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Digital Dave

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

A reader has a problem with too-large e-mails he cannot print out; a reader's laptop mouse pad leads to frustration; a reader needs information on Wi-Fi security encryption.

Dear Digital Dave,

Every now and then, someone sends me an e-mail that not only fills the screen, but I have to scroll up and down and to the right to be able to read it. Even if I use landscape mode to print out the message, I can't print it all.

I have used Print Screen and Paint Shop, and then I copy and print out segments of the message. Then I cut and paste so that I can read the whole message and print any photos included.

I have tried to reduce the e-mail's size, with no luck. Is there a way for me to reduce this massive e-mail where it will fit on a standard piece of paper to print out? Even smaller would be better.

Bob G.
Spring Valley, Calif.

Dear Bob,

It's always a challenge to answer a question when I've never seen the problem before. If I guess wrong, someone else out there may have a better answer.

First, I'd have to ask the sender, "What's up with this big e-mail?"

Next, what pops into my head is that virtually all e-mail programs use word-wrap, which causes text to fit within any window and to print on any size paper. Sometimes an e-mail will include carriage returns, but that will only cause the text to look funky if the page width is too narrow, not cause scrolling right and left.

The primary object that I've seen defeat word-wrap both in an e-mail program and on the Web is a very wide graphic inserted in the e-mail or Web page. When the graphic is too wide, it does not allow the narrowing of the window to less than the width of the graphic without introducing scroll bars and disabling further word-wrap.

In those situations, I would copy all of the text in the e-mail (Control-A, then Control-C), then paste it into a text-only word processor such as NotePad. This will eliminate the graphics from the copy and allow the text to wrap and fit on a standard page for printing from Notepad. Then, you should be able to right-click each graphic and paste it into a

graphic-capable program for separate printing.

If someone reads Bob's problem differently from me, please submit your comments and ideas.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

The mouse pad on my HP laptop is not centered on my keyboard. This leads to my right thumb and palm touching down on the mouse pad. This is an endless source of frustration, as my cursor will end up somewhere else and mess me up.

Even when writing this question, the cursor jumped to the Subject: Field and erased the subject "Mouse pad" as I was typing this message.

What steps can I take to stop this annoying occurrence?

Thanks, and create a wonderful day.
Paul Anthony
San Carlos

Dear Paul,

This is a serious problem for the many laptops that include mouse pads—and almost all do. The accidental touching of an active pad can be a tremendous source of frustration, as the cursor could jump almost anywhere. For this reason, when I look at laptop computers, I make sure that the computer has a built-in mouse pad on/off switch. Many of the HP laptops do have such a hardware switch. However, this is not much help if your computer, or the one you want to buy, doesn't have such a switch.

When I owned a laptop with no mouse pad switch, I needed to use the mouse setup program to disable the pad. It can be found in Mouse Properties in the Control Panel. Under Device Settings, or something similar, you should be able to find the mouse pad and disable it. See Figure 1 for a Windows Vista example.

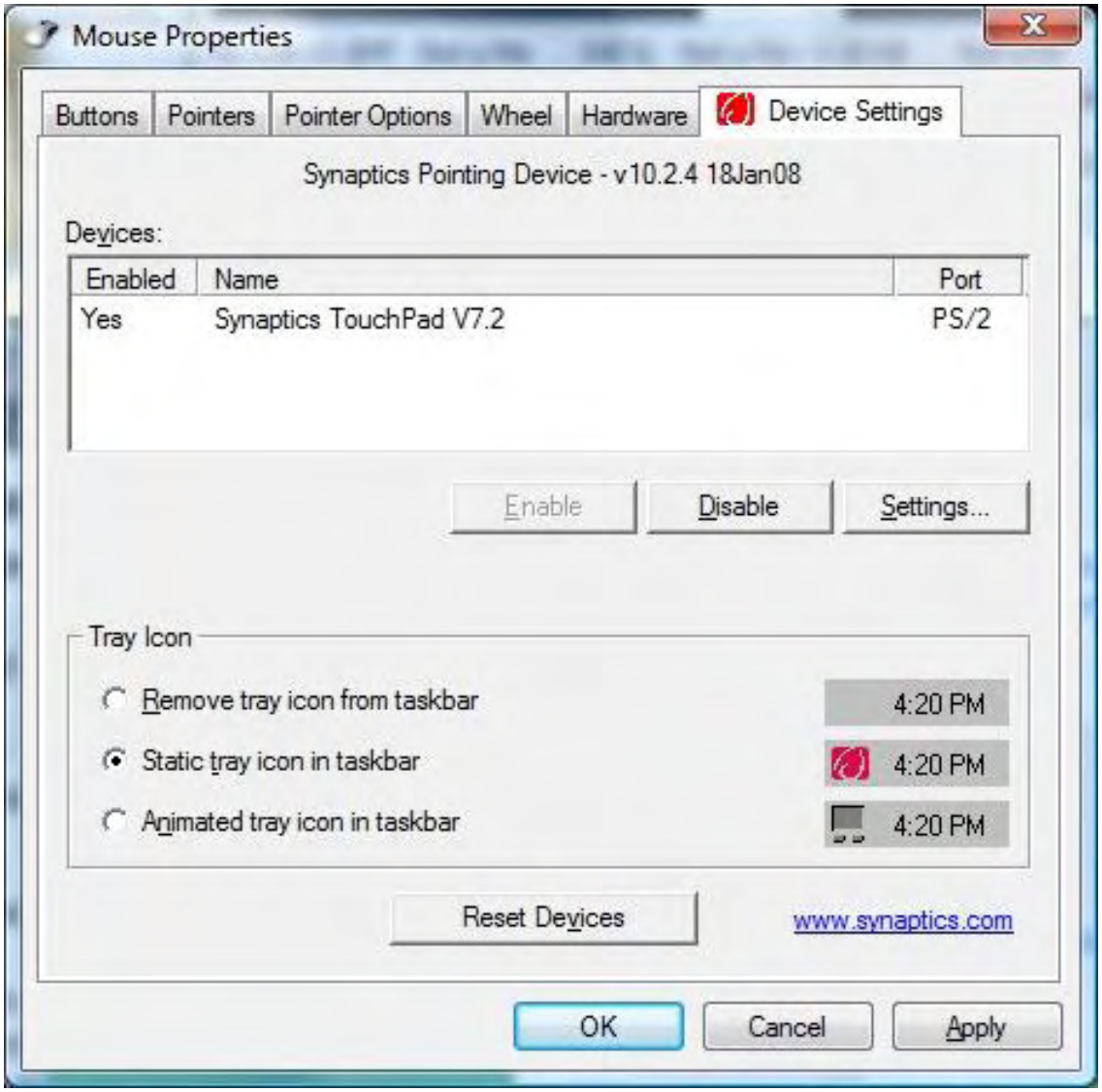

Figure 1. Disable the mouse pad in the Mouse Properties window.

You may want to add the tray icon to the taskbar. This will make it easier to turn the mouse pad on and off (double-click icon and Mouse Properties window opens).

There is a problem I've found with disabling a mouse pad that has no hardware switch. It is exceedingly awkward when booting up a computer in your lap at an airport when the mouse pad is set to off. You'll need to either learn the navigation key commands or roll an external mouse on your leg.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

Maybe I missed this in the wireless issue, but being relatively new to home networking, I am presented with different choices for encryption technology. Which of the various types (WEP, WPA) is most appropriate for a home user who uses the Internet for e-mail, shopping and the like?

Philip
San Diego

Dear Philip,

Maybe you did miss it, but it is always worth repeating. WEP is the older form of encryption for Wi-Fi, and it is relatively easy for people with the know-how to crack. Therefore, whenever you're setting up your Wi-Fi router for maximum security, you should use WPA or WPA2 encryption with a strong (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Password_strength*) encryption key that is long, using mixed numbers and letters (upper and lower case).

The only reason for using WEP is if you have older devices to connect to the Wi-Fi network that will work only with WEP. I say get a new device (whatever it is) that will support WPA.

Digital Dave

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File Synchronization for Free

“Open-source and freeware applications.” by Michael J. Ross

> It is very possible to keep your personal and business files synchronized and up-to-date on multiple devices, without having to spend any money.

People are more mobile nowadays than ever before, and the same is true of their data—especially now that more people are using laptops, palmtops, PDAs, flash drives and smartphones, in place of desktops, or sometimes in conjunction with desktops. These portable data devices are carrying an increasing amount of business and personal information, to more destinations outside of the home or office—back and forth on a daily basis, for some commuters. At the same time, a growing amount of that data is also being stored on the Web—in e-mail accounts, FTP accounts and blogs, as well as with Web-based file-backup services and other data repositories in the digital "cloud."

As a result of this widespread distribution of data, there are more cases of any given computer file existing in two or more locations. There are also more chances for losing new information. For instance, if you connect your PDA to your desktop computer, and you copy your daily schedule from your PC onto your PDA before heading out the door, now you have two copies of the same file. If you update your schedule file on your PDA as you are running about town, then the two copies of the file are now out of sync. Upon your return home, if you forget to synchronize those two copies of your schedule file, then if you repeat the process the next day—updating your schedule on your PC, and copying it to your PDA—you will have lost your previous day's changes to the version on your PDA.

The above example illustrates two-way synchronization, in which you might be making changes to either version, and after doing so you should bring the other version up to date, so the two files are synchronized. An example of one-way synchronization would be the process of creating backups. For instance, you can have all of your personal data on your primary hard drive in your PC, and you can wisely install a second hard drive that is used only for daily backups. This form of file synchronization is commonly referred to as "mirroring," because after a backup, the backup drive reflects the state of the files on your primary drive.

One-way synchronization is quite straightforward: You always copy from the "source" location to the "target" location—never the other direction. In the case of our example of a backup hard drive, the files on

your primary drive, the source, are where you make any changes, and those changes are saved the next time you back them up to your second drive, the target. You would never edit the copies of your files on the backup drive, and so there would be no danger of losing those changes the next time that you perform a backup and copy those same files over from your primary drive.

Two-way synchronization is more complicated, because there is no guarantee that one location is always the most up-to-date. In other words, two different locations could alternate roles as the source and target. Even worse, if both versions are changed independently, then both are sources. When it comes time for you to synchronize the files, you could do it manually, but that is very tedious, time-consuming and dangerous. It is simply too easy to forget that you modified a particular file tucked away in a folder. Even more problematic is if one of the newer files has somehow become corrupted, or you accidentally deleted a large portion of its contents, and that bad version is copied over an older but better one.

The possibility of losing your latest changes becomes almost a certainty if the system clocks for each location are not themselves synchronized. That is because, for the two versions of any particular file, you are basing your comparison upon those files' timestamps, which show when they were last modified. Those timestamps rely upon the system clock of each particular device, and if the two system clocks are not in agreement as to the current date and time, then the separate timestamps for the two versions of the file become misleading. It is the digital equivalent of comparing apples with oranges. For instance, imagine that your PC and PDA show the same time, and you copy a file from the former to the latter. Both copies of the file show the identical "last modification" timestamp. Minutes later, your PC detects that Daylight Saving Time has ended, and sets your PC system clock back one hour, but your PDA does not do the same. You make some changes to the file on your PC. It is the most up-to-date version of the file, and yet it has a timestamp older than the PDA version.

For the reasons mentioned above, it is critical to verify that the system clocks on your various file locations are in agreement. Secondly, it is highly recommended that you use a file-synchronization program, rather than trying to do it manually and running the risk of losing important updates. In this article, we will examine some of the better file synchronization applications that can be used free of charge.

Freeware Programs

Even as the world of software development continues to move in the direction of open source (meaning that the computer source code can be viewed by anyone), many software development organizations and individuals are sticking with the older model of making their products free, but not releasing the source code along with the executable programs. (There is an ongoing and interesting debate in the software world as to the advantages and disadvantages of each model, but we will not explore that here.)

Microsoft is certainly not the first vendor name that comes to mind when people think of free applications, but over the years the company has released several file-synchronization utilities, and they can be freely downloaded and used by anyone running Windows on their PC. Two separate but related programs, Windows Mobile Device Center (*www.microsoft.com/windowsmobile/en-us/help/synchronize/device-center.mspx*) and ActiveSync (*www.microsoft.com/windowsmobile/en-us/help/synchronize/activesync45.mspx*), were designed for people who need to synchronize documents, e-mail messages, calendar entries and contact lists, between their desktop PCs and any type of mobile device that supports these protocols. Windows Mobile Device Center runs on Windows Vista, while ActiveSync is intended for anyone running Windows XP or Vista.

