives with it.)

To make it easy for readers to navigate the issue, I add a navigation menu (Bookmarks) created from structure embedded in the program-generated Web page. This creation of "New Bookmarks from Structure..." is another feature that allows the use of the HTML tags to add a navigation menu. In this case, I used the Document and H3 tags since they were programmed with the appropriate titles for the articles (see Figure 4).
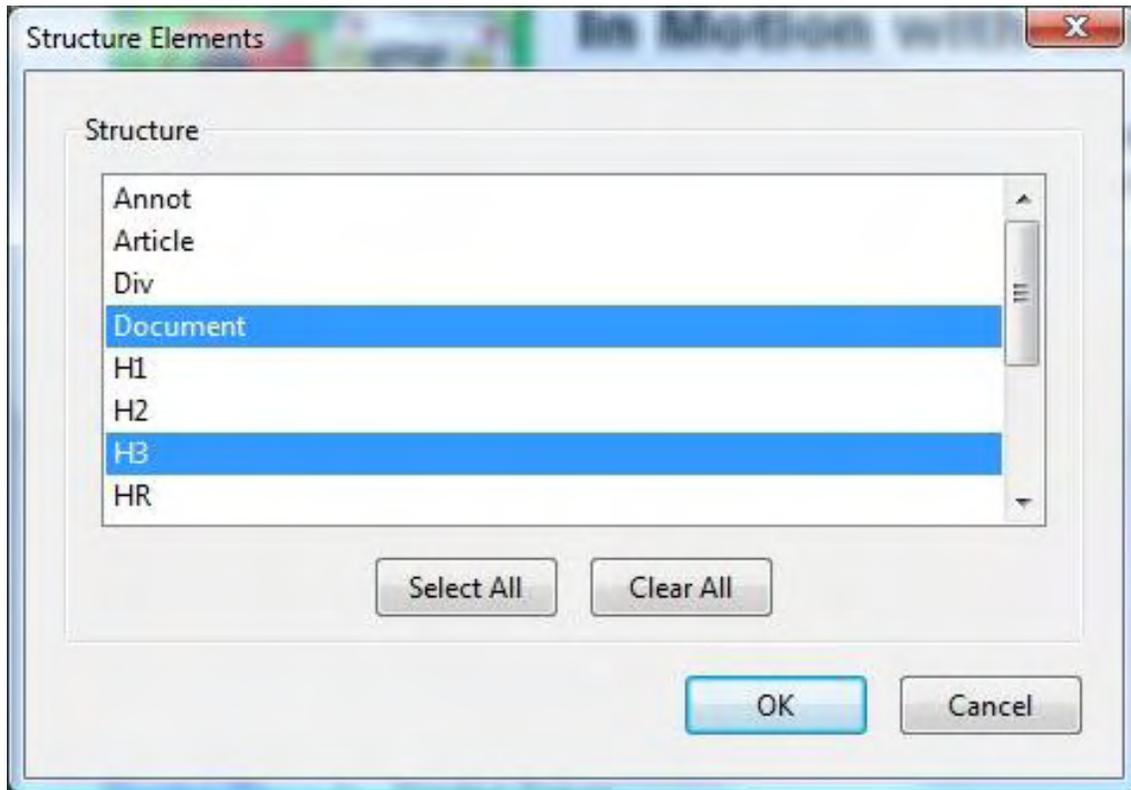
Figure 4. The Document and H3 tags are used to create bookmarks.

It should be noted that the jumps in the Table of Contents pages and the "Return to Table of Contents" jumps at the top of each article look and work in the same manner as they would in the generated Web page. If set to do so, Acrobat automatically makes the links hot in the PDF. The banner ads on the Table of Contents page are also hot-linked in the PDF directly to the sponsor's Web site.

The last step before uploading is adding the headers and page numbers to each page. This is done with a "Saved Setting" that makes them uniform from week to week.

There is much more to Adobe Acrobat. I feel that in my use, I have only scratched the surface. Most of the advertising on *ComputorEdge* is submitted as PDF files. Acrobat is one of the tools used to process the advertising. Many of the valuable capabilities in Acrobat, I haven't seen in the other PDF-creation programs. However, most people don't need much more than the ability to print to a PDF file-a feature that comes with all of the free and low-cost programs. It's only in those situations where heavy file manipulation is required that a power program like Adobe Acrobat is needed. At that time, it is well worth the extra money.

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*

PDF-Creation Programs

"Free or low-cost alternatives to Adobe Acrobat." by Michael J. Ross

A look at some of the better free or low-cost tools that you can use for generating your own PDF documents, without having to purchase Acrobat.

In the early days of the Web, there were even fewer data-formatting and presentation standards than there are today. Consequently, a Web page could look different depending upon the user's Web browser, operating system, screen resolution, or image-display limitations (or even no images at all, such as in the text-only browser Lynx (*lynx.isc.org/*)). Content publishers struggled to figure out a way to format documents so that their appearance would be consistent for all people viewing those documents. This was especially problematic for businesses and other organizations that, for legal and commercial reasons, must have complete assurance that customers are seeing these documents exactly as intended—particularly the ones that constitute agreements, and need to be printed and signed.

Several document formats were developed, but one eventually emerged as the winner: Portable Document Format (PDF), which was conceived by Adobe Systems (*www.adobe.com/*) in 1993. Every PDF file is a self-contained document that contains all of the text, images and vector graphics, as well as positioning, indexing, text font and other information that specifies the exact appearance of all elements in the document. Adobe also developed a browser plug-in, Adobe Reader (*get.adobe.com/reader/*), which made it possible for a browser to display a PDF file, just as well as a dedicated PDF desktop application would.

Initially, PDF documents were created by organizations that had the budgets for purchasing Adobe Acrobat (*www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/*), which is an application for creating such documents, and at the time was the only one available. (For most of its history, PDF has been a proprietary format, and was released as an open standard by Adobe only in July 2008, and later made an ISO standard.) But as more people began using the Internet for publishing and e-mailing documents, and the PDF standard became ubiquitous, the need arose for individuals to be able to create PDF files themselves.

By the way, people are sometimes confused by the two Adobe products. So, just to clarify, Reader is not a writer: It cannot be used to create new PDF documents, which is the purpose of Adobe Acrobat. Yet that is not to say that Adobe Reader is lacking in capabilities; it can display, search, digitally sign and print PDF documents.

In this article, we will consider some of the better free or low-cost tools that you can use for generating your own PDF documents, without having to purchase Acrobat.

PDF by Printing

When most people think about the phrase "printing a document" from an application, such as Microsoft Word, they immediately think of paper being fed through a printer, and emerging as a stack of pages marked with ink. They assume that Word is sending the data directly to the printer itself. Actually, it is a multistep process, and the first of the two major steps is that Word is sending the data to a printer-specific device driver, which is a program on the PC that knows how to receive data like that and send it to the printer properly. The device driver sees that information before it has even come close to the printer itself.

This multistep process opens up some terrific possibilities for redirecting the output of an

"This customer wants to know if we can put a pizza in a PDF file and deliver it via e-mail."

application to a different destination—one never intended when that application was first created. Programmers can develop a device driver that isn't even associated with a physical device (such as a printer), but instead does something completely different with the data it receives, such as writing it to a specially formatted file on the hard drive. That is precisely how PDF files can be easily created from word processing programs such as Word. In fact, anyone who has learned how to generate PDF documents usually learns this method first.

Microsoft Word does not have a built-in way of taking a document in Word format and saving it as a PDF file. Fortunately, several programs have been created over the years, each of which creates a virtual PDF printer in Windows' list of available printers. As soon as you have installed one of these utility programs, you will see the new entry in the printers that Word can send the document to. When you "print" a document to that PDF printer, Word prompts you for a filename and location, and then the virtual printer generates a PDF file in that location.

CutePDF Writer (*www.cutepdf.com/*) is a free and lean PDF-creation program, not infected with any advertising, spyware or nagging pop-ups. It also does not write any watermarks onto PDF documents created. It requires you to download and install a separate PostScript print language interpreter, such as Ghostscript (*www.ghostscript.com/*), but those are free as well. Granted, like all of the freeware PDF utilities mentioned here, CutePDF Writer does not offer all of the configuration options, font choices and security features found in Adobe Acrobat. But most computer users don't need any of that, and simply want to create a straightforward PDF file from an existing Word document.

doPDF (*www.dopdf.com/*) is quite similar to CutePDF Writer in terms of capabilities and lack of fee, bloat and annoying nag dialog boxes. Even better, it does not require Ghostscript or any other third-party programs. It also does not require Microsoft .NET, unlike some other PDF converter programs—thus significantly reducing the size of the installation program and the amount of disk space consumed. You can set the resolution to anything from 72 dpi (dots per inch) to 2400 dpi. You can set a default page size (including Letter, Legal, A4, A5, A6) or define your own custom page size. Users whose primary language is not English can choose a different language to be used for the user interface, from a list of 20 languages.

If basic PDF generation is not sufficient for your needs, and you are willing to pay some money for extra features, then consider deskPDF (*www.docudesk.com/*), which is shareware, with a $30 license. It includes security features designed to prevent unauthorized copying, editing or printing. It supports watermarks, predefined profiles, PDF quality levels, international page sizes, international graphics software requirements and one-click e-mailing of the PDF document. It has a table of contents capability, and can handle Word hyperlinks. As of this writing, the company's home page is having technical problems, but the setup program (*download.deskpdf.com/deskPDF25Pro-Setup.exe*) can be downloaded directly.

These are just a few of the programs out there that take the approach of using a virtual PDF printer for making it easy to create PDF files from existing documents in other formats. But what if, for whatever reason, you wish to create a PDF document from scratch?

PDF by Editing

PDFedit (*pdfedit.petricek.net/index_e.html*) is a free and open-source editor for modifying PDF documents, without sending them to a virtual printer. This program is able to analyze a PDF document and decompose it into its native hierarchical structure, allowing the user to modify any aspect of it. The program's documentation does not appear to explicitly state that you can create a PDF document from scratch, but it seems to logically follow from the program's capabilities.

Modifications can be made using its built-in graphical user interface (GUI) or on the command line, for users who prefer that over the GUI or who wish to place PDFedit commands into some sort of script to be run later programmatically.

Unfortunately, PDFedit is designed for use on the Linux operating system; prebuilt packages are available only for four different Linux distributions (Debian, Gentoo, NetBSD and openSUSE). Yet as an open-source product, its source code can be downloaded and compiled into an executable by anyone who feels up to the challenge of, on a Windows machine, compiling C++ code requiring four different libraries. It is unfortunate that the developers who created PDFedit do not appear to have any interest in supporting Windows.

For anyone who is using Linux on one of their computers and would like to try PDFedit, be sure to check out the article on HowtoForge (*www.howtoforge.com/*), titled "PDFedit On Ubuntu Feisty Fawn." (*www. howtoforge.com/editing_pdf_files_pdfedit_ubuntu_feisty*) It explains the process, step-by-step, and is loaded with screenshots.