Windows Live Sync (*sync.live.com/*) is Microsoft's rewrite and repackaging of ByteTaxi's FolderShare.

Unlike the two Microsoft programs mentioned above, Live Sync runs on Mac OS X, as well as Windows XP and Vista. The program is now able to synchronize up to 20 directories, each containing up to 20,000 files. It supports Unicode and Windows Live ID. In addition, it is integrated with the Windows Recycle Bin and Windows Live Photo Gallery.

The last of the Microsoft products we will consider, SyncToy (*www.microsoft.com/prophoto/downloads/synctoybeta.aspx*), is a Windows PowerToy that is free to download and use, and can be utilized to automate the synchronization of multiple files and folders. It is capable of merging the contents of two different versions of a file, as well as automatically renaming and deleting files in one folder as already done in its pair folder. The folders can be located on local hard drives, network shares, flash drives, and even digital cameras. The graphical user interface is easy to use, and allows you to exclude particular files and folders based upon their names and the file types.

BestSync 2009 (*www.risefly.com/foldersynceng.htm*) is a free alternative to the Microsoft options, and offers a wide range of features, including the following: It handles two-way synchronization of content on local drives, network drives, removable media, FTP servers (handling multiple time zones) and Microsoft Outlook. It runs on Windows Vista, XP, 2000, Server 2008 and Server 2003. Its user interface is available in at least six languages, including English. Synchronized files can be compressed or encrypted, which is especially valuable for sensitive data written to removable media. The synchronization process can be done automatically, as the program detects changes in different versions of files, and it can also be scheduled, as a Windows service.

SyncBack (*www.2brightsparks.com/freeware/freeware-hub.html*) is offered in three different versions. The freeware version supports one-way and two-way synchronization on local drives, optical media, flash drives, FTP servers, Zip archives and network drives. It does not require registration or any personal information to be downloaded and used, and it contains no advertisements, nag screens, or spyware.

Open-Source Programs

Some of the open-source synchronization applications run only on Windows, while others are cross-platform. We will look at examples from each category, starting with the first. FullSync (*fullsync.sourceforge.net/*) can back up or synchronize in local directories and FTP servers, and allows you to specify exactly what files to include or exclude, depending upon rules you define, even on a per-directory basis. WebSynchronizer (*sourceforge.net/projects/websynchronizer/*) supports the automatic and manual synchronization of files to network drives and FTP servers, and the user interface is available in English and Russian. WinSCP (*winscp.net/*) (Windows Secure CoPy) focuses on synchronizing files between local and remote servers, using regular or secure FTP.

DirSync Pro (*directorysync.sourceforge.net/*) (Directory Synchronize Pro) can synchronize files on desktops, laptops, PDAs and flash drives. It can be used for creating incremental backups (meaning that only the changes are copied, saving time and disk space). It is written in the programming language Java, and thus can run on Linux, Windows and Mac OS X. KDiff3 (*kdiff3.sourceforge.net/*), too, is in Java, and allows you to display, merge and print differences among multiple versions of the same file, line by line. JFileSync (*jfilesync.sourceforge.net/*) is yet another Java-based synchronization utility. It reports conflicts between files—meaning that each contains changes not in the other—and it has its own built-in file server, which allows synchronization through firewalls.

It is clearly possible to keep your personal and business files synchronized and up-to-date on multiple devices, without having to spend any money. Yet even if you have only one computer or other data-storage

device, you still should be doing one-way synchronization, on a frequent basis. In other words, do those backups!

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

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File Management Is an Attitude

“Sync and backup programs don't always overcome human error.” by Jack Dunning

Computer users need to develop a protective attitude toward their data. To do so, it's necessary to understand how data can be lost during file management—and methods for coping.

With the introduction of computers into everyday life came one of the major new stress factors for people—data loss. Anyone who uses computers has experienced that sinking feeling in the pit of their stomach that occurs when the computer crashes after a few hours of unsaved work. The new changes are lost. We vow that next time we will save our file every two minutes—or less. This we do until—over a period of time—we get careless and stop our frequent saving.

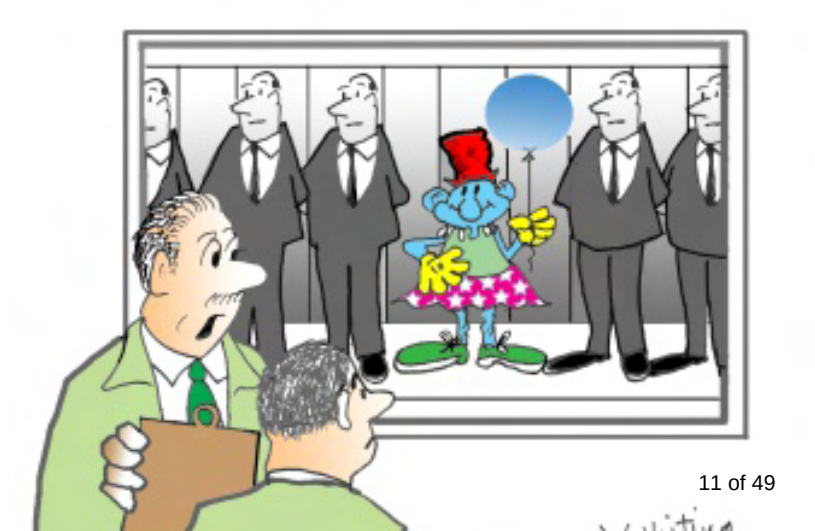
Even worse is when we unthinkingly do something (such as inadvertently deleting a file) that causes us to lose data without any intervening computer problem. This was often the case in the old DOS systems. To back up a DOS file, the copy command requires the name of the original file to be replicated and the destination location. However, if a person forgot the proper order of the two filenames, it was easy to replace the new file with the old backup—again, losing everything new.

With the exception of the occasional computer (or hard drive) crash, the vast majority of data loss is caused by human error. We thought we were doing right, but we did wrong. Software has been developed to help eliminate our human inadequacies, but no matter how good the technology, we seem to find a way to unintentionally circumvent those protections.

Just as parents are protective toward their children, computer users need to develop a protective attitude toward their data. In order to develop that proper attitude, it's necessary to understand the source of the problem of data loss—and methods for coping.

One-Way Copying

The original solution to the data-loss problem was to make copies of critical files on separate media. In the early days, that might have been on a floppy disk, an external hard drive, or a tape backup system. This protected files from computer and hard drives crashes, as well as the accidental reformatting of a hard drive—an all-too-common procedure. One-way copying is an excellent procedure and remains the backbone of almost all backup systems today—whether done locally or on the Web. As long as the procedure is done often enough, it's a reliable system.



There are two major problems with this one-way simple system. The first is that it's usually easy to copy in the wrong direction. With today's user-friendly computers, the concept of dragging files to a new location by clicking and holding down the mouse button of the icon of the file(s) has eliminated the confusion of remembering the old DOS command-line copy format. However, you still need to remember which folder holds the original and which is the

"One of the clones looks corrupted! There must be a bug in the sync program."

backup. Dragging in the wrong direction could be a major setback.

The second issue is that, if your original file is corrupted, the one-way backup will corrupt the copy as well. This has been addressed with versioning software, which will create different backups for different times—all of them accessible at a later time. A form of manual versioning is to back up files to a different directory on different days. Then you will never destroy more than one day's work.

One-way copying is still the most common source of file protection. I have an external USB hard drive that I use to do a daily backup of the most important files on my primary computer. I use the Backup and Restore Center in Windows Vista. (See Windows Vista Tips and Tricks, dated November 28 2008.) The beauty of the system is that it does versioning and syncing. It syncs by backing up only those files that have changed since the last copy was made. It versions in that each backup is tracked by date, allowing you to return to any earlier version. It has the best features of all one-way copying programs. (Note: If you want to use the Windows Backup and Restore Center with USB drives, you will probably need to convert the drive to NTFS format. See Windows Vista Tips and Tricks dated December 5, 2008.)

Two-Way Copying

Two-way copying is not for backup, but for sharing. Either the files are shared with other people or used by the same person on more than one computer. In these situations, some type of file synchronization is needed because the computer has no way of knowing which files are truly the latest version. Most sync programs use the date and time stamps to determine the latest, but if the clocks are not in sync, or if both files have changed, then the computer program could be wrong.

Most sync programs will give the user choices as to which file to save when syncing. This is yet another opportunity to introduce human error. If only one person is involved, then the problem is manageable. However, if multiple people are working on the same document, then it is very difficult to build an automated system that will protect us.

There have been some very elaborate systems built to allow multiple people to work on the same file. Most of them involve locking out all but one person—either at the file or record level. While there are systems that allow the merging of two changed documents, they can be tedious to implement when there are significant differences between the two files. Choices need to be made.

Ultimately, human control systems are needed. Only one person is allowed to work on a file at one time. Either there is a checkout system that prevents others from making changes while the file is out, or there is a hand-off systems that will tell the user when the file is available for work. The problem with a check-out system is that there is always someone who forgets to check the file back in.

The *ComputorEdge* Web site editing process has the potential for people to work at cross-purposes. There are three different people who must work with each article. All of the editing is done on the Web with one control program. The hand-off between editors is done by log entries that let each of them know when the article is ready for them. Everyone knows that if they make changes when an article is not in their purview, they could wipe out changes made by another. The system, while not dependent upon a slick program, is extremely effective. Sometimes a human system is better than a computerized system. (Every night a

complete backup is made of the entire site and the editorial work using the free program rsync (*www.samba.org/rsync/*), which runs on Linux and Unix-like machines. Thirty days of backup are maintained on a separate computer.)

One Master File

An important concept for maintaining file systems is that there should be only one master file. That means whenever possible, all other files by the same name will be copies. While it is understood that multiple masters will occur if simultaneous editing on two or more copies is allowed, it should be avoided as much as possible.

If you are taking a file from work to process at home, the second you open and modify that file, the office copy is no longer the master. It's merely a copy until it is updated from the new traveling master. If a file is e-mailed to another person for editing, then the ordinal is only a copy of an older version.

If you can imprint into your brain which copy of a file is the master, then you're exercising the level of control that will eliminate many of the problems of file management. I have one computer, a laptop, that is my master computer. I consider everything on the computer the master files, with the exception of the editorial. The articles and columns are masters on the laptop until I move them to the Web for editing. At that point, the laptop copies become merely unformatted, unedited copies. I do have another Vista Business machine that I use from time to time for editing and e-mail, but I use the Windows Vista Sync Center (see Windows Vista Tips and Tricks dated June 20, 2008) to stay up-to-date with the master laptop. (Syncing with my laptop did avert a major catastrophe for me last year; see Edgeword dated September 5, 2008.) If for some reason I can't use my laptop, I can work on the Vista Business computer. The files will automatically appear in the laptop folders if online. The syncing is continuous—or scheduled if the laptop is not concurrently online.

Last week, I discussed Windows Briefcase (see Windows Vista Tips and Tricks dated April 17, 2009), which is a basic sync program for taking your files to another computer—and back again. In many cases, this may be all you need, although I wouldn't use it as a backup program. As the name implies, it's for making your files more portable.

Good file management is a state of mind. While there are numerous systems and programs to help you stay in control, it's important that you remember what you're trying to protect. I often ask myself the question, "Would I be upset if I lost this file?" If the answer is yes, I take action with syncing and backup programs to protect it.

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

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Windows Vista Tips and Tricks

Windows Vista Tips and Tricks

“Power Options in Windows Vista” by Jack Dunning

Whether you're dealing with Standby and Hibernate issues, or you're trying to save battery power, there are features in Windows Vista for controlling the computer's power settings.

There are a number of reasons for knowing how to change power settings in Windows. The first is to reduce power consumption, especially when running on battery in laptops. Second, there may be times when it is necessary to disable some features, such as Standby and/or Hibernate. Many people either need their computer wide awake to perform late-night tasks, or they seem to have trouble getting their computer out of Standby/Hibernate. In each case, the user needs to know where to reach the settings that control power saving.

The strength of Window Vista is the ability to set up various power plans that can be changed with the click of a button. This means that whenever you're in a situation that requires battery use, you can quickly set everything to maximize your battery life, then quickly change it back whenever you need a more balanced or maximum performance setup.

To open the Power Options window, type "power" into the Start Search field of the Windows Start Menu, and select Power Options from the list. (You may also open the Control Panel and find Power Options under the System and Maintenance category. If it is a laptop, then there will be options for battery settings, plus another Control Panel access under Mobile PC. If you have a desktop computer, there will be no settings for batteries in any of the windows, and System and Maintenance will be the Control Panel access to Power Options. In Classic View of the Control Panel, double-clicking the Power Options icon will open the window. See Figure 1.) Click the radio button next to the desired plan to enable a particular plan.

Figure 1. Power Options in Windows Vista on a laptop computer.

There are three basic plans that are offered by default in Windows Vista: Balanced, Power saver and High performance. Balanced is designed to optimize power-saving computer responsiveness. Power saver is primarily for laptops on batteries. High performance is for people who never get off their computer or have it working all night long. To create your own power plan, select "Create a power plan" at the right. When the Create a Power Plan window opens, the three default plans are offered as templates. Give the new plan a name and click Next, and then the edit procedure will continue in the same fashion as editing plans in the next paragraph.

To tailor a power plan, click "Change plan settings" just below the target plan name. The Edit Plan Settings window will open (see Figure 2). There are options for turning off the display with inactivity, when to put the computer to sleep, and adjusting display brightness for both battery power and external power. (For desktops, only external power settings will appear.)

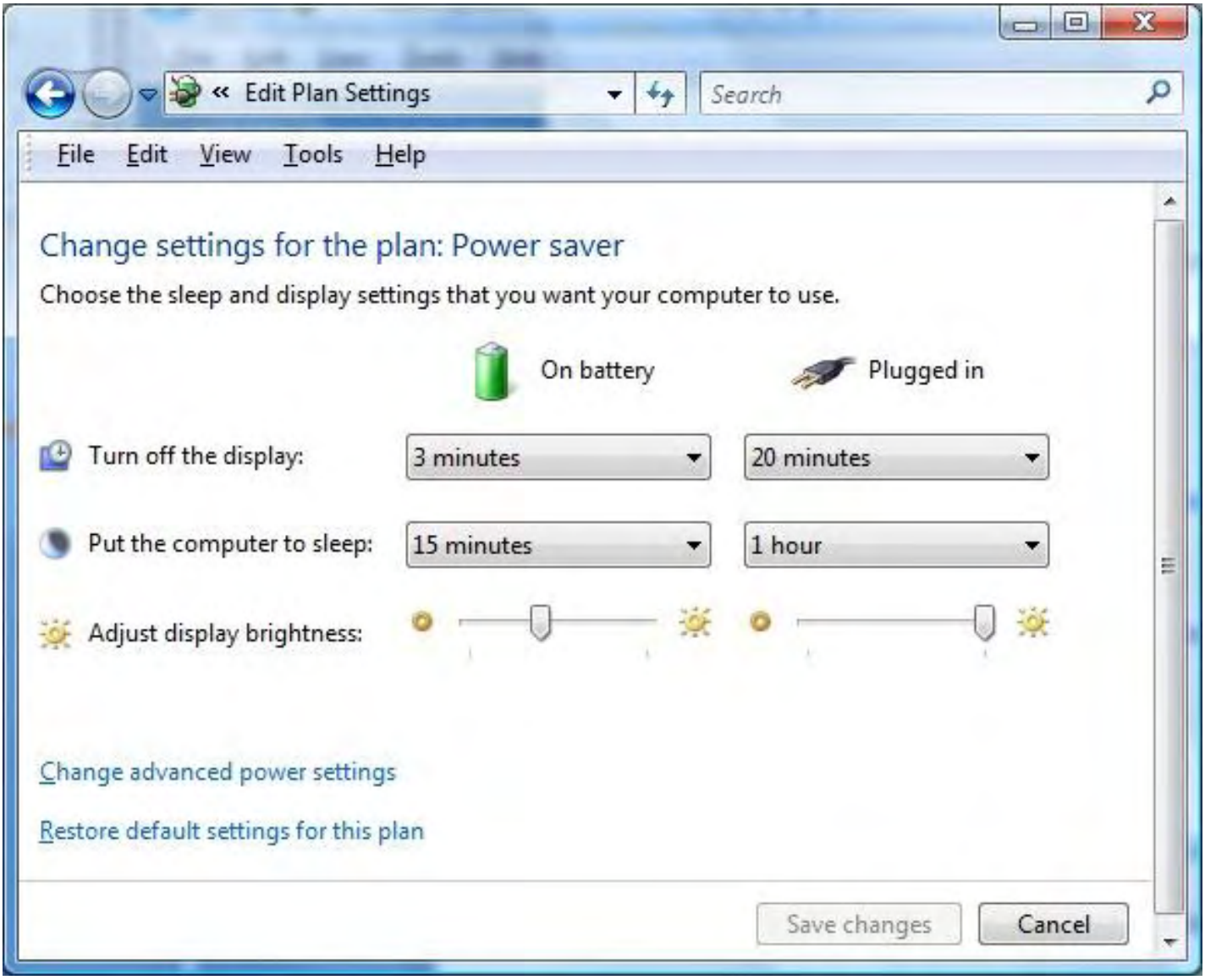

Figure 2. Edit Plan Settings window in Windows Vista for the "Power saver" plan on a laptop computer.

Any changes will be saved and implemented the next time the particular plan is selected. If you have a problem with your computer not coming out of sleep mode properly—or at all—setting "Put the computer to sleep" to "Never" when "Plugged in" could solve the problem, although the computer will use more power. Ensure that the display will turn off after a reasonable period of time. That will help save both the screen and power.

To access more settings, return to the Power Options window and click "Choose what the power buttons do" on the left side of the window (see Figure 3). If you have a desktop computer, the only option may be the main power button.

Figure 3. System Settings windows for Power buttons in Windows Vista for a laptop computer.

For each button (or closing the lid of a laptop), you can select "Do nothing," "Sleep," "Hibernate," or "Shut down." (Although there is a Sleep button showing in the window, I couldn't find one on my laptop.) Each option saves more power respectively, but will take more time to later respond and restore itself to full computer awareness. For some computer systems, there are times when Vista will hangup in both the Sleep and Hibernate modes and just won't wake up. So, unless you have compelling reasons to do otherwise, if you experience any of these problems, I would suggest select either the "Do nothing" or "Shut down" the computer settings.

If you are using a laptop, then you should have the Windows Mobility Center available, which will allow you to directly set many power options that affect how quickly your batteries will die (see Figure 4). The Center can be opened by typing "mob" into the Start Search Field of the Windows Start Menu and

selecting Windows Mobility Center from the Programs list. (It can also be found in the Control Panel in "Adjust commonly used mobility settings" under Mobile PC, or as an icon in the Classic View.) As shown in Figure 4, the most common sources of battery power drain are directly accessible from the Mobility Center, including an option to change the selected power plan (Battery Status).

Figure 4. Windows Mobility Center in Windows Vista on a laptop computer.

The Center includes additional options, such as the control of the Wi-Fi, which can draw quite a bit of power. If you want quick access to these options, then open the Start Menu and right-click on the Windows Mobility Center shortcut (either in the list of recently opened programs or after you type "mob" into the Start Search field) and select Properties. Add a shortcut key by holding down Ctrl-Alt-M (if not in use) and Apply. Then, in the future, Control-Alt-M will quickly open the Center for you. (Memorize it!) For more information on creating keyboard shortcuts, see Window Vista Tips and Tricks dated January 16, 2009.

Whether you're dealing with Standby and Hibernate issues, or you're trying to save battery power, there are features in Windows Vista for controlling the computer's power settings. With proper setup, you'll be ready for almost any set of circumstances.

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

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

"Synchronizing Files" by Wally Wang

Keeping your data synchronized doesn't have to be a headache if you get the right tools to simplify the task. Also, a look at Adobe's $699 InDesign desktop-publishing program, and a tip on using Apple's refurbished store to get Mac bargains.

If you have just one computer, you never have to worry about keeping your data updated on more than one device. However, if you're like most people, you probably have a cell phone or a laptop computer (or maybe both). With a laptop computer, the problem is partially keeping your word processor or spreadsheet files current on all your devices, but a more crucial problem is keeping your appointments and contact information updated as well.

One solution is Apple's $99-a-year MobileMe service. Basically, MobileMe lets you transfer data from any device (computer or iPhone) and store it on the MobileMe servers. When you connect to MobileMe through another device, such as your iPhone or MacBook, MobileMe transfers the latest data to your other device, keeping everything updated as a result.

Figure 1. MobileMe helps keep data synchronized over multiple devices.

MobileMe works with both Macs and PCs, so if you use a Macintosh at home but a PC at work, you can still keep your data synchronized. The main drawback is that MobileMe synchronizes with only specific programs on your Mac or PC.

On a Macintosh, MobileMe works with Mail, Address Book and iCal. On an iPhone, it works with Mail, Contacts and Calendar. On a PC, it works with Outlook, Outlook Express, Windows Mail and Windows Contacts.

That means if you use a different e-mail or contacts program, such as the built-in e-mail program in Opera or ACT!, you can't easily synchronize your data through MobileMe without going through extra steps. If you have a BlackBerry or Google Android mobile phone, MobileMe won't work for you either.

One way around this limitation of MobileMe is to use CompanionLink's products (*www.companionlink.com*), which allow you to synchronize data between multiple mobile phones along with different organizers such as ACT!, Time & Chaos and Lotus Notes.

For keeping phone numbers and appointments synchronized, relying on multiple products (CompanionLink and MobileMe) can work, but can also get clumsy. If keeping your files synchronized is more important than keeping your appointments or contact information organized, then you can always store files on MobileMe, which acts like a virtual hard disk. Now you can access those files over the Internet with any computer that can read those files.

Such simple file synchronization can work, but using MobileMe just for storing files online is expensive. For a much cheaper solution, create a free account with ADrive.com (*www.adrive.com*), which gives you 50GB of free storage space. (MobileMe gives you only 20GB of storage space.)

Like MobileMe, ADrive.com lets you access your files over the Internet. As long as you have a computer and software that can read your files, you can store and access them anywhere in the world, whether you're using a laptop in Bangkok or Quebec.

To use a file stored online, you have to download it to your computer, edit it, and then upload it back online again. Forget to do this, and suddenly your online file is no longer the most current file available.

To avoid this problem, consider using Google Docs, which lets you view and edit word processor, spreadsheet and presentation files. By working online, you can collaborate with others or just insure that you have only one copy of a file at all times. Best of all, Google Docs is free. The only drawback is that if you don't have access to the Internet, you don't have access to your files.

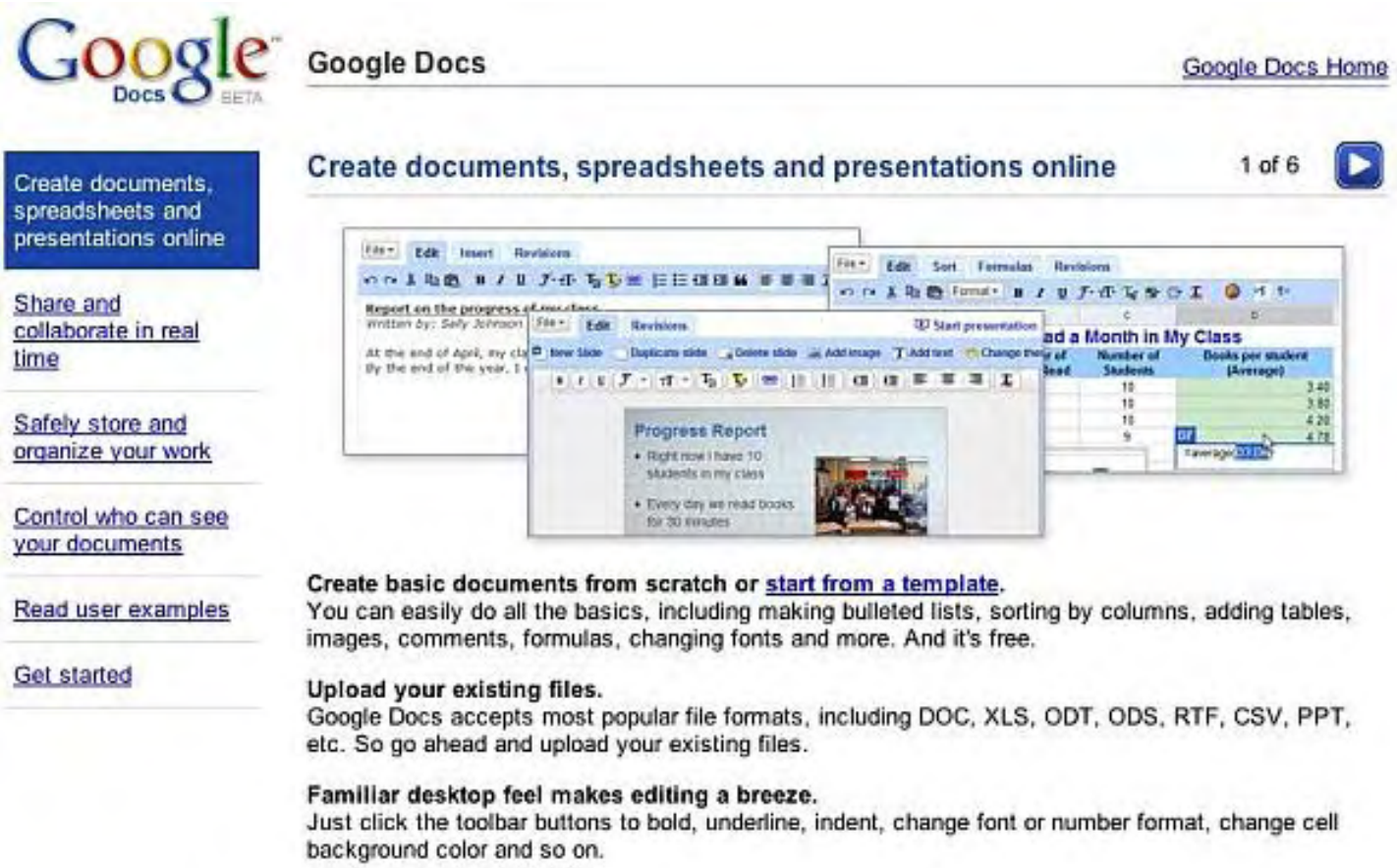


Figure 2. Google Docs lets you edit files through any browser.