If any reader is aware of a free or shareware PDF-editing application that runs on Windows without having to be compiled from source code, please let us know.
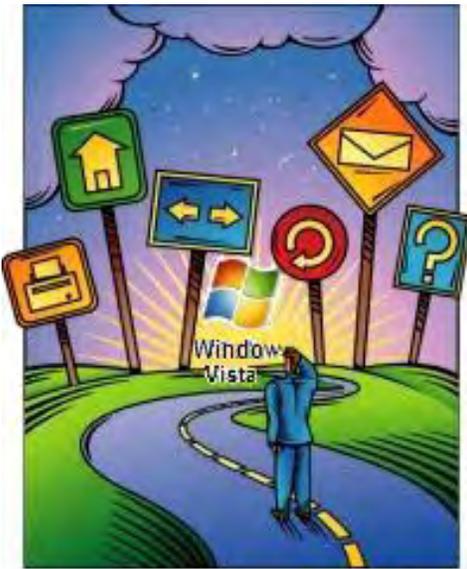

Michael J. Ross is a Web developer (*www.ross.ws*), writer, and freelance editor. He creates Web sites that help entrepreneurs turn their ideas into profitable online businesses.

Windows Vista Tips and Tricks

"Windows Briefcase for Taking Your Work to Another Computer" by Jack Dunning

> Windows Briefcase is a file-synchronization system that is helpful not only for Vista, but for all versions of Windows since 95.

First introduced with Windows 95, Windows Briefcase is a file-synchronization system for making files portable for use on other computers. Since that time, we have seen numerous other ways of synchronizing files introduced both for Windows and via third-party efforts, such as online file backup and flash drive synchronization programs. In Windows Vista, you might think that the Sync Center would replace Briefcase, except that the Synchronize Network Folders version is included only with the Business and Ultimate versions of Vista, leaving the Home version out in the cold.

If you are looking for a quick-and-dirty way to work with specific files on a different network computer, or you want to take the files with you for further work elsewhere, then Briefcase is the way to go. (If you have the Business or Ultimate version, then you can test the Sync Center, although Briefcase is still a good method for carrying files with you for use on another computer. For regular backup of your data, check out the Backup and Restore Center in Vista.)

To create a Briefcase, right-click on the target folder icon or an empty space in the folder, select New, then Briefcase. A special folder looking like a briefcase will be created, as shown in Figure 1. For all intents and purposes, the Briefcase folder will act like a regular folder. When you copy files into a Briefcase, the exact location of each file is secretly logged.
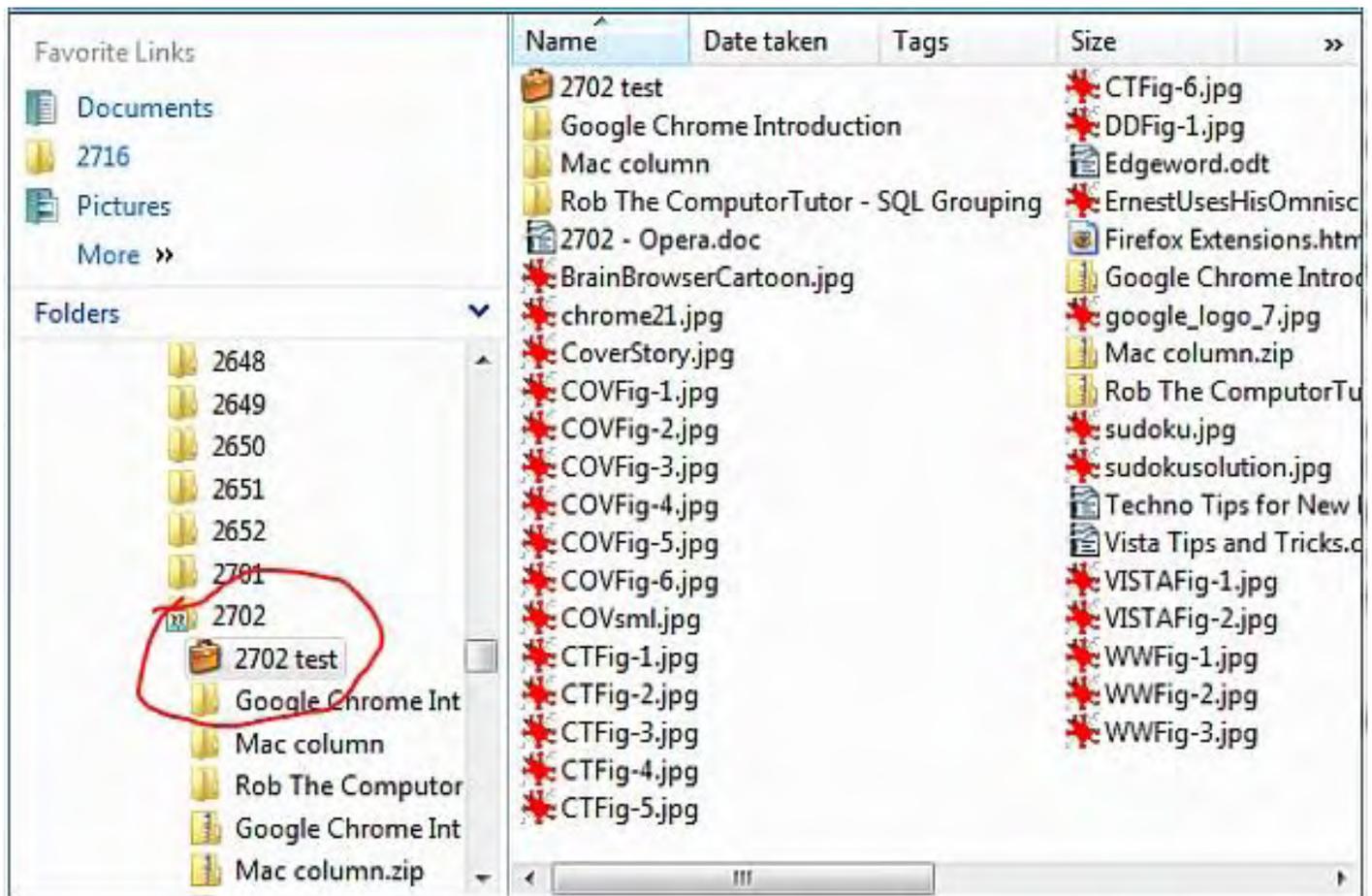
Figure 1. A Briefcase in Windows Vista.

Copy those files that you want to use elsewhere into the Briefcase. For use with another computer on the network, copy the filled Briefcase over to that computer. The little briefcase icon will disappear from the original folder and move to the folder on the other computer. Then you will be able to work with the files on either computer. When you want to sync the files, you right-click the Briefcase icon and select Update All from the menu. You will be given a dialog to determine which versions of the altered files you will save.

If you want to put the Briefcase on portable media (flash drive) for use on another computer, then copy the Briefcase to the flash drive. Again, the icon will move from your computer to the flash drive. Take the flash drive with you for use on the other computer(s), but don't copy the Briefcase or files to the new computer. Work with the files directly on the flash drive. When you return to the first computer, insert the media and use Update All to sync the files. (You can also update individual files by right-clicking and selecting Update for the particular file in the Briefcase.) The Briefcase icon appears only on the flash drive, as those files are linked directly to the original files that you copied from the folder into the briefcase—the originals remain in the primary folder. However, if you move any of the original files, the Briefcase file will not be able to find then.

I would recommend using Briefcase over manually copying files (click and drag). While you can effectively do the same thing by copying the target files manually to the flash drive, working with them on the new computer, then later copying them back to the original computer, Briefcase saves you needing to open folders both on the flash drive and the computer, then dragging the files, since the Briefcase has locked in where to sync each file. Plus, you can mix in many files from different locations into the same Briefcase— upon update, they will all sync back to their proper original location.

Once you've done it once or twice, it's remarkably simple to do. This isn't just a Vista tip, but one for all versions of Windows since 95.

Wally Wang's Apple Farm
"Working with PDF Files" by Wally Wang

If you just need to create a PDF file from an existing document, the Print command in every Mac program will do just fine. However, Acrobat Pro goes further. Also, everyone's expecting a radically new product from Apple by the end of this year; and a tip on downloading Apple's Mac-tips podcasts.

In the old days, PDF (Portable Document Format) files were something exotic. You needed special software to create PDF files, which typically fooled your computer into thinking it was sending data to a printer instead of trapping that data in a PDF file. To save PDF files, you had to buy special PDF-creation software.

Fortunately, with the Macintosh, this headache is gone for good. Within any program, choose File/Print. When the Print dialog pops up, click the PDF button in the lower-left corner, and you'll see various options for saving your data as a PDF file.
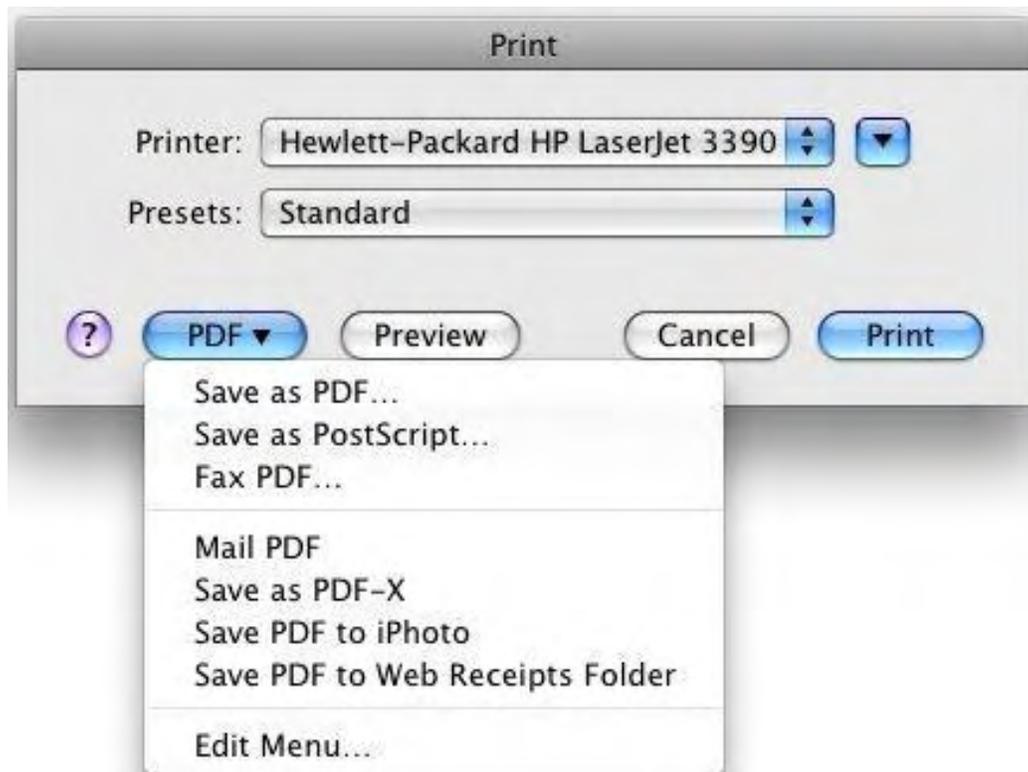
Figure 1. You can save any document as a PDF file through the Print dialog.

Having the built-in ability to save PDF files is handy, but the built-in Preview program can not only let you read PDF files, but it can also let you add or delete pages as well.