The best solution will likely be a combination of the above methods. Use a service like MobileMe to keep your appointments and contact information updated, then use a free online file-storage service like ADrive to supplement the online storage available through MobileMe. For collaboration, use Google Docs.

Keeping your data synchronized doesn't have to be a headache if you get the right tools to simplify the task. Then again, it might just be easier to dump your current mobile phone and switch to an iPhone, and that will make synchronizing with your Macintosh far easier using MobileMe.

* * *

If you need to create flyers, menus, newsletters or brochures, you could get a simple program like The Print Shop (*www.mackiev.com/print_shop.html*). The Print Shop is great for creating simple desktop-publishing projects, but if you need to create longer documents, such as books or magazines, or just want more control over every aspect of your document, there's no substitute for Adobe's $699 InDesign (*www.adobe.com/products/indesign*) desktop publishing program.

InDesign is Adobe's answer to QuarkXpress. Back in the early days of desktop publishing, everyone was using Adobe PageMaker. Then QuarkXpress arrived, offered far more advanced and powerful features, and basically stole the desktop-publishing market. Adobe had a choice. It could update PageMaker or it could create a new desktop-publishing program from scratch. They chose the latter approach and wound up with InDesign as a direct competitor to QuarkXpress.

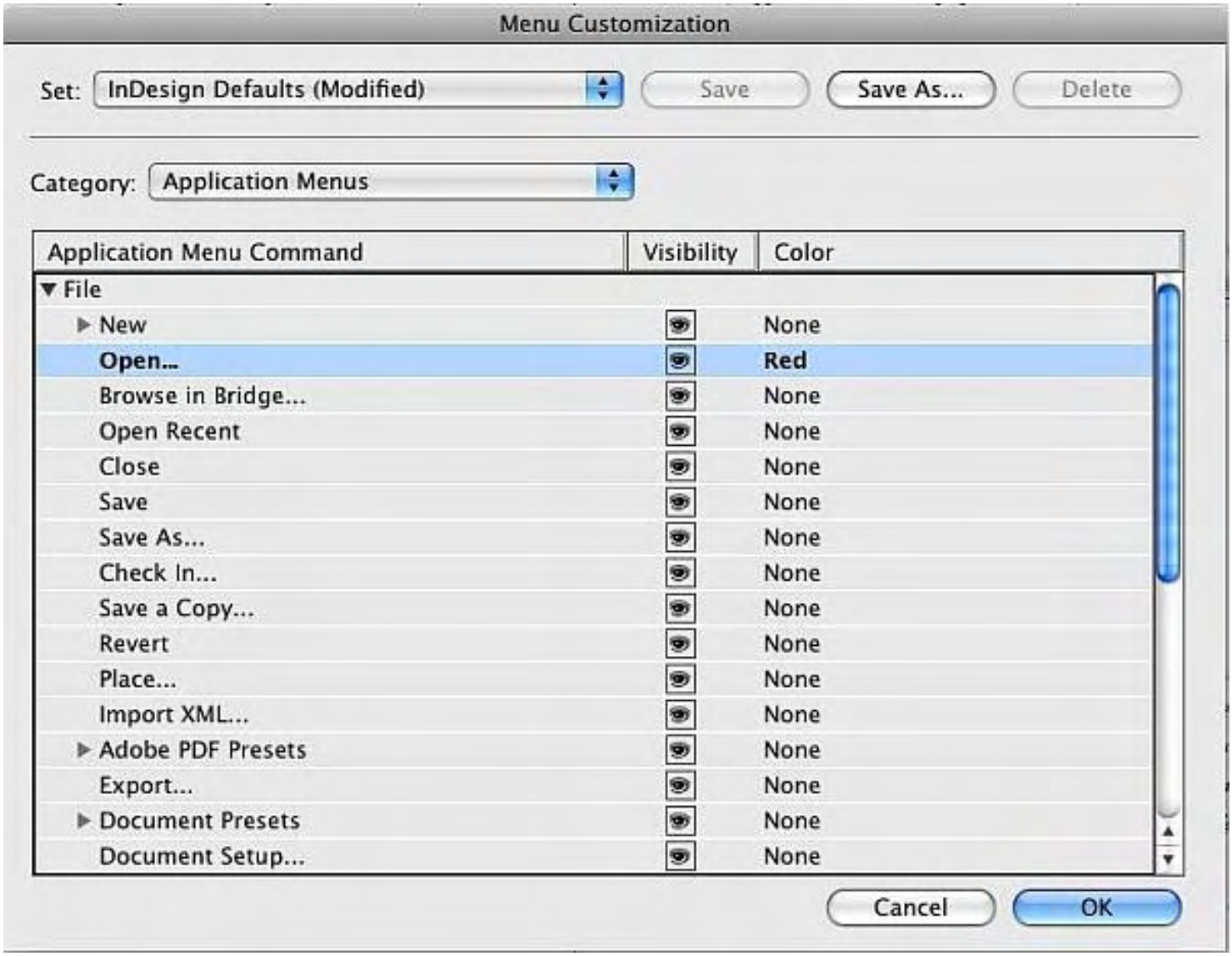
While InDesign and QuarkXpress are similar in features, InDesign got a head start when QuarkXpress failed to upgrade its program to run under Mac OS X. In fact, QuarkXpress was one of the last major

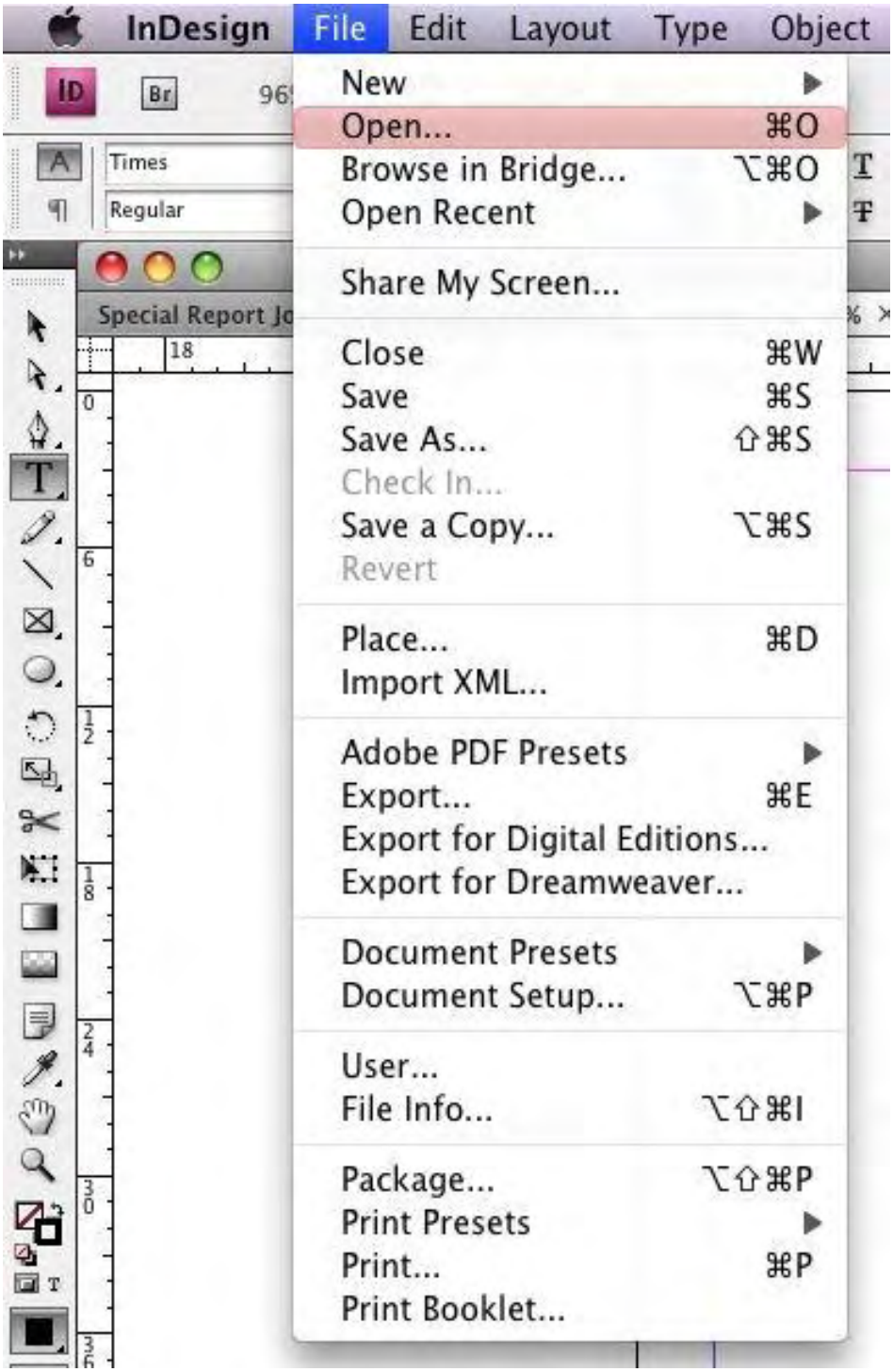
software programs to transition from OS 9 to Mac OS X. In the meantime, Adobe had launched InDesign. Rather than wait for QuarkXpress, many desktop-publishing departments simply switched to InDesign.

If you have QuarkXpress documents, InDesign can import them, so you can retain all your work and edit it using InDesign. Adobe even offers a free QuarkXpress-to-InDesign conversion guide so you can smoothly transition from QuarkXpress to InDesign with minimal hassle.

If you're already familiar with QuarkXpress or desktop publishing in general, you should have little trouble learning how to use InDesign.

One particularly nice touch of InDesign is the ability to customize your own keyboard shortcuts (so you can make commands mimic the keystroke shortcuts of PageMaker or QuarkXpress). You can also customize InDesign's menus to eliminate commands you never use or color-code your favorite commands to help you find them quicker.





Figures 3 and 4. InDesign lets you color code and customize your menus.

Naturally, InDesign lets you print out your documents, save them as HTML files to import into Dreamweaver, or convert them to PDF files. To make sure as many people as possible can read your InDesign documents, you can also export files into the epub file format, which is the standard file format used by many e-book readers, such as Sony's e-book reader or Stanza, a free e-book reading program available for the iPhone, PCs and Macs.

InDesign can also create interactive documents. Just create a document in InDesign and then export the file into the Flash Exchange File format (XFL). Import this file into Flash Professional and save it as a SWF (ShockWave file) format, and you'll have an interactive version of your file.