Deleting a page from a PDF file gives you last-second editing abilities. Instead of going back to your original document, deleting a page and then saving the entire document as a PDF file again, you can just remove the page you don't need directly out of the PDF file. Many times you may not even have the original document that created that PDF file, so using Preview may be your only way to edit a PDF file.
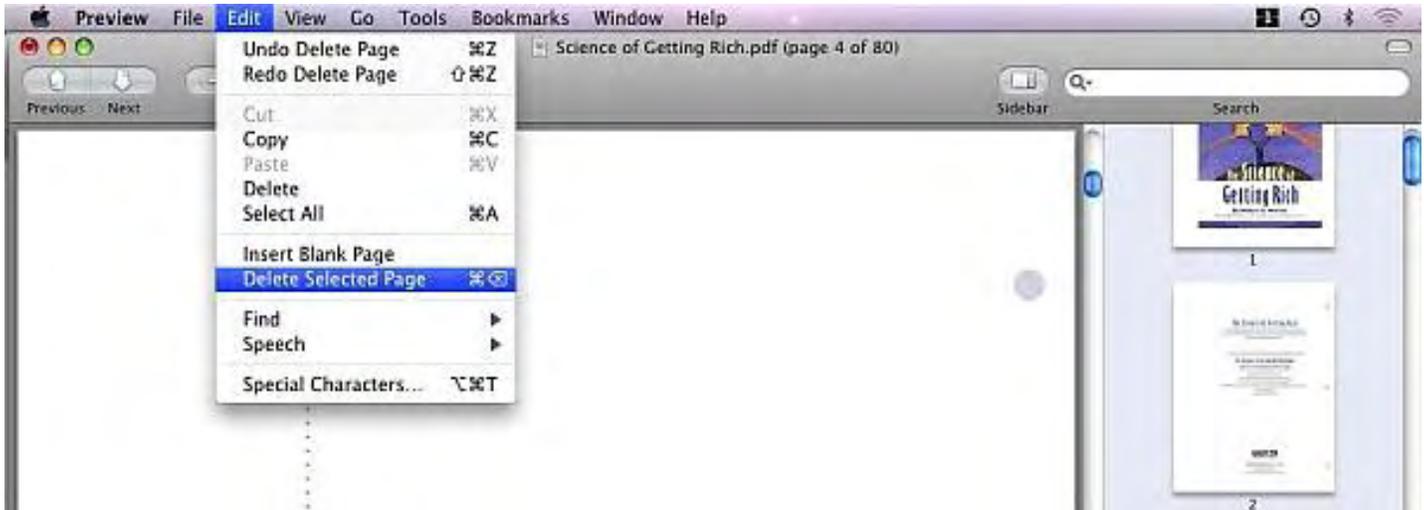

Figure 2. The Preview program gives you the ability to add or delete pages in a PDF file.

Adding a page to a PDF file is just as easy. Just open two PDF files in the Preview program and make them both display pages as thumbnail images in the sidebar. To do this, you'll need to click on an icon in the bottom-right corner of the Preview screen. When a pop-up menu appears, click Thumbnails.

Figure 3. How to display pages as thumbnail images in Preview's sidebar.

After Preview displays your PDF files as thumbnail images, you can drag and drop pages from one Preview

window (containing a PDF file) to another Preview window. Now you can edit PDF files quickly and easily without buying any special PDF-editing software.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

If you just need to print and edit PDF files occasionally, then the free Preview program found on every Macintosh should be all you need. However, if you want more flexibility creating and manipulating PDF files, there's no substitute for Adobe's Acrobat Pro ($449).

If you just need to create a PDF file from an existing document, the Print command in every Mac program will do just fine. However, Acrobat Pro goes further by letting you capture screens, windows or scanned images and turn them into PDF files as well.
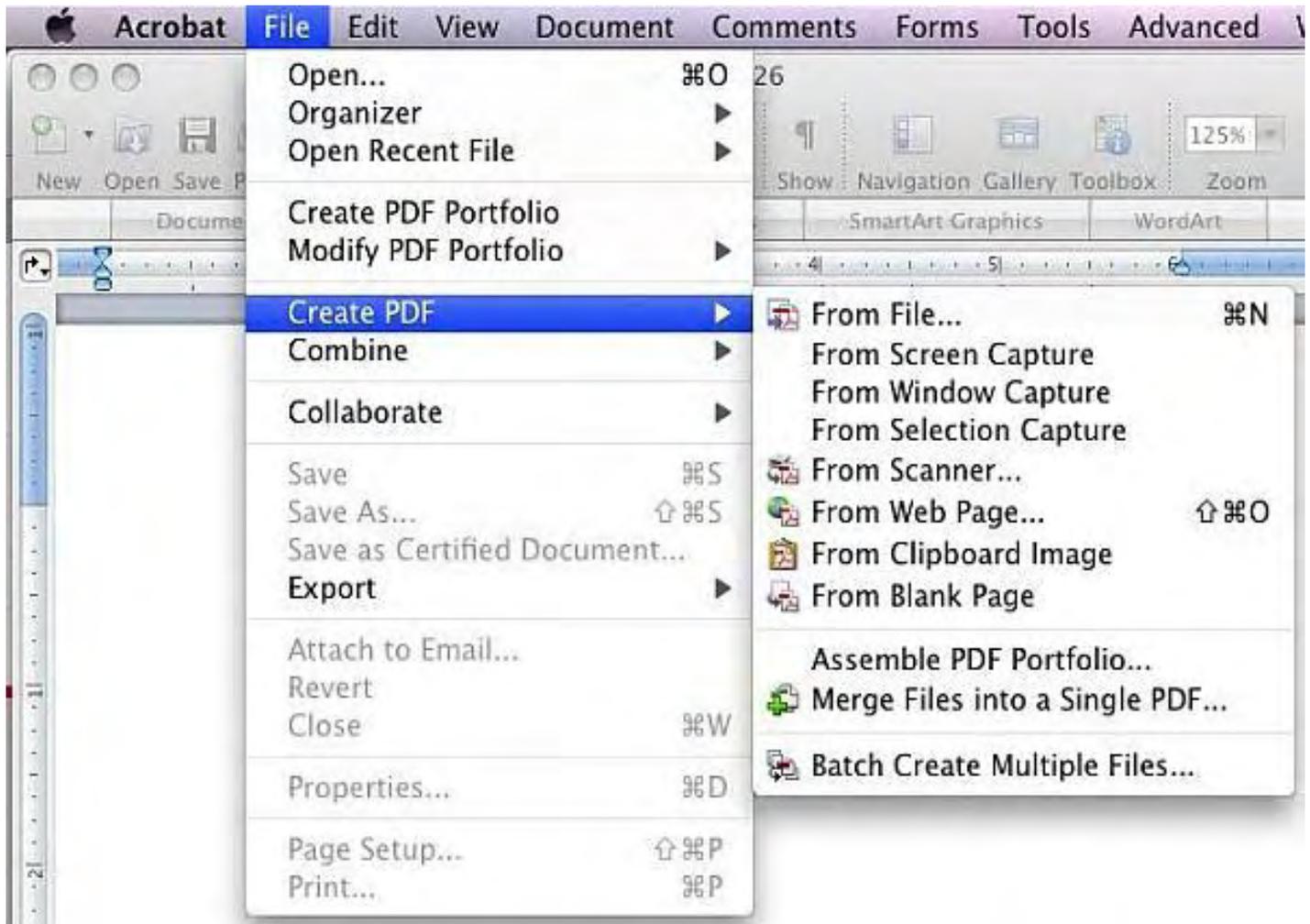

Figure 4. Acrobat Pro can create PDF files from a variety of sources.

Perhaps more remarkable is Acrobat Pro's ability to convert text, Excel spreadsheets, InDesign page-layout files and even graphic images into PDF form files that allow others to type information directly into the PDF file. Instead of just displaying information, PDF files can now act like simple database forms to store information from others.
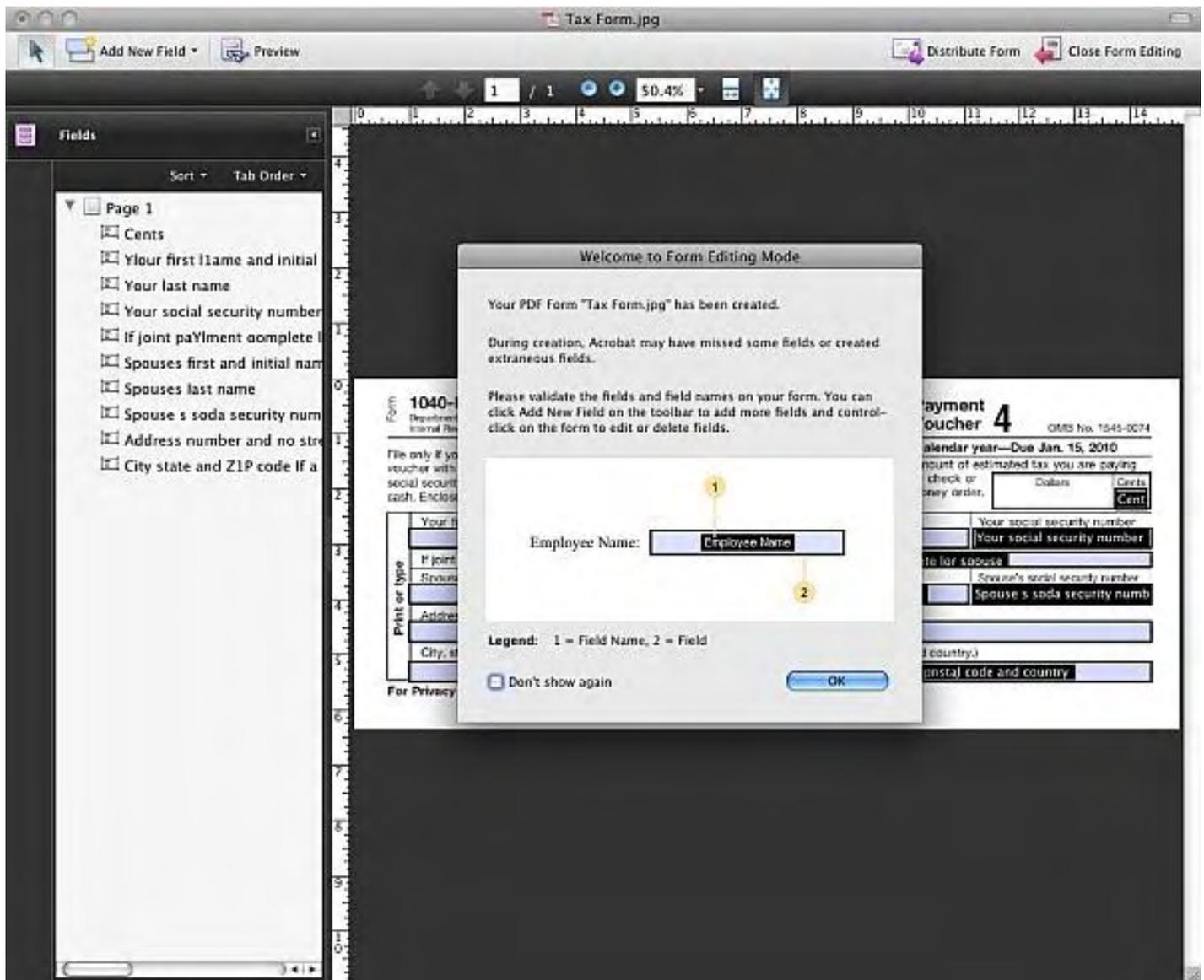
Figure 5. Acrobat Pro can create PDF forms to store data.