If you're serious about desktop publishing, InDesign and QuarkXpress are your only two choices on the Macintosh. While both programs offer similar features—and QuarkXpress has long dominated the desktop-publishing field—InDesign is a strong and worthy competitor. If you're currently using QuarkXpress, give InDesign a try with Adobe's free trial version and compare the two programs head-to-head on your own computer.

* * *

The next time someone says that Macintosh computers are too expensive, direct them to Apple's refurbished store (*store.apple.com/us/browse/home/specialdeals*), where you can pick up previous-generation models or even current models at a 10 percent or more discount.

You have to check Apple's refurbished store frequently, since popular models, such as the Mac mini, come and go rapidly. For a while, Apple was selling refurbished Mac minis for $419, but those deals got snapped up in a hurry.

Refurbished computers come with the same warranty as a new computer. Some people buy computers and return them because they changed their mind or found a problem with them. Apple then tests these returned computers, makes sure they work, and then sells them at a discount.

Currently, the least expensive Macintosh is an iMac for $849, which may not come with all the latest processor and RAM that a bare-bones PC might give you, but at least you'll be getting a real Macintosh at a bargain price. So if price has stopped you from getting a Macintosh, now you can get a real Macintosh for under $1,000.

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

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

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

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

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

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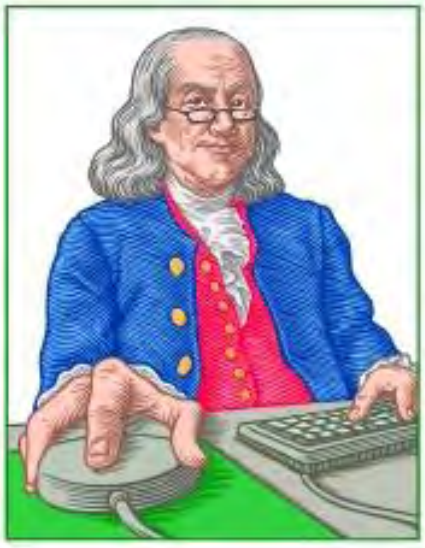

Little Linux Lessons: Tips and Tricks from Users

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

Readers write in with more tips on the "top" command, and one suggests the "htop" command.

More on Viewing Inner Workings

Saw the article about "top" in the Linux Lessons column.

Here are some additional tips:

1.) If you have a multicore or multiprocessor system, you can have top show you the utilization of each core/processor. Just run top and hit the 1 key to toggle the display between showing each core versus showing the average of all.

2) The ps command is a lot more useful and flexible than most people know. Although many will use the ps -ef or ps -waux combination of options, if you wanted to show just specific information, the output of those commands is probably too much. This is especially true if you're writing scripts to parse process information. This can be remedied with the -o formatting option.

Here are some examples:

Example 1 - I want to see the PID, the process command, and the owner of that process:

```
$ ps -eo pid,comm,user
```

Example 2 - I want to see the users and complete command (including arguments) they are running:

```
$ ps -eo user,args
```

Example 3 - I want to see the virtual memory size of each process and its pid and name:

```
$ ps -eo vsz,pid,comm
```

Example 4 - I want to know which processor the process is assigned to, and the process name and pid:

```
$ ps -eo psr,comm,pid
```

Anyway, the options are plentiful, and being able to get specifically what you want out of the ps command makes parsing that information in scripts much, much easier than trying to parse the entire output of something like ps waux or ps -ef.

Enjoy!

Sincerely,

Bond Masuda (*bond.masuda@JLBond.com*)
Linux Consultant
JL Bond Consulting (*www.JLBond.com*)

Try Out htop

This is a response to the top command column.

I use htop (*htop.sourceforge.net/*), which provides a lot more features and flexibilities. If you are a top user (literally and figuratively), you might want to check out htop.

Sol

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.

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Rob, The ComputorTutor Does Visual Basic for Applications

"More on Updates" by Rob Spahitz

Last week, we started exploring the Access way of updating data to a specific value through a query. This week, we continue this by exploring how to use a referenced value as a source for an update query.

Last week, we started exploring the Access way of updating data to a specific value through a query. This week, we continue this by exploring how to use a referenced value as a source for an update query.

Our goal today is to use a query to transfer a state code from one field to another. We'll also jump back into our forms design in our goal to make a useful mailing list database. Meanwhile, grab some of the interim databases found on my Web site at *www.dogopoly.com/ce*.

Visual Basic

I realize that many of you are still waiting for the VB portion of this column. It's on its way. One thing to realize is that there are many tools and features available in Access. Your goal should be to learn enough about the tool so that you do not have to use VBA. The reason for this is that all code that you write is subject to errors. As a team of one, you are only human and likely to miss one or more steps in your goal to create the perfect VB code.

Compare that to the features included in Access to achieve the same goal. The feature may have been created by one person, but it was likely done in a professional environment, by a trained person, with a team of assistants to review the feature and assure that it works as expected. But even more than that, there have been millions of testers (other users) who may have used that feature and could have reported any problems to the Access team for correction.

That said, it doesn't mean that there won't be a problem. Several years ago, while working on VB, I found a combination of properties that, when used a certain way, caused VB to crash every time. When I reported this to Microsoft, they confirmed it was a problem that they had never tested, primarily because it was a very uncommon combination of settings.

So looking at your choices, you can either take a feature that is probably very well tested and see if you can adapt your expectations to match what the feature offers, or you can write your own VB code and hope that you can create the perfect code (which is unlikely for anything beyond the simplest project). I suggest that if the feature is very close to what you want, use it. If there are lots of other features you want, try to write it yourself if you can learn enough about how to do that. If you write it yourself, you can always fix any problem yourself as you come across it (and hope that the problem had no adverse affects.)

While we're working toward more VB code, certainly peruse Wally Wang's columns on REALBasic, which explore a similar topic.

State Updates

As a quick review, last week we wanted to update our State table. There was no CountryID value, and we wanted to update our states to have it show USA in this field. We created an entry in the Country table for USA that was record 1. In the State table, we updated this field with 1 and saw that, because of a previous relationship we had created when we built the table, we saw the country name appear when we previewed the table.

The same update process can be applied to the empty state name field. To begin, let's just update the state name field with the state code since we don't have the state names in our database at the moment.

To handle this, create a new query in Design view using tblState as the only table. Select the StateName field and view, noticing that all values are blank, since we don't have any names yet. Initially, this is only a Select Query. Switch this to an Update Query from the Query menu, as seen in Figure 1.

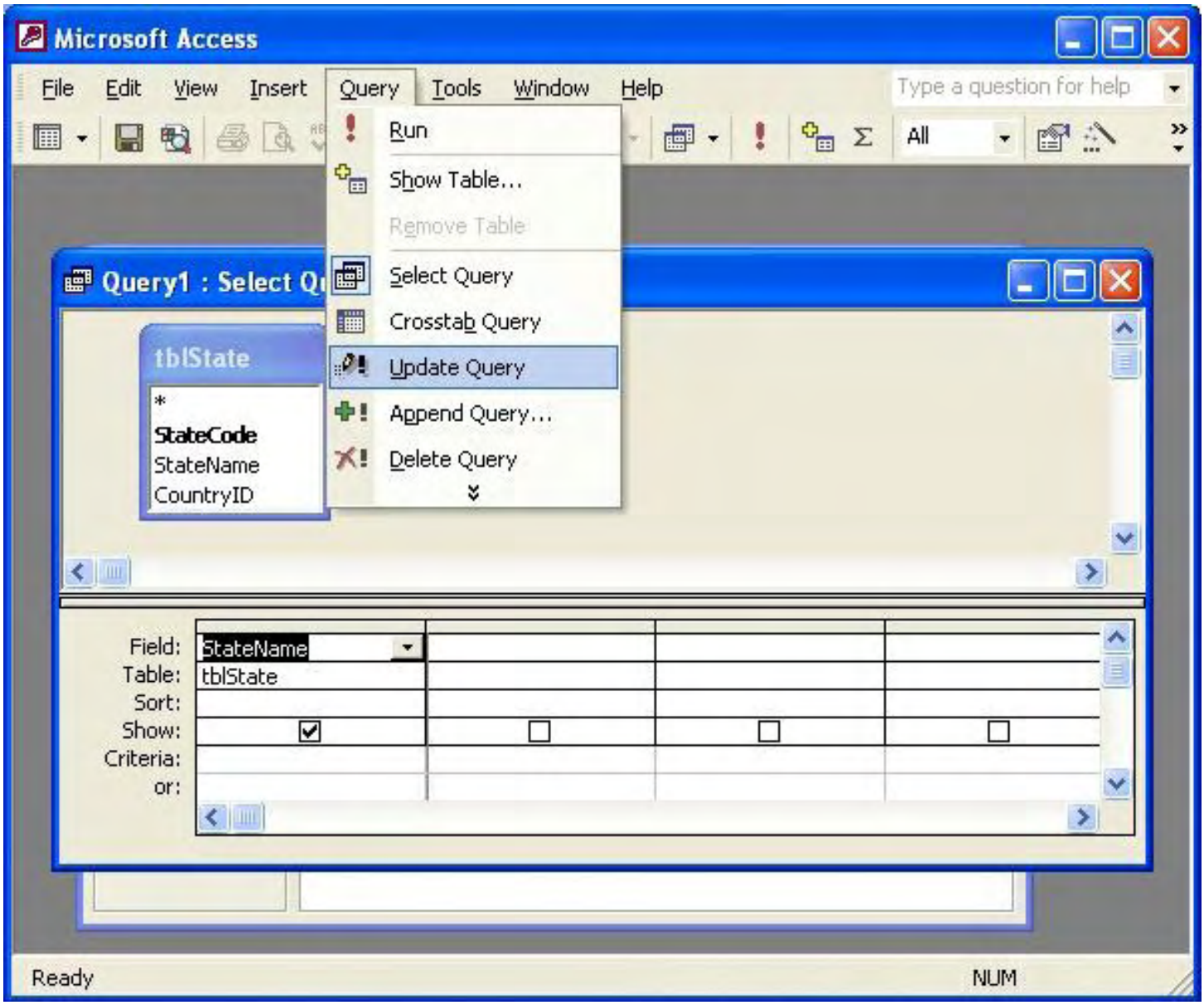

Figure 1. State table update query.

After selecting this, the Sort row will change to "Update to" and the Show row will be hidden. At this

point, you'd want to indicate the value you want to update into this field. Last week we used a value of 1. Obviously that's not what we want here. We want each value to be different. We need to put in a calculation. But how can we calculate a name? The answer is to use a reference to another place that has the information. Again, we don't have that yet, but to demonstrate the effect, use a reference to the StateCode field by entering StateCode into the Update To row under StateName.

When you do that, and leave the field, notice that Access puts quotes around it. Access assumes that you want to put a fixed value, so it adds quotes. If you run the update now, every state name will have the text StateCode rather than the corresponding value from that field. Feel free to try it since we'll re-update it shortly. Run the query (from the Query menu) and click the Yes button when it tells you it's going to update 51 records. When you view the query, you see a column of the text StateCode.

Let's fix this. In the Update To field, change the quotes into brackets: [StateCode]. Now if you run the query, you should get the value of the corresponding field being transferred into the name. In other words, the state name should now match the state code. I'll save this for future reference as qryUPD_StateName. To confirm that it worked, you may want to switch this back into a Select Query and show both the StateCode and StateName field, but you probably don't want to save that.

Real State Names

Having a state code as the state name is better than nothing, but let's see if we can get the real state names in there. To do this, you'll have to find a place where they identify all of them. Again, you could type them in yourself (assuming you know all of them), but since this is such a common relationship, there should be plenty of places we can find this information on the Internet. I'm going to try the U.S. Postal Service Web site (*usps.com*), since they're the ones who created this coding system. From their main page, I went to Site Map and found Acronyms & Abbreviations then State Abbreviations, which led me here: *www.usps.com/ncsc/lookups/abbreviations.html#states*

In this case, there is a beautiful list of state names followed by their codes, but there is extra information near the bottom that is not related to our information. We could try copying the information that we want and pasting it into our table, but we might still need to manually update some things, since the alphabetized list of state codes is not the same as the state names (such as Alabama AL and Alaska AK), plus there are a few others like AS (American Samoa) that we did not include.

This could be a great chance to use VB to help us, but again, let's find a built-in solution before we wander down that path. In this case, we can use the Import feature, and then the query process to handle everything we need.

Let's try the import process as a review and to solve this problem. First, save the Web site locally (using Save As or Save Page As in your browser). Without this step, Access will not let you load the file, even though all we want to do it to read it. Next, go to menu File/Get External Data/Import, and then choose file type HTML Documents, enter the local version of the Web site into the filename field, and then click on the Import button. On the first window that appears, select the group that has the information you want. I found it in the second group as seen in Figure 2.

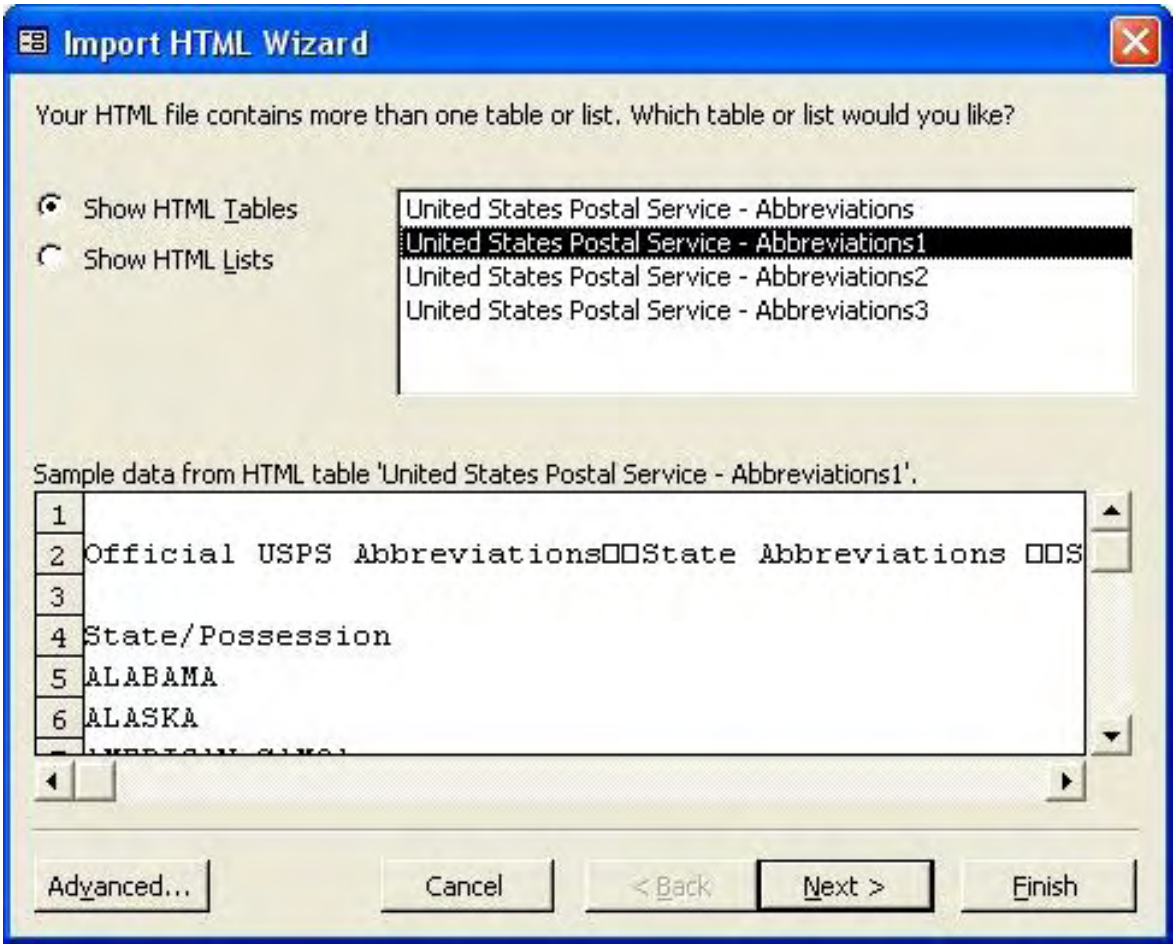

Figure 2. Import state names.

If you scroll to the right, you'll notice some duplicated information, but you'll also see the information that we want to import, just about ready to use. Click the Next button to the end, noticing the different options. One is to push this into an existing table, and you might be tempted to push this into the State table. However, there is extra information that will simply mess it up. It's better to put imported data into a new table unless you are positive that it will import correctly. It's usually easy enough to put it into a new table and then transfer it to the proper table using a nice Append or Update query.

You could also update the Field names for the new table you're creating, but since this is a one-time import, that's a bit of overkill, especially since we only care about two fields. Similarly, we don't care whether there is a primary key set up in this data, so let Access do what it wants here. On the last window, you can choose a better name if you like, but you're likely to just delete this table when you're done. I'll rename it since I want the table for demonstration purposes when people look at my database later. I'll call it tbl_Import_StateNames. I get a message to let me know they're imported, and I can now see what's in my table, as seen in Figure 3.

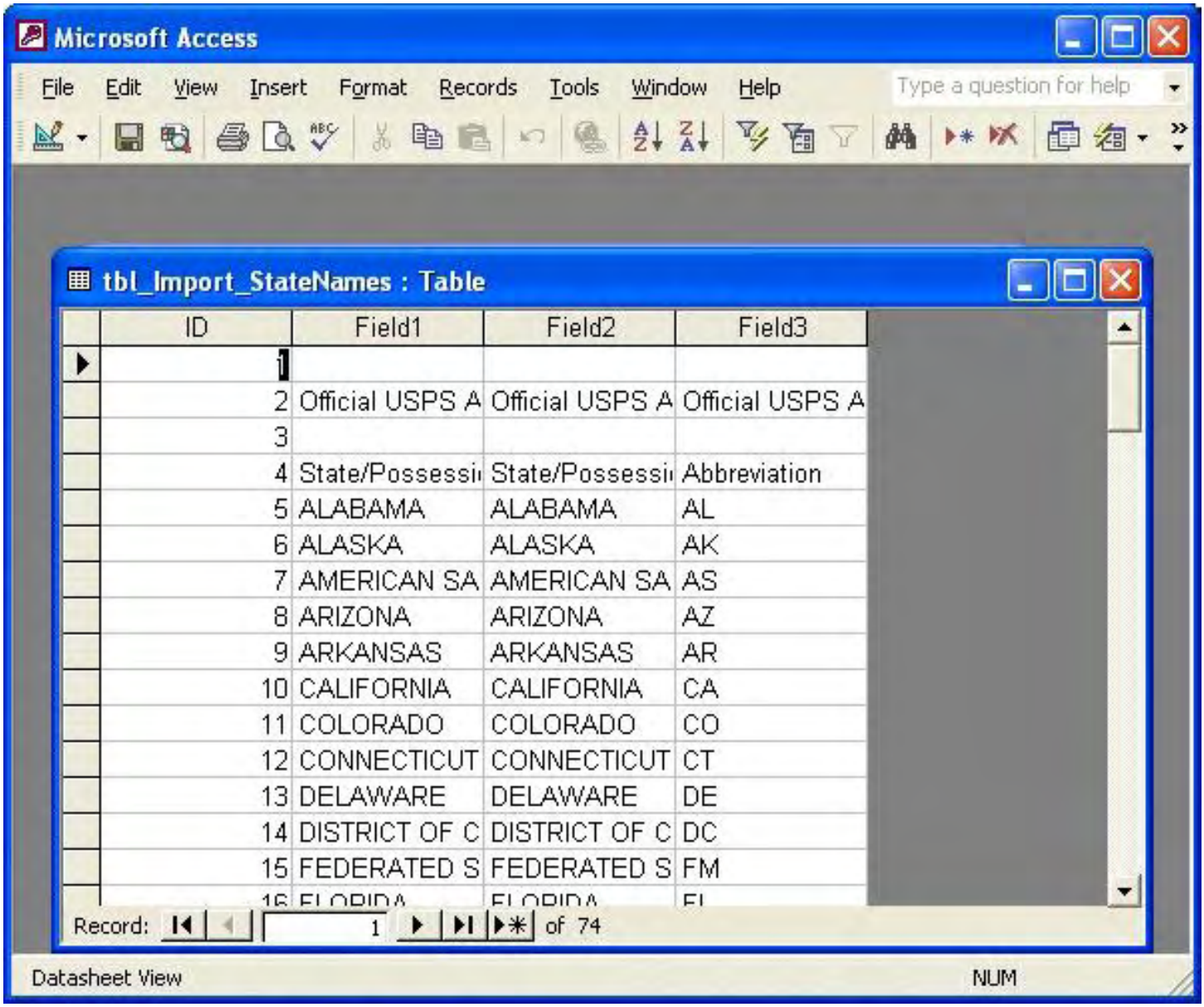

Figure 3. Imported state data.

As previously, our first goal is to get a Select query that gives us just the pieces we want. We could manually remove unneeded records, and sometimes that's the way to go. But in this case, we can already match our data to the data in Field3 from the import. Anything not found should be skipped.

So go make a new query and add tblState and this import table. Notice that there is no relationship defined between these two tables since there is no line connecting them. We can define a temporary relationship just for this query by dragging one field to another. In this case, we'd like the StateCode field to connect to Field3, so drag it across and drop it. If you have trouble with this, you can also use menu View/Join Properties and manually link, as seen in Figure 4.

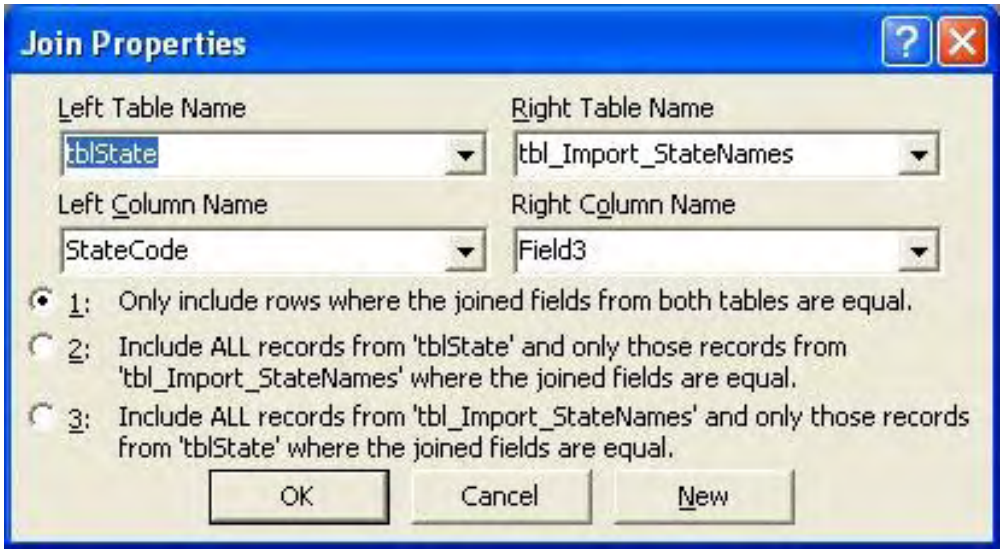

Figure 4. State and import table relationship.

In this case, because our StateCode list is complete and accurate, we don't have to do anything else. If we were missing items, we might need to change to relationship 3 listed above to ensure that we could see all of the items not in our list. Then we'd have to figure out how to filter out the ones that are not useful to us. Anyway, select Field3, Field2, StateCode and StateName to ensure that you're getting what you expected. Notice that StateName will have just the StateCode from our previous update.

At this point, our task is actually pretty easy. We want to run almost the same update query we did earlier. The only difference is that the source of the information is Field2 being updated into StateName.

From Design View, change this into an Update Query. Under the StateName column, change the Update To row to [Field2] with brackets around it, as seen in Figure 5. Run your update query, and you're ready to go! (I'll save this as qryUPD_StateNameImport although, again, we're done and don't need this query or the import table anymore.)