Not everyone needs the power of Acrobat Pro, but for those who do, there's no substitute. If you need to do more than just create and modify PDF files, you need Acrobat Pro.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Apple's stock has been steadily rising from $80 a share a few months ago to $110 (or even higher) today. That's because everyone's waiting for the new iPhone 3.0 to arrive by this summer, but there's also another product that Apple is working on, which involves 10-inch screens.

Some people think this could be Apple's version of a netbook, while others think it could be Apple's version of a tablet computer. Whatever it turns out to be, it's coming soon, and everyone's expecting a radically new product from Apple by the end of this year.

Amazingly, Apple continues to innovate and surprise everyone while other companies seem to be standing still. You have to wonder what makes Apple such an exciting company, and what makes other companies such dull places despite billion-dollar revenue streams and plenty of brainpower to tackle any project? Whatever the answer, the results are clear: Apple is currently driving the market, and everyone else is

waiting to see what the company will do next.

* * *

One easy way to keep up with all the hidden features buried in Mac OS X is to subscribe to Apple's free podcasts of Macintosh tips (*itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewPodcast?id=257243321*). Like most podcasts, Apple's tips let you view individual episodes or subscribe to receive the latest ones as they're made available.

Figure 6. Finding Apple's podcasts on iTunes.

Most of Apple's podcasts are about a minute or so in length, which lets you pick up the tips you want without wading through a lot of extra stuff you may not care about. If you have an iPhone, you can store these podcasts on your iPhone and view them whenever you have a free moment. Now you can learn about your Macintosh in short, bite-size chunks of information, direct from Apple.

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*.

Little Linux Lessons: Tips and Tricks from Users
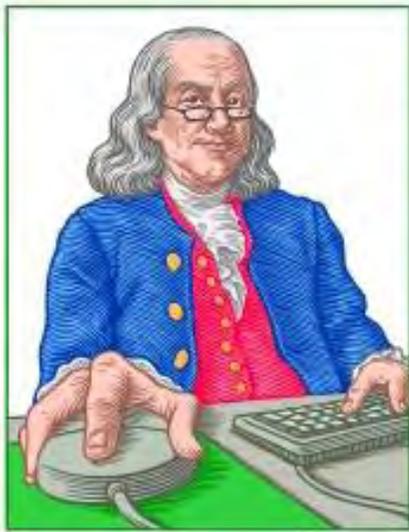
"Linux users share ideas and ask for help." by ComputorEdge Staff

A tip about the "top" command, which displays a list of the active processes in your computer and continuously updates it in real time.

What's Going On Inside Your Linux Computer?

When we have a Linux computer running, the nerd in us wants to know what's happening. Linux has a utility that helps us to take a real-time peek at the inner workings. The "top" command displays a list of the active processes and continuously updates in real-time. The screen can be exited by hitting the Q key.

```
$ top
```

```
last pid: 47393;  load averages:  0.00,  0.00,  0.00     up 47+17:29:44  13:11:50
63 processes:  2 running, 61 sleeping
CPU states:  0.0% user,  0.0% nice,  0.0% system,  0.0% interrupt,  0.0% idle
Mem: 67M Active, 3430M Inact, 204M Wired, 161M Cache, 112M Buf, 25M Free
Swap: 8192M Total, 216K Used, 8192M Free

  PID USERNAME     THR PRI NICE   SIZE    RES STATE    TIME   WCPU COMMAND
  965 root          1  96    0  1476K   996K select   7:33  0.00% master
  647 root          1  96    0  1392K   864K select   4:08  0.00% syslogd
  833 root          1  96    0  5620K  2208K select   3:28  0.00% nmbd
  975 postfix       1  96    0  2380K  1896K select   2:42  0.00% qmgr
  867 root          1  96    0  3048K  1492K select   1:42  0.00% ntpd
  813 root          1   8    0  6412K  3672K nanslp   1:32  0.00% httpd
 1087 postfix       1  96    0 13472K 12992K select   1:05  0.00% verify
55915 root          1  96    0 13272K  7872K select   1:00  0.00% smbd
 1048 root          1  96    0  1492K  1060K select   0:50  0.00% inetd
59765 postfix       1  96    0  1636K  1120K select   0:44  0.00% anvil
  718 bind          1  96    0  4120K  2548K select   0:14  0.00% named
  997 root              8    0  1440K   968K nanslp   0:10  0.00% cron
  887 root             96    0  1304K   712K select   0:07  0.00% usbd
  771 root          1  96    0  1476K   960K select   0:07  0.00% rpcbind
46709 user1         1  96    0  2556K  1484K RUN      0:04  0.00% top
  992 apache        1  20    0  8540K  5884K lockf    0:03  0.00% httpd
  995 apache        1  20    0  8540K  5872K lockf    0:03  0.00% httpd
 1079 user1         1   4    0  6416K  2400K select   0:03  0.00% sshd
44336 user1         1   4    0  6416K  2452K select   0:03  0.00% sshd
55035 apache        1  20    0  8540K  5884K lockf    0:03  0.00% httpd
  544 root          1   4    0   552K   296K select   0:03  0.00% devd
  837 root          1   4    0  9256K  3592K select   0:03  0.00% smbd
32554 apache        1  20    0  8540K  5896K lockf    0:03  0.00% httpd
32555 apache        1  20    0  7836K  5196K lockf    0:03  0.00% httpd
34386 apache        1  20    0  8540K  5876K lockf    0:03  0.00% httpd
```

Screen shown by the top command.

For more information on the top screen, plus parameters and commands to use in conjunction with it, type:

```
$ man top
```

You can also get more active information with the process status command (ps). The ps command gives a static list of active processes. By adding the -aux parameters (ps -aux), more processes will be listed than you will know what to do with. Now, all you have to do is figure out what it all means.

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 *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

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.

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

Rob, The ComputorTutor Does Visual Basic for Applications

"Duplicates and Updates" by Rob Spahitz

This week, we will continue our search for how to import data into our database and filter out information that is not relevant, including duplicate data.

Last week, we continued our search for how to import data into our database and filter out information that is not relevant, including duplicate data. You can find it at my Web site at *www.dogopoly.com/ce*, where you should right-click the file in your browser and save it to your local machine before opening that version.

Our goal last week was to import some telephone area codes into our table. We pulled them from a Web site, imported them into a temp table (tbl_Import_AreaCodeInfo), and noticed that the format wasn't quite right to load them. To make it work, we used a calculated field to make the data look the way we needed (i.e., removing parentheses, etc.), then performed the append into our Area Code table. However, we got a few errors that were not clearly identified to us.

First, if you look in our Queries area, you see a few queries we left behind from last week, as seen in Figure 1.
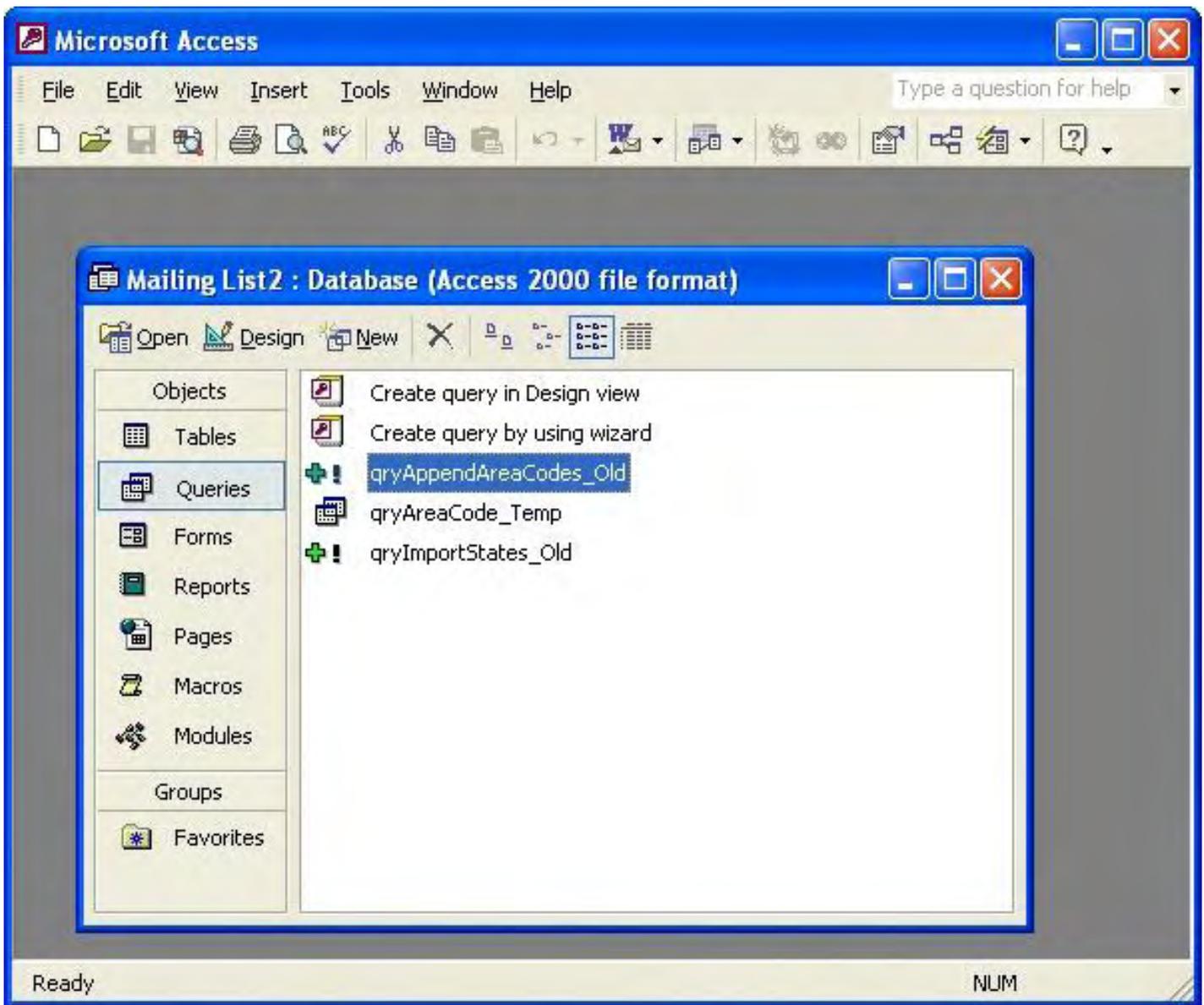
Figure 1. Mailing List queries.

We'd like to look at the qryAppendAreaCodes_Old query. However, since it's an append query, if you try to double-click on it, you are actually running the query, which will attempt to insert records into the table. Since the records were put in last week, let's just open the query. Either click on the Design link near the top left of the window, or right-click this query and select Design view. You should see something like Figure 2, which simply pulls information from our other Area Code query.
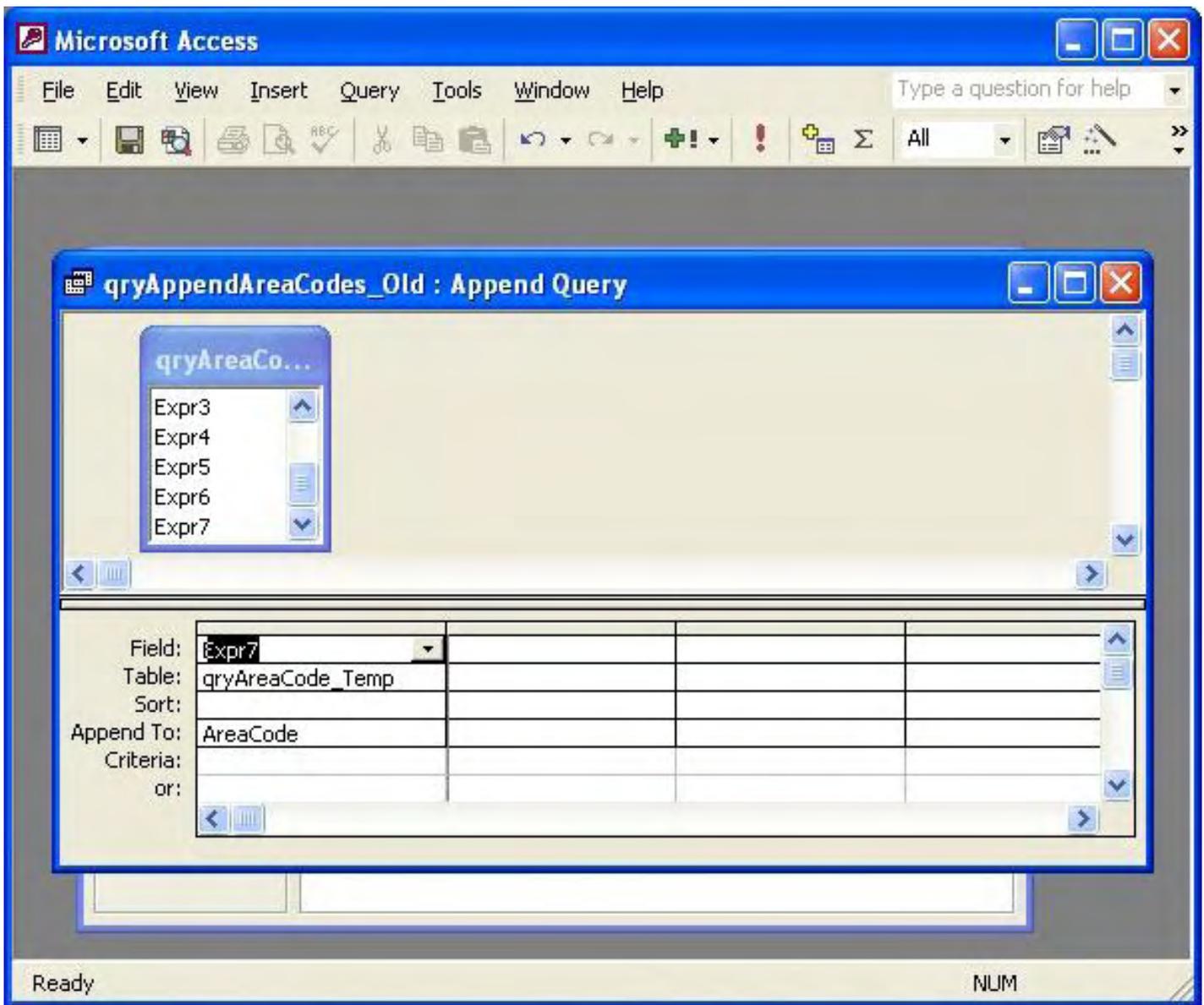
Figure 2. Area Code query.

View the query (menu View/Datasheet View), and you should see the six records that we attempted to import last week, as seen in Figure 3.
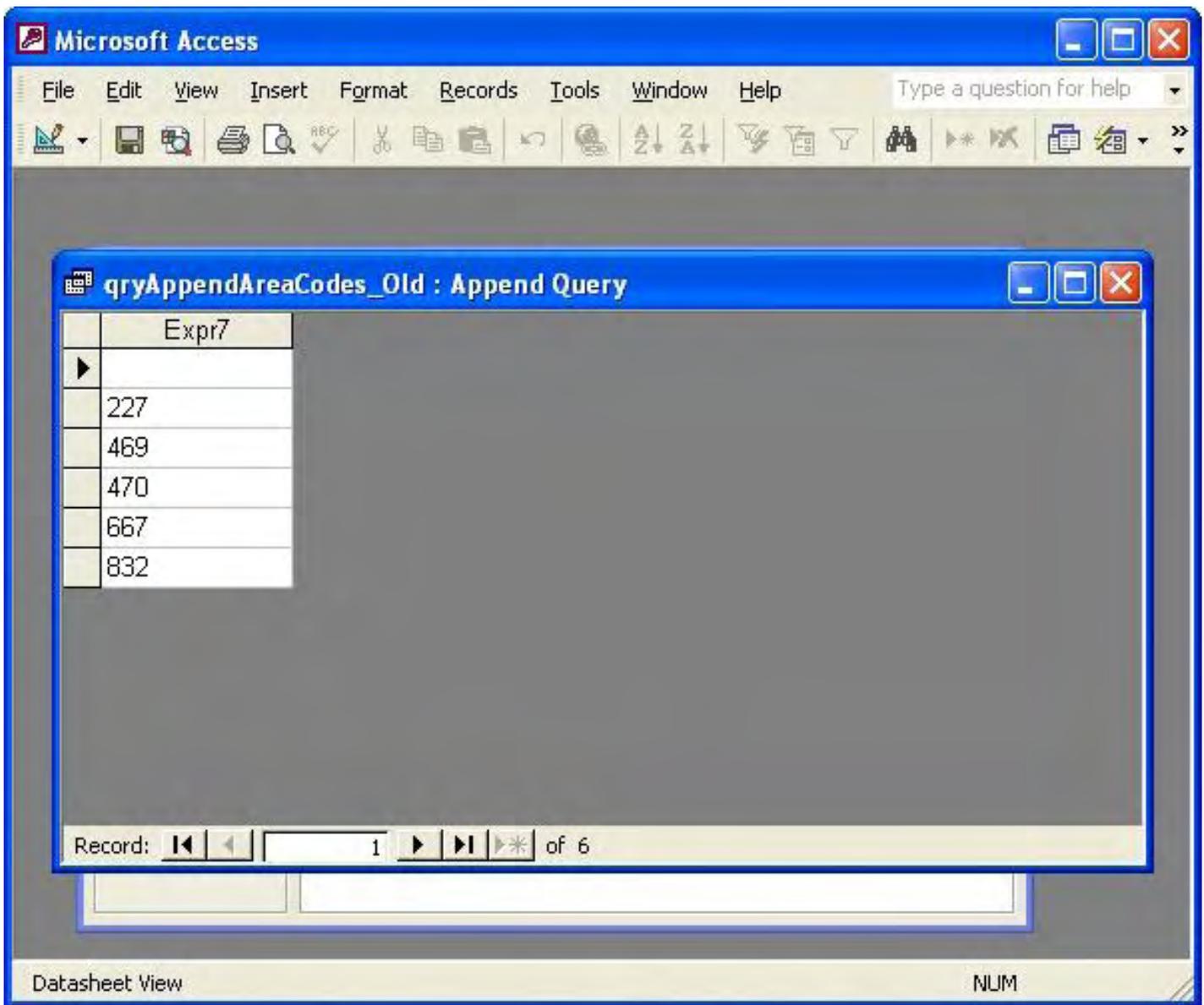
Figure 3. Area Code records.

When we ran the query last week, it told us that only four of the six records were being inserted. However, we have no idea which ones were inserted and which were rejected.

There are several ways that we can approach this. If we had canceled the query (and skipped inserting the records), we could have extended the query to filter out the problem items, but we weren't exactly sure which ones were causing the problem or why. Instead, let's see which records *were* inserted. We can do that by going to the Tables section and looking at the highest numbered primary key records (since we set up a separate autonumber primary key). The last four records are the ones that were inserted, as seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Area Codes previously inserted.
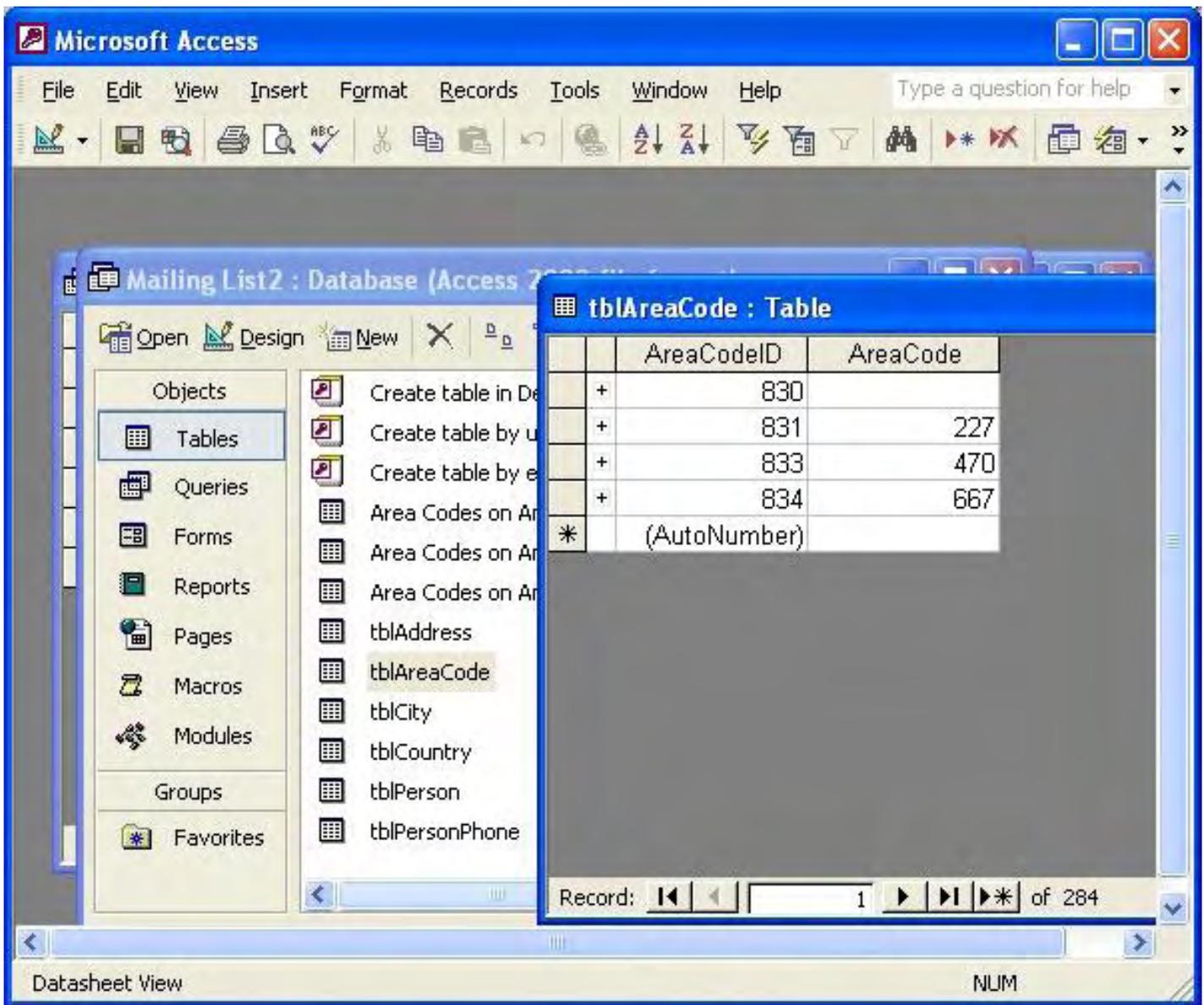
This shows us which records failed. Area codes 469 and 832 did not insert. One thought here is that these were previously inserted from one of our other insert queries. And if you look higher in the list, you'll see that this is exactly what happened. You could have also created a very simple query to see if they exist. To do that, open a new query and, in SQL view, enter this:

```
SELECT * FROM tblAreaCode
WHERE AreaCode in (469, 832)
```

Run this query, and you'll see that these two records already exist at area code ID numbers 599 and 715 (if you used my database). So sure enough, we had duplicate records, so our inserted data was fine.