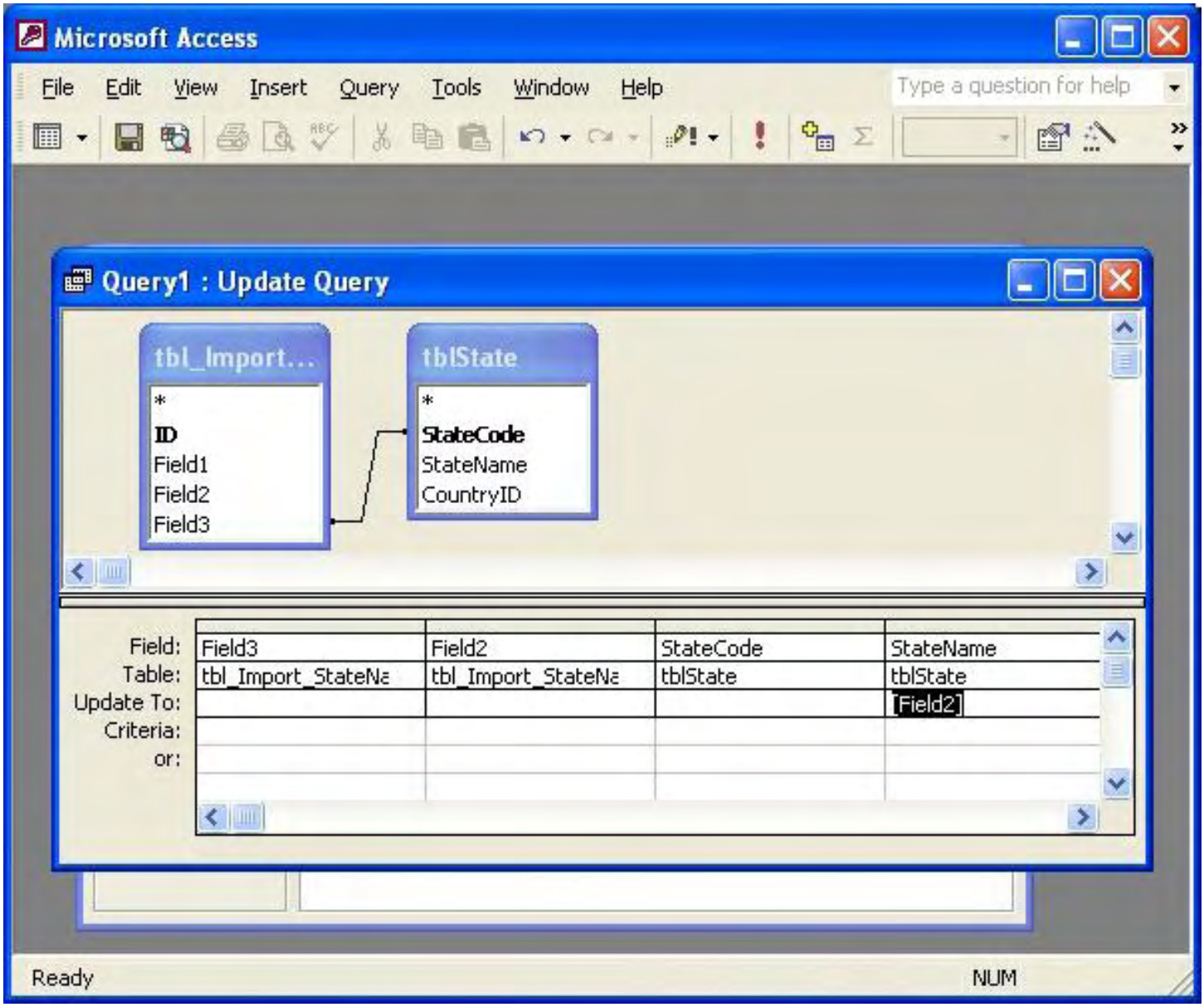

Figure 5. Updating state name with imported name.

"But Rob," you say, "all of the state names showed up in upper case. I want mixed case to make the state names look better." Well, I'm not familiar with an SQL command to create what we want. There's one for upper case (UCASE or UPPER, depending on your version) and lower case (LCASE or LOWER), but not "Proper Case" or "Title Case."

Instead, we'll quickly make a VB function to handle that for us, then use it in our update query. In this case, trying to do the task in SQL would be quite difficult, but it's much easier in VB (if you know the right command). Although we can tap into the VB function that handles this, we'll take this opportunity to explore a little bit of VB.

Quickly jump to Visual Basic (Alt-F11) and insert a new module (menu Insert/Module). We want to create a custom function to create title case for us. This should take whatever text we send to it, make everything lower case except for the first letter of each word, and then return the modified text. Although this might normally be challenging in VB, it would be much simpler than in an SQL command, since we can do it across multiple lines. But it turns out that we have a built-in VB function to do the work, so it becomes simple. Enter the following into the code window in VB:

```
Function TitleCase(TextValue As String) As String
    TitleCase = StrConv(TextValue, vbProperCase)
End Function
```

This means that we're creating a function named TitleCase ("Function TitleCase"). It expects to receive some information from whoever uses the function. The information should be a string (text) and will be stored in a function variable named TextValue ("TextValue As String"). When done, the function will return a string.

Inside the function, it will assign the calculation to the function name ("TitleCase ="). The calculation will consist of just a function called StrConv (convert string) that wants to know what text you want to convert (TextValue) and how you want to convert it (vbProperCase). Put all this together, and we have a new function called TitleCase that we can use in SQL.

Now switch back to your Access Query. Change it back to a Select Query so we can examine our new function. In the next blank column, select Field2. A quick view will show the state name all upper case in that column. Change it to be: TitleCase(Field2)

When you view again, you should find that this column displays the information correctly. Since this was a calculated field (rather than a database field), it gave it a new name, like Expr1. We could change that but, again, this query is really just a throw-away query.

Change this query back to an Update Query. Under StateName, change Field2 to the same calculation as this new calculated field, TitleCase([Field2]) and run the query.

Your states are now nicely updated, and your state table is ready to go. If you look at frmCity, the drop-down list for state code will show a nice listing of state codes and names.

Next week, we'll go deeper into forms and start using VB in ways similar to what we did today with an SQL custom function.

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

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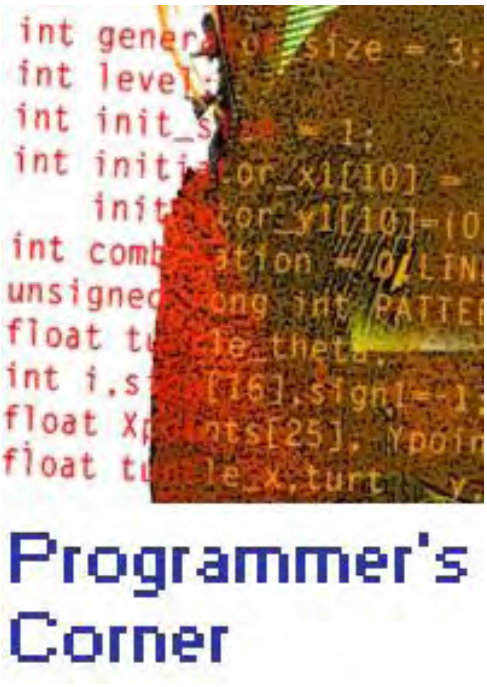

Introduction to REALbasic

“Part 4: Writing BASIC Code in REALbasic” by Wally Wang

Programming doesn't have to be complicated, and REALbasic can help turn anyone with a good idea into a real programmer in no time.

Previously,
"Part 1: The Roots of REALbasic"
"Part 2: Getting to Know REALbasic"
"Part 3: Designing a User Interface "

Until you write BASIC code, your program won't do anything. In traditional programming, you simply write a list of commands. The more you wanted your program to do, the more commands you needed to write. Trying to write, let alone edit, such a long list of commands made programming more complicated than necessary.

REALbasic solves this problem by letting you write small, isolated programs called event procedures. An event procedure is linked to a single control, such as a push button, and runs only when a specific event occurs, such as when the user clicks on a control or moves the mouse over a control.

Every control can respond to a handful of different events, but most of the time, you need a control to respond only to one event. Responding to specific types of actions or events is known as event-driven programming because programs run only when certain events occur.

To write an event procedure, you need to specify:

• A control
• An event that you want the control to respond to

Event procedures typically perform a single task. The most common event for a push-button control to respond to is the Action event, which occurs when the user clicks on that push-button control.

The simplest BASIC command to type is simply Quit, stored in the Action event procedure. This tells your program, "When the user clicks on this control, run the Quit command, which makes your program quit running."

Event procedures typically do one of the following:

• Make your program do something, such as stop running
• Retrieve data from the user interface
• Display data on the user interface

To see how to create a simple event procedure that does nothing but make your program stop running, load up the REALbasic project (named MyFirstProject or whatever name you chose to save your project from last week).

Double-click on the Quit push button. This opens the code editor displaying the Action event procedure. Type Quit, and then click on the Window1 tab that displays your user interface, as shown in Figure 7.

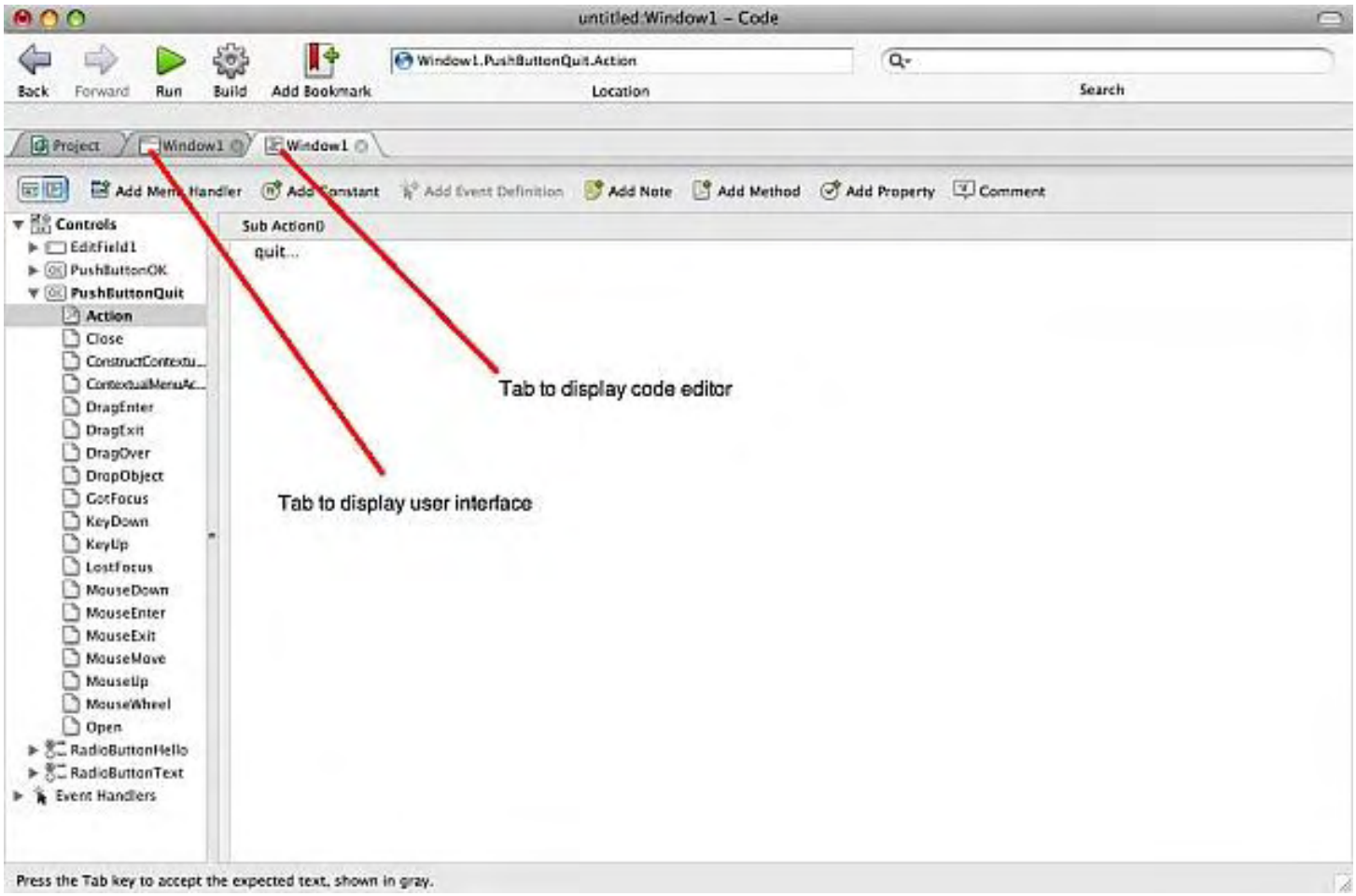

Figure 7. REALbasic's tabbed interface lets you switch between viewing your user interface and the code editor for writing BASIC code.

Double-click the OK button and type the following:

```
If RadioButtonHello.value = True then
  MsgBox "Hello, world!"
End if
If RadioButtonText.value = True then
  MsgBox EditField1.Text
End if
```

To understand the above BASIC code, here's how it works line by line.