If you wanted to improve our original queries, you could extend the inserts so that they insert all entries where the items in the list are not already in the table. However, this is complex enough that I'll leave it for another time.

One other thing: Since we inserted a blank area code, we know that this will never be valid. You could simply delete that record from the table, create an Access delete query (pulling all records from tblAreaCode showing Field AreaCode and setting the criteria to "Is Null"), or you could create a simple query to do that for you, like this:

```
DELETE * FROM tblAreaCode
WHERE AreaCode Is Null
```

Make sure you use the word "Is" rather than an equal sign, since databases cannot check for something "equal to" null. Null is just one of those strange things that sometimes give unusual results, so it is treated in a special way. Also, make sure you include the WHERE portion or it will attempt to delete all records, which is rarely the desired effect.

Oddly enough, when you run it, it may show you that there are two records to be deleted. If you view the query data, you'll see the two. Access shouldn't really allow multiple entries with the same value, but I suppose that Access feels that "Null" is an exception to the rule. Go ahead and delete both. And although you don't have to, I'll save this query as qryDeleteNullAreaCodes for future reference.

Updates

Switching to another topic, aside from inserts and deletes, you are likely to perform updates at some point. I've personally found Access's update tool a bit awkward to use, but let's struggle through and see what happens. Then I'll show you how to handle it in SQL, as we saw with the DELETE command above.

First, to make this simple, go to tblCountry and add a new entry for USA. Note the primary key, which is just 1 in my database. We'll use this number to update into the country field for all of the states.

OK, now create a new query that's going to use tblState. Since this will be an Update query, select all of the fields you want to update. In this case, it will be just the CountryID field. If you View Query now, you'll see just a column of blanks, since this field was never set up.

This should be an Update query, so switch it using menu Query/Update Query. You should see that query change to something like Figure 5.
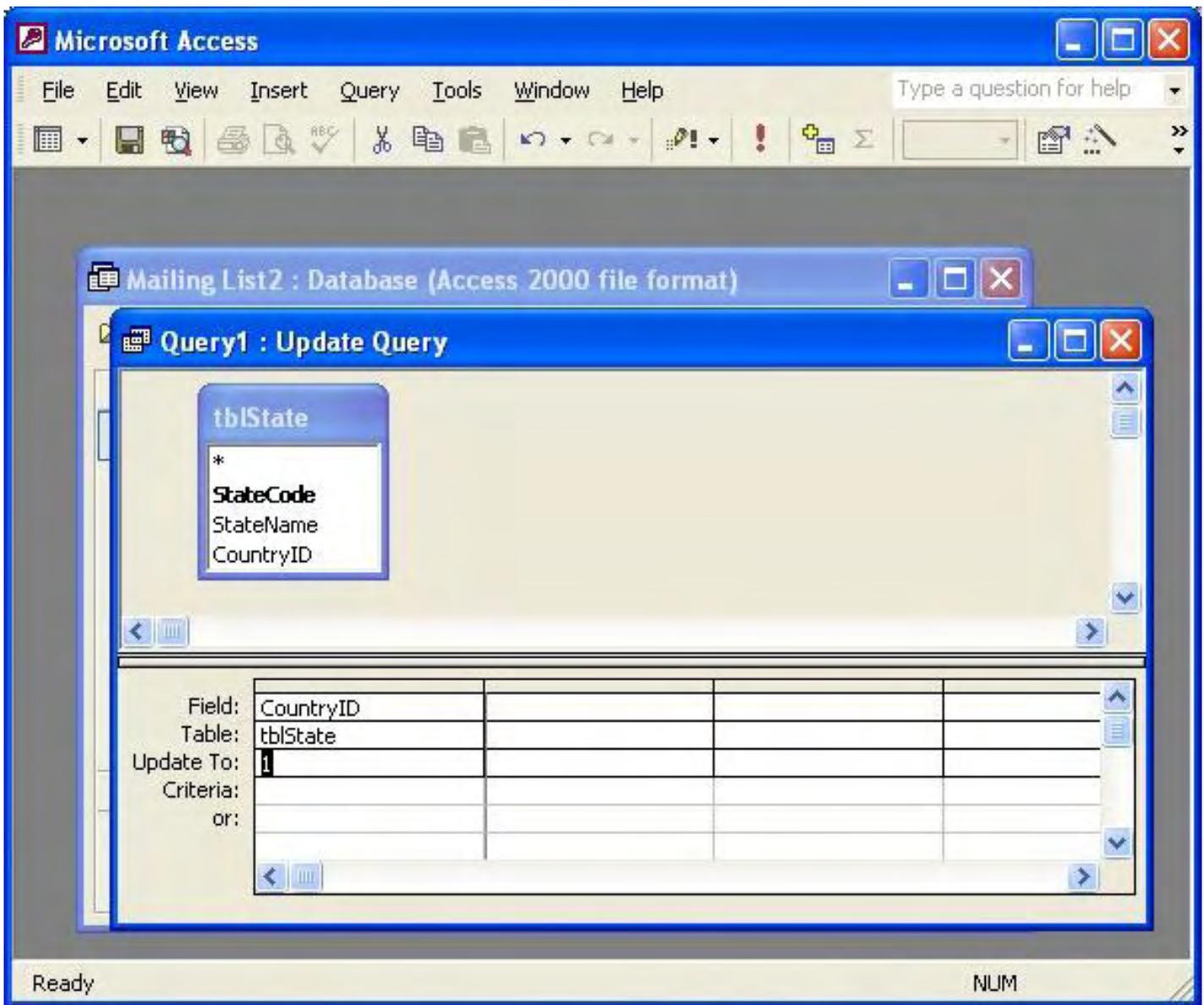
Figure 5. Update State country.

This update will change the query to match the CountryID that you got previously. Enter that number in the new "Update To." This new field will be the value that you want to push into the field. If you view the query, it will show you only the current value (null) and not the new value. This can be frustrating, since you may want to see what it will look like afterward. However, it's also nice to see what values will be removed. If, for example, you want to change all 1's with 2's, it would be important to see all of the 1's so you don't accidentally replace other numbers.

Anyway, you can see that you can also enter other Criteria as with other queries, but at this point we'll simply replace all. Go ahead and run the query and observe the message that appears in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Update message.

Since we have 50 states and Washington D.C., the number 51 in the message is correct. Click on the Yes button. Assuming that you entered a valid value for the new field, it should now be updated. If you View now, you should see the new information, as seen in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Updated country.

Now, if you examine the SQL, you'll see this:

```
UPDATE tblState SET tblState.CountryID = 1;
```

Next week, we'll explore more update commands. For example, we'd like to be able to add full state names, but since we don't have a list of those handy, we'll at least update them to match the state code.

Stay tuned for more 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 *ComputorEdge* 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.

Introduction to REALbasic
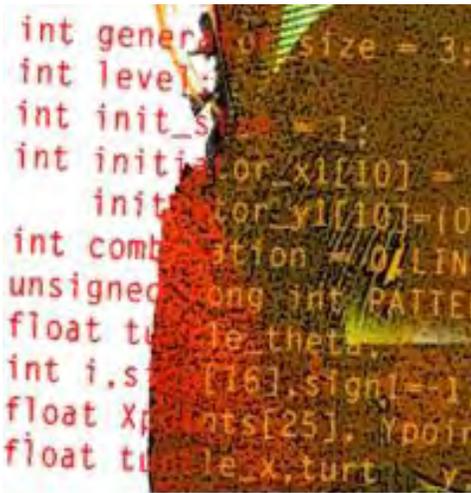
"Part 3: Designing a User Interface" by Wally Wang

By simply placing controls on windows and customizing each control's properties, you can quickly and easily create your program's user interface.

Previously,
"Part 1: The Roots of REALbasic"
"Part 2: Getting to Know REALbasic"

When you first start REALbasic, you'll probably see a welcome screen that provides links to video tutorials and other information about using REALbasic. Get rid of this welcoming screen, and you'll be staring at the REALbasic IDE (Integrated Development Editor), where you can start designing your user interface.

To place a control on the window to create your user interface, you have two choices:

• Double-click on a control in the Toolbox
• Drag a control off the Toolbox and place it on the window

If you double-click on a control in the Toolbox, REALbasic displays that control in the window. After REALbasic places a control on the window, you'll probably need to drag it to put it where you want it to appear. If this method of double-clicking and then dragging a control seems too cumbersome, you can just drag a control off the Toolbox and place it on the window yourself.

To create a simple program, place two radio buttons (from the RadioButton item in the Toolbox) on the window, as shown in Figure 4.
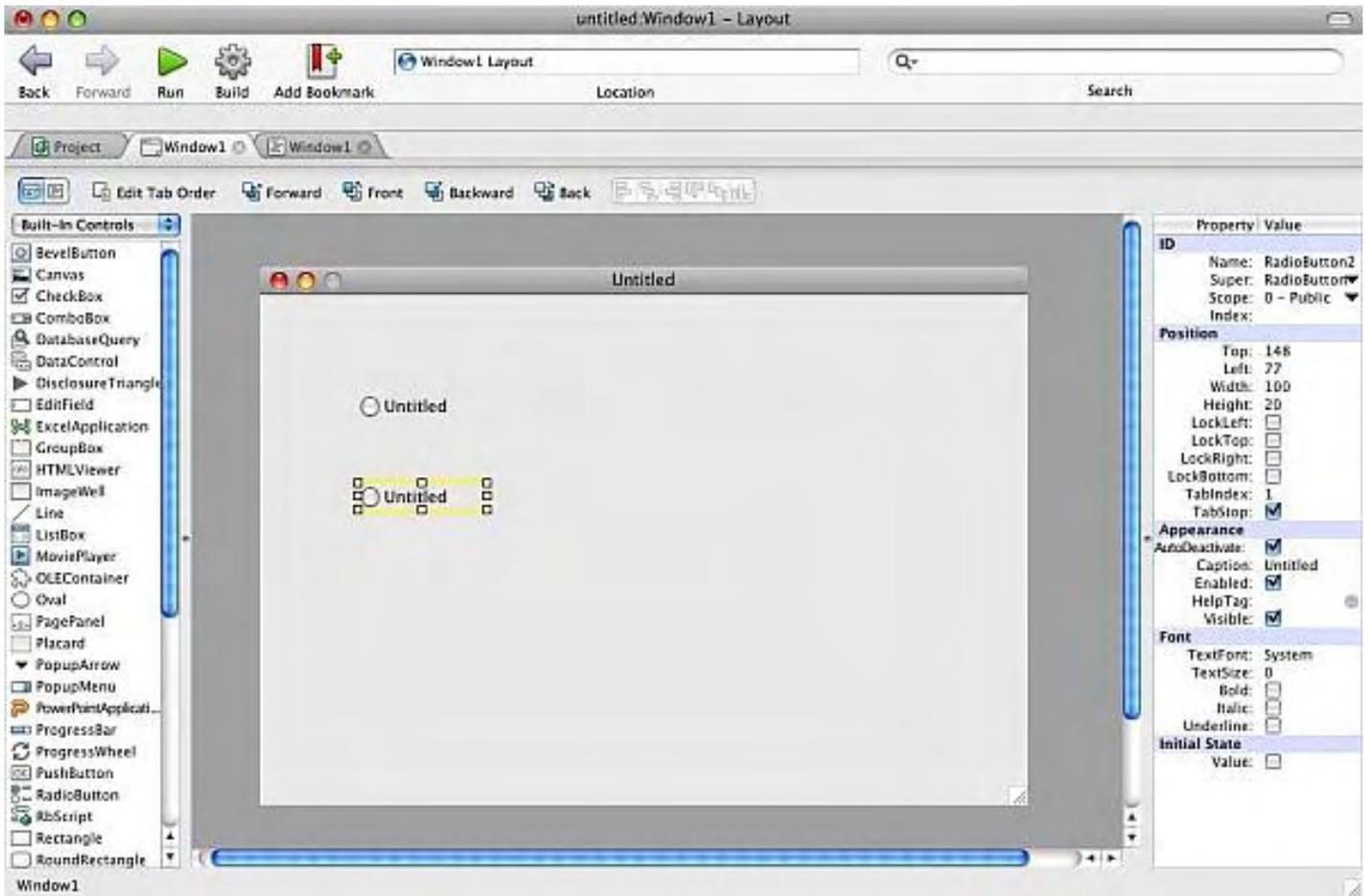
Figure 4. Placing two radio buttons on the window.

Notice that each radio button displays the generic caption of "Untitled." Don't worry, we'll change this later.

Now place a text field (called an EditField on the Toolbox) and two buttons (called PushButton on the Toolbox) on the window, as shown in Figure 5.
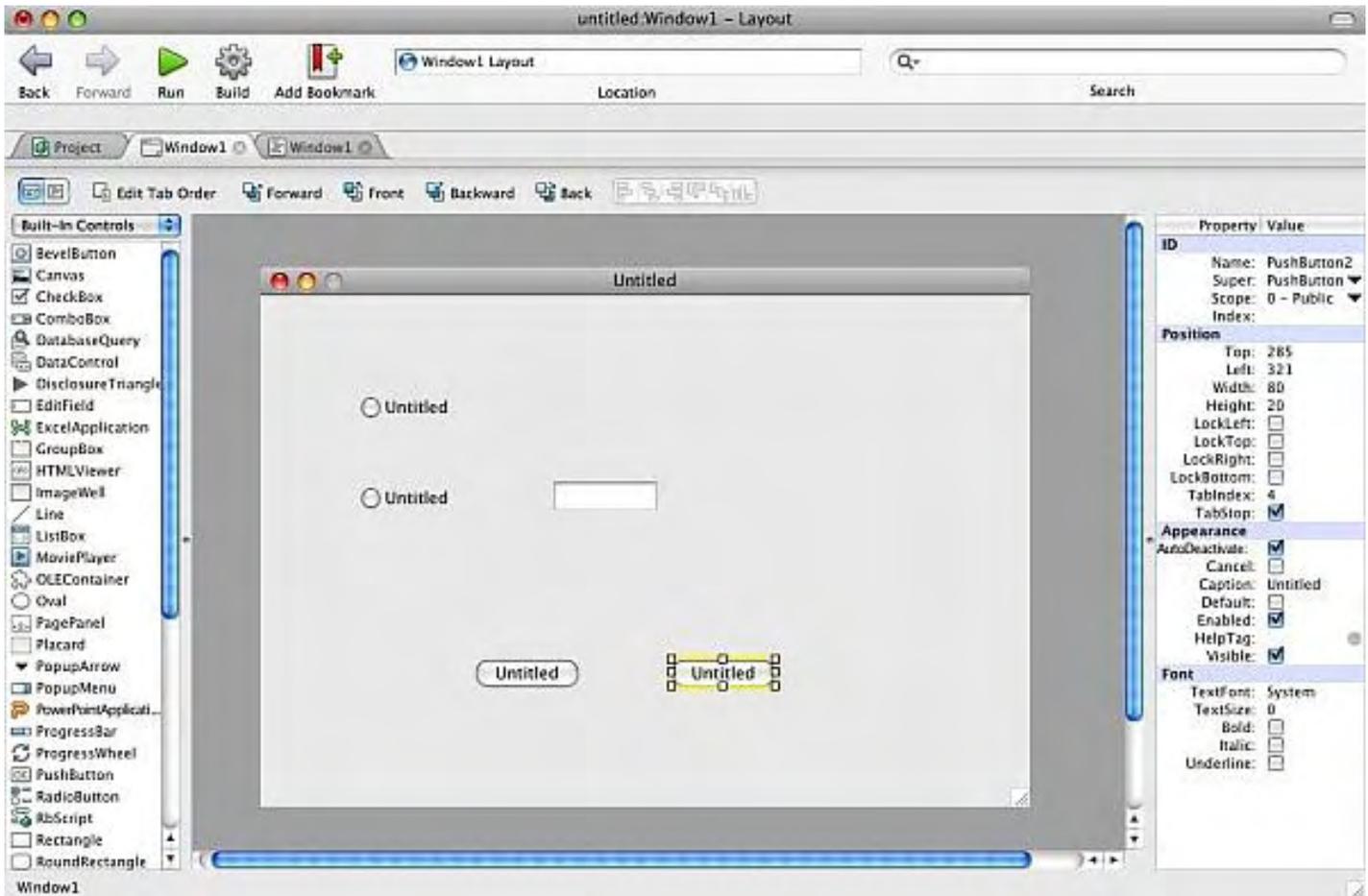
Figure 5. Your complete generic user interface.

After creating your controls and arranging them on the window, the next step is to customize your controls by changing each control's properties. To change a control's properties, click on that control once. The Properties palette now displays all the properties for that control.

Click on the push button closest to the left side of the window. Its properties appear in the Properties palette.

Click in the Default check box, which appears under the Appearance group. Notice that the push button now appears highlighted in blue.

Click to the right of the Caption field and type OK. Notice that the caption on your push button now displays "OK."

Click to the right of the Name field in the ID group and type PushButtonOK. The Name property does not affect the appearance of a control. Instead, the Name property is used strictly when writing BASIC commands.

After making all these changes, the properties on the left push button should appear as follows:

Property	Data
Default	Checked
Caption	OK
Name	PushButtonOK

Property

Use the following table to modify the properties of the other controls on the window:

Control	Property	Data
Top radio button	Caption	Display "Hello, world!"
	Name	RadioButtonHello
Bottom radio button	Caption	Display your own text:
	Name	RadioButtonText
Right push button	Caption	Quit
	Name	PushButtonQuit

You'll need to widen each radio button so the entire caption appears on a single line. Your entire user interface should look as shown in Figure 6. By simply placing controls on windows and customizing each control's properties, you can quickly and easily create your program's user interface.
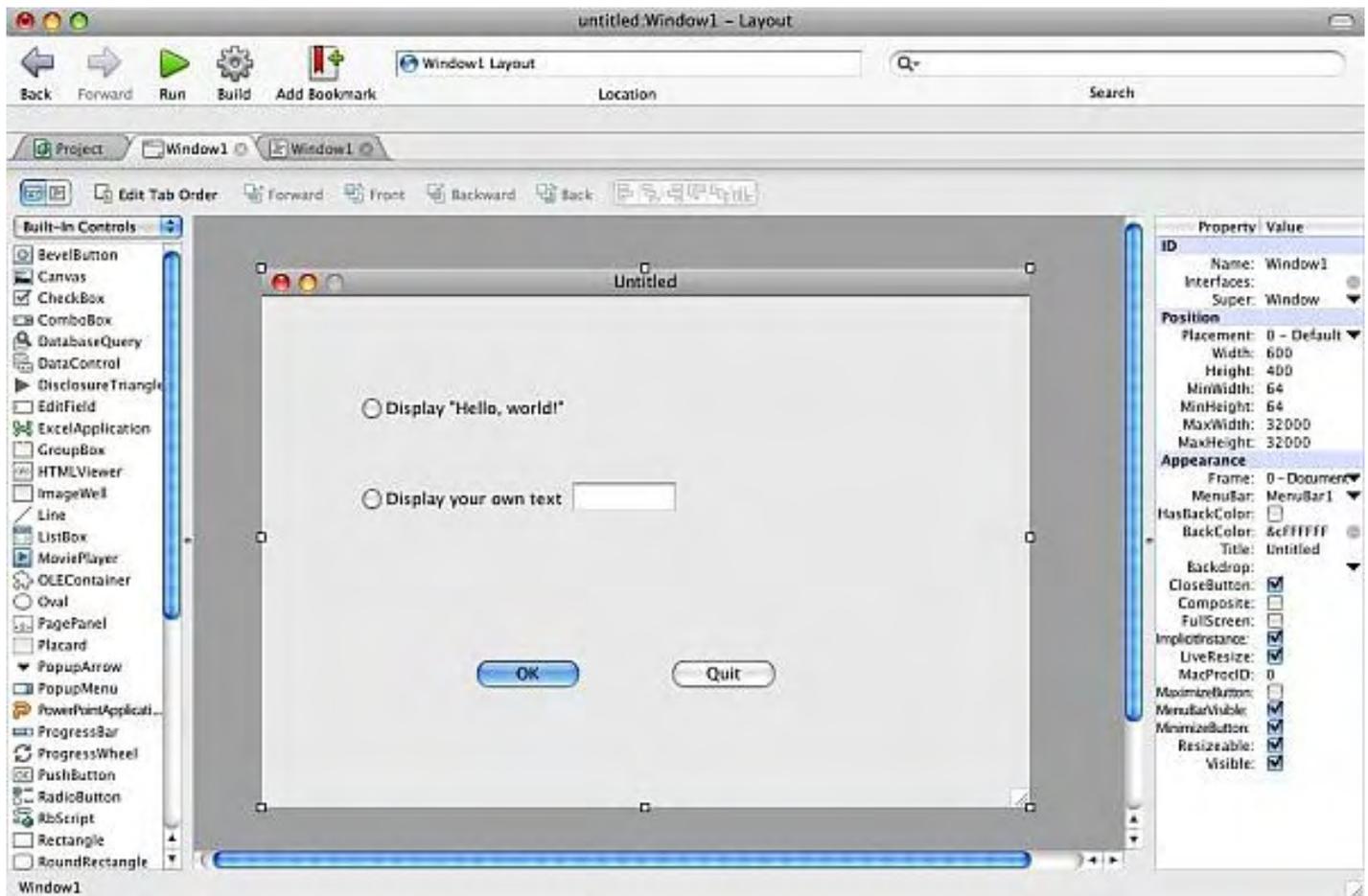
Figure 6. The complete customized user interface.

Click on the File menu and choose Save, and then type a project name such as "MyFirstProject." You may want to choose a drive and folder to store your program.

Right now, your program just looks good, but doesn't actually do anything. To make your program work, the final step is to write BASIC commands, which you'll learn about next week.

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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.*

ComputorQuick Reviews

News and Reviews from Readers and Staff

ComputorQuick Reviews

"Kindle-ing Thoughts" by Marie Loggia-Kee

Will the author's new Amazon Kindle e-book reader stop the UPS truck from visiting with little brown boxes of books?

Usually, I'm an early adapter. But, my mother-in-law bought an Amazon Kindle before me. For almost two birthdays, and two Christmases, I resisted. Then Kindle 2 came out—new and improved technology. With a check for freelancing a fiction piece hot in my hand, I surfed to Amazon to buy myself the hardback of an author I adore. My fingers twitched: I had enough. Should I buy the new Kindle? When asked, my husband Dennis said, "I'd be disappointed in you if you didn't buy it."

Three days later it arrived. Amazon does everything possible to make purchasing books easy. If you have an account, and bought the item for yourself, it's already set up and ready to go. Free wireless. We didn't have to set it up on our system, or any other wireless network. Somehow, someway, it comes wired, and there are no additional service charges to buy from the Amazon store. For someone who thinks she's very technologically savvy, I still don't have my e-mail hooked up on my cell. It's beyond me. (I've been told that my cell is more than usually complicated.)

A few clicks and I had bought Kim Harrison's "White Witch, Black Curse." And the reading began. Now, let me explain: I do more than read books. I am a voracious reader. On my recent trip to New Mexico, I brought five books. That's a lot of weight to lug around. But, if there's time, I want to have something to read. A piece of technology that holds 1,500 books, on which I can download and purchase books on a whim? Sounds good.

While the technology is there, fueling that reading passion isn't quite yet. Some things that are missing:

The weight of a book. Whether it's a paperback or a hardback, holding a slim plastic reader just doesn't feel the same. I'm not one to get all weepy over the smell of paper because yellowing, dusty books from the library just make me sneeze, but there's something to be said about holding something and reading it.

How long is a chapter? Seriously, I'm a busy working mom. Sometimes I decide if I'm going to start to read based upon how much time I have. Can I finish at least a chapter? Should I start reading over my lunch break? How many pages do I have left before I go to sleep? Last night I started reading, and ended before the chapter. I could have had two pages left, I could have had one. Not knowing drives me crazy.

How long is the book? The tension is building … when does it end? Sometimes I finish a novel and think: "That's it?" I read it so quickly, it's like I feel guilty that it's over. Sure, the Kindle seems to have line counts,

or something like that … but there's nothing like the feel of knowing that you're more than halfway through, or three-fourths of the way through a novel. (Maybe page count is an option, but I haven't found it yet.)

An interactive screen. All right, so I'm here, but the technology really doesn't seem to be. I don't want to click a little button to turn the page. At least with a book, I get two pages worth of reading before having to turn. Now, it's one page and click. How about letting the user touch the screen to advance the page? The same can be said for the small (we're talking slightly larger than a Bic pen clicker) button that's supposed to be a "five-way" controller. It moves up, down, side to side, and you press it to select something.

Bookmarks. I'm an active reader, which means I turn down pages where the writer explodes with creativity and passages are done absolutely right. I take notes. I write in books. (I also have a habit of finding typos and inconsistencies, but that goes with the editing background.) How can I refer back to the amazing example of pacing at the end of chapter 5? Or the perfect way that Harrison delved into the psyche of a character, without telling too much? There's a way to place an electronic bookmark in the Kindle, and an electronic note. While it's a start, the technology feels awkward, and it still isn't the same as writing on a page.

Limited selection. Yes, Amazon touts that it has an amazing catalog of titles available. But two days into owning a Kindle, and I searched for a second book and it's not available. This morning, a fellow member of the Chick Lit Writers of America posted that her young adult book, "Evermore," made the #1 spot on the New York Times bestseller list for children's paperbacks, and I thought, "Before I forget, I'll buy that one and put it in my kitty for the next read." Guess what? Not there. Hopefully, since the book hit #1, it will be soon.

Afraid to break it. Let's be honest, some of the reading that's done is not in the most ideal conditions. If I drop a book in the bathtub, the worse that will happen is the pages will get wet, wrinkly and stuck together. It'll dry out, and I can still finish it. The Kindle? No way it'll get near the tub … or my Fritos Honey BBQ Twists (imagine the orange fingerprints on the white plastic?). Or, seriously, the beach. Sand in cracks is not a good thing.

The past two nights, my husband has looked at me expectantly: "How do you like it?" I gotta admit, I like it. The Kindle's convenient, and will definitely cut back on some of my book clutter. But, I've also got some bad news for hubby: It's not going to stop the UPS truck from visiting with little brown boxes of books. Right now, it's a supplement, not a replacement.

In addition to writing and being a mom, Marie teaches at Cal State Fullerton, the University of Phoenix and National University. A former chapter leader for Webgrrls Orange County and Los Angeles, Marie continues to keep her technical edge. She can be reached at *info@marieloggiakee.com.*

EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher

"The Future of Newspapers" by Jack Dunning

Unless newspapers can offer their readers something truly unique, a paid subscription online will merely cause a further loss of readership—no matter how inexpensive.

The newspapers are still trying to figure out how to make the Web pay—especially in light of their rapidly shrinking print-advertising revenues. Web-advertising revenues are increasing, but not at a rate that comes close to the gap caused by the drop in print. This is the dilemma that all print media faces in some form. The potential revenue of the Internet arm of the business is a drop in the bucket compared to what revenue once was in the traditional print business.

Part of the dilemma is caused by the fact that most newspapers have been giving away their Web editorial; therefore, Internet users have grown accustomed to not paying for the information. Now there are plans in the works for the major publishers to band together and start charging readers for their articles on the Web. The question is whether or not it will work.

The answer is a simple no. The Internet culture will not accept paid Web subscriptions to any great degree for anything other than extremely targeted markets. Newspapers are not in a niche market.

The best example of seeming success for a newspaper selling Web subscriptions is the Wall Street Journal. The WSJ has well over one million Web subscribers who pay to read the magazine online. However, the Web is merely an alternative to the printed edition, which is much more expensive. Plus, the WSJ offers editorial content that is not readily available elsewhere.

This is not the case for most newspapers. Any of the cable television news networks or news radio stations easily provide substitute news on a 24-hour basis to print readers. By the time the printed newspaper arrives in the morning, it's old news. Without the comics and crossword puzzles to peruse during breakfast, the print editions might already have disappeared. Even with the one million online subscribers, the WSJ would become a shell of its former self without the printed edition.

The problem with the print industry is that the numbers just don't add up anymore. The expense of paper, ink and distribution has outstripped the revenues from advertising. (Paid subscriptions are not a money maker for a newspaper, but merely help to offset the costs of distribution. The real money has always been in advertising.) When revenues drop off, profit is always the first line item to disappear. Sadly, the sales generated on the Web are not going to help much.

Unless newspapers can offer their readers something truly unique, a paid subscription online will merely cause a further loss of readership—no matter how inexpensive. Many Web surfers won't sign up for a free subscription because it requires them to offer up their e-mail address. What chance is there when money is added to the requirements?

Possibly newspapers need to stop thinking of themselves as newspapers. Rather than fighting the new media, they could embrace it. There is no point in simply offering up the same content on the Web that's suitable for paper. Possibly featuring interactive news that draws upon Internet examples such as YouTube and Facebook would have a better chance of success. Maybe a better model for the Internet is the cable news network—only adapted to the Internet. Of course, then the newspaper would no longer be a newspaper. I'm

thinking that I may be too late. So much has been spent by the industry to save itself, that there is neither the capital, nor time, to do a major restructuring.

I'm not happy about what's happening to the newspapers. I look forward to my copy every morning. I hope that they hang on as long as I do. I don't think that the kids care one way or the other.

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*

Editor's Letters

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

"Video Telephony," "Freeware PDF Programs," "Wi-Fi Security," "Sharing a Setup"

Video Telephony

[The following letters are in regard to Michael J. Ross' April 3 article, "Video Telephony, Then and Now."]

Video phones are extremely popular with the deaf. Facial expression is such an integral part of sign language that using a TDD or text relay means missing half the conversation, so to speak. Video phones bring that integral part into play. For us, it's not a fad.

-Mike, Colorado Springs

Apart from the objective and succinct presentation, I was most impressed with the diachronic depth and comparative historical significance of Ross' research.

-John A. Ross, Spokane, Washington

Ross' articles are always good. So today, I opted to check out Skype. After the download and in the process of using their Wizard, I was asked about Google's toolbar. Not wanting it, I unchecked the box and attempted to go on. Well, ha ha! That not only didn't work, it froze my Vista OS/200GB/3GB RAM almost new computer! Thank heavens for Ctrl-Alt-Delete—and it took three tries to get it to reboot. Not too cool of Skype or Google. I feel bullied.

-Lynn Manning Ross, San Diego

Hi Lynn,

I understand your frustration whenever a computer starts acting up. It can happen on any computer at almost any time. However, I think that it's unlikely that the problem was caused by Skype or Google Toolbar. Although I can't be sure, the computer crash at the time you were downloading Skype was probably coincidental. I've been using both Skype and Google Toolbar without a problem on two different Vista machines for quite a while now. (I did not download Google Toolbar with Skype.) I'm not suggesting that you should use Skype if you're uncomfortable with it, but it could have been a random problem (memory leak) with an unrelated source that caused your crash.

-Jack Dunning, ComputorEdge

Freeware PDF Programs

[This letter is in regard to Digital Dave's March 20 column, which mentioned CutePDF.]

It's good to note that CutePDF and most of the [free PDF-creating programs] create a document that can be read by PDF programs, but they don't shrink the content like a purchased program. Expect them to be about 1MB per page, while an Adobe PDF page is only 100K per page, more or less (depends on amount of white space on the page). You'll hit e-mail limits in only five or 10 pages using the freebies.

-Kent Dugan, Round Rock, TX

Wi-Fi Security

[This letter is in regard to Digital Dave's April 3 column, where a reader wondered about the need for Wi-Fi security.]

While bandwidth is usually the issue [when someone else is using your Wi-Fi Internet], if some perv downloads child porn via your router, the feds would come a-hunting for you.

-Stewart Levin, Centennial, CO

Sharing a Setup

[This letter is in regard to Jack Dunning's April 3 article, "Making Video Phone Calls."]

I wanted to share the [video-phone] setup I have with my family.

I travel a lot around the country, and my wife isn't a techno-savvy person. We have a medium-sized family, and I like seeing them even when I'm gone for weeks at a time.

D-link makes a DVC-1000 broadband video phone. It sits upon a TV screen, and you configure it to accept incoming calls through your firewall. I use Dyndns.org to keep my dynamic Cox IP address a static name. I use Netmeeting to connect to my home via a fictitious URL I created on Dyndns.org.

The video phone automatically picks up and starts streaming video from my home to my hotel room's computer. The video phone has a feature to have audio and video stream, but I find it easier to have the family on the phone when I'm doing the videoconference.

So if you're a technology freak, and your family isn't—there's still hope for you to be able to use a video phone to see the family.

-Joe Vent

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.

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