Line 1: This line checks to see if the control, named RadioButtonHello, is selected. If the radio button is selected, then its Value property will be True. If the radio button is not selected, then its Value property will be False.

Line 2: The second line runs only if the first radio button is checked. The MsgBox command displays the text "Hello, world!" in a message box.

Line 3: This line marks the end of the command that started on line 1 with the IF command.

Line 4: This line checks to see if the control, named RadioButtonText, is selected.

Line 5: This line runs only if the second radio button is checked. This uses the MsgBox command to display the text stored in the control named EditField1. Any text typed into the EditField1 control gets stored in the Text property of that control, so this line grabs the text in the EditField1 control and displays it in a message box.

Line 6: This line marks the end of the command that started on line 4 with the IF command.

To see how this program works, click the Project menu and choose Run. As long as you didn't make any spelling errors in typing your BASIC code, you should see your program running as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Your working program.

Click the top radio button labeled Display "Hello, world!" and then click the OK button. A message box appears, displaying the phrase "Hello, world!" as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. A message box appears, displaying the "Hello, world" text.

Click the OK button in the message box to make it go away.

Now click the bottom radio button labeled Display your own text. Click in the edit field to the right and type any text that you want, such as your own name. Click the OK button, and you'll see the text from the edit field displayed in the message box, as shown in Figure 10.

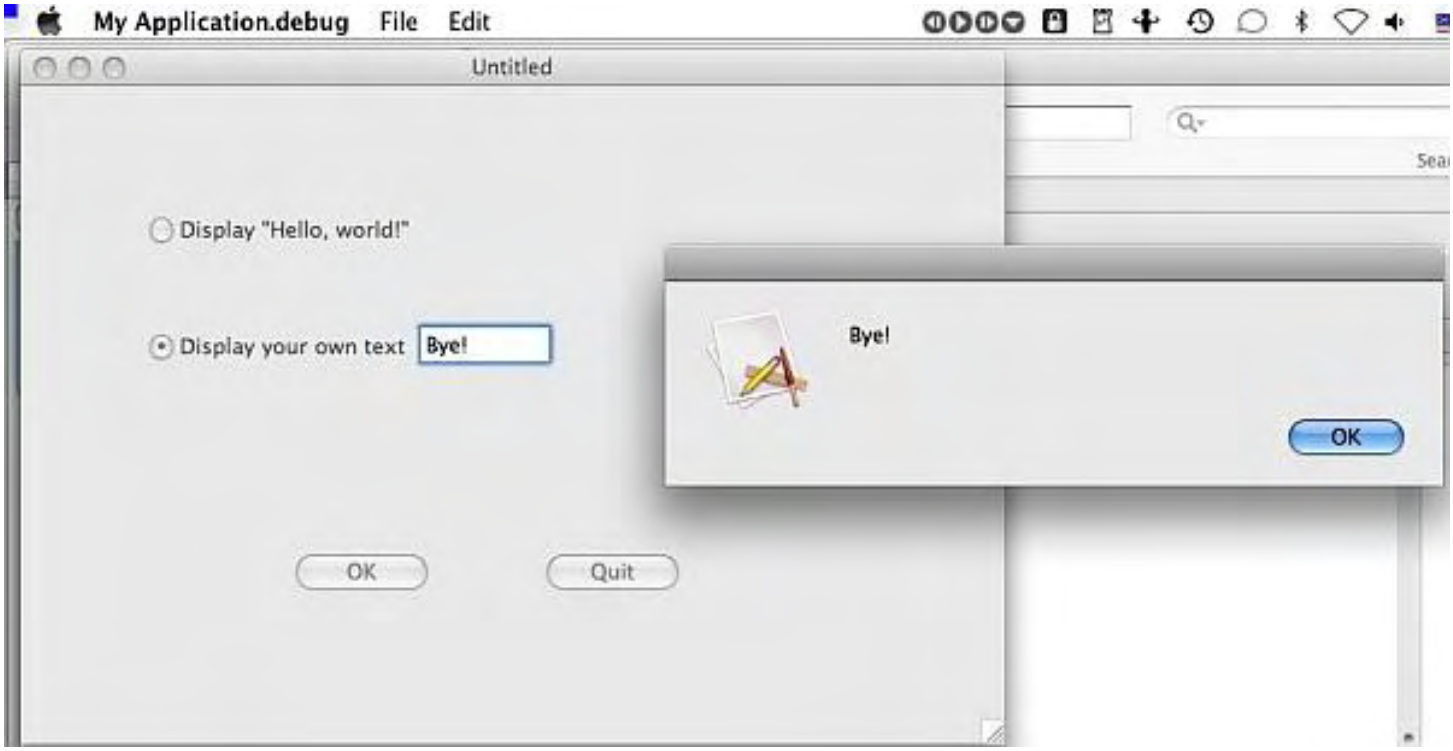

Figure 10. The text from the edit field appears in the message box.

Click the OK button in the message box to make it go away and then click the Quit button to stop your program from running.

Congratulations! You've just created a REALbasic program by designing a user interface, customizing its properties and then writing BASIC code to make your program work.

(You can always load the Sample Program.rbp (*www.computoredge.com/images/2717/Sample%20Program.rbp*) file in case you don't want to do all the typing and customizing of the program yourself. You will need REALbasic on your computer to load and see it. Otherwise you'll just see gibberish)

Of course, there's a lot more to know before you can write more sophisticated programs in REALbasic, but you've already learned the fundamentals just by following these steps of designing a user interface, customizing its properties and then writing BASIC code to make it work.

If you've ever been interested in writing your own programs, but felt that computer programming was too difficult, you can see how REALbasic makes writing programs fast and easy. From here, start experimenting with using different controls on a user interface, dig into the REALbasic language so you can find out how to use more powerful BASIC commands, and have fun. Programming doesn't have to be complicated, and REALbasic can help turn anyone with a good idea into a real programmer in no time.

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

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

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

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

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

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Worldwide News & Product Reviews

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

Post-Tax Tips to Thwart Identity Thieves: Electronically filed tax returns are ripe for identity thieves; Cell Phone Penny-Pinching—Contract-based cell phones are being set aside for cheaper prepaid plans; Acer Aspire One—A review of the Windows XP-based netbook.

Post-Tax Tips to Thwart Identity Thieves

According to Todd Feinman, identity-theft prevention expert and CEO of Identity Finder (*www.identityfinder.com*), "Tens of millions of tax returns have just been prepared and/or filed electronically. While electronic filing provides a convenience people value, it also creates a great risk of identity theft, as personal information used in tax preparation could be easily exposed to hackers and identity thieves. For just one year—2008—the FTC has reported almost 10 million Americans had their identity stolen; identity theft is now widely acknowledged to be the #1 most committed crime in the world."

"Stored tax documents are a gold mine for hackers because a tax return contains at least one person's Social Security number and a tremendous amount of other relevant, personal information," continues Feinman. "Once thieves get an SSN, they can potentially wreak havoc on a victim's credit." In times like these, when people store so much personal information in electronic form, Feinman urges everyone to be extra vigilant and stay one step ahead of the criminals.

Here are 10 simple, effective post-tax-time tips from Identity Finder:

1. When storing a copy of your tax return on your computer, make sure you secure it with a password so that your SSN cannot be read if the file is lost.

2. Securely delete all electronic, financial documents used to prepare your tax returns so any personal information is safe.

3. Ignore all refund/rebate/warning e-mails claiming to come from the IRS, and never click on links within those e-mails because it is most likely a phishing attack.

4. Do not provide personal information to anyone calling you claiming to be from the IRS; the IRS already has your information and it's likely to be an identity thief calling you.

5. Check your credit report with one of the three credit bureaus for free every four months at *www.annualcreditreport.com* to make sure your identity hasn't already been stolen.

6. Install the latest updates to your operating system so known Windows or Mac vulnerabilities can't be exploited by hackers.

7. Don't save your password in your Web browser when accessing banks and other institutions that keep

your personal information, because it could be leaked if you ever get a virus, Trojan, or are hacked.

8. If you provided your bank account and routing information to the IRS for payment or refunds, check your bank accounts to ensure the proper transfer occurred.

9. Visit your bank account online and set up alerts on your accounts to monitor when high amounts of cash are withdrawn.

10. Make sure you do not receive incorrect payment liability or refund information; a thief could have filed a tax return on your behalf fraudulently. If you suspect tax preparation fraud, call the State Tax Department toll free at 1-888-675-9437.

Identity Finder, specifically designed to help prevent identity theft, provides a free edition (*www.identityfinder.com/free*)—in addition to its Home Edition ($24.95) and Professional Edition: ($34.95)—to search several areas of computers for unprotected data.

Cell Phone Penny-Pinching

Patrick Mitchell, representing Washington, D.C. think tank The New Millennium Research Council (NMRC), cites a recent survey showing that 60 million U.S. consumers are worried the current recession is likely to make them switch to prepaid cell phones from more expensive contract-based calling plans. Mitchell writes:

"As fears about the recession become more widespread, millions of Americans are on the verge of disconnecting expensive cell phone plans. Two out of five Americans with contract-based cell phones—39 percent or 60.3 million consumers—are likely to cut back on their cell phones to save money if, as is widely expected, the economy gets worse over the next six months, according to new survey of 2,005 Americans conducted by Opinion Research Corporation (ORC) for NMRC."

The survey also finds that:

• A potentially major shift in consumer habits at the expense of contract-based cell phone service is underway as more consumers seek to save money in the face of the recession. No fewer than 40 million Americans—26 percent of consumers with contract-based cell phone service—are "more inclined today than six months ago to look at a way to save money on your cell phone bill, such as by switching to a prepaid cell phone service." This group includes 38 percent of those in households making $35,000 a year or less, 32 percent of African Americans and 30 percent of those aged 18-34.

• Cell phone extras—such as Internet connectivity, e-mail and texting—are also likely to take a hit in the economic downturn. A total of 19 million Americans—one in five cell phone users with cell-phone extras—have "considered cutting back" (5 percent) or actually "have cut back" (15 percent) on such features "in the last six months because of actual job loss, fear of job loss, the recession, or any other related financial concerns." More than two out of five cell phone users with extras on their phones (41 percent) say it is "very" (19 percent) or "somewhat" (21 percent) likely that they will cut back on cell phone extras "if the economy gets worse in the next six months." Fewer than two in five (39 percent) say it is "not likely at all" that they will make such cuts in the face of a deepening recession.

Allen Hepner, scholar, New Millennium Research Council, said: "The era of cell phone penny pinching is

officially here. Thanks to the recession, the U.S. cell phone marketplace is undergoing fundamental changes that will just get bigger as the economic downturn deepens. What we see in these survey findings is clear evidence that most consumers will keep a cell phone during this recession, but only after shifting to less expensive cell phone plans, such as prepaid, and also by scaling back on cell phone extras including Internet connectivity and texting."

In recent months, Consumer Reports (*blogs.consumerreports.org/electronics/2009/01/cut-cell-phone.html*) and the Telecommunications Research and Action Center (*www.trac.org/newsroom/releases/archives/2007/press_111308.html*) (TRAC) have both emphasized that millions of Americans now on contract-based cell phone plans could save money by switching to a prepaid cell phone service.

The survey also determined that four out of five Americans own a cell phone, ranging from 84 percent of 18-34 year olds to just 68 percent of those age 65 or older. While 91 percent of those in households earning $100,000 or more have cell phones, less than two-thirds in households earning $35,000 a year or less (65 percent) have such devices. Nearly one in five Americans (17 percent) reports having a prepaid cell phone currently, compared to 84 percent with a contract-based cell phone. (There is some overlap due to individuals who own both types of phones.) African Americans at 22 percent are the group most likely to have prepaid cell phones.

For full survey findings, go to *www.thenmrc.org*.

Acer Aspire One

Last year, I reviewed my Asus Eee PC 701 running Linux (World News and Reviews dated February 29, 2008). Not being a polished Linux user, I came across a Windows XP-based netbook this year that I really liked: the Acer Aspire One. It is slightly larger than the Asus product, with an 8.9-inch WSVGA (1,024 x600) TFT LCD screen. The Eee PC's screen was seven inches.

Other features include an Intel Atom Processor N270, 1GB of DDR2 533 SD RAM, 8GB NAND flash memory as C: drive, and an 8GB SD card as D: drive, which I replaced with a 16GB SD card. There are other models with traditional 120GB and 160GB hard drives. As mentioned above, the OS is Windows XP Home Edition. It has three USB 2.0 ports, an RJ-45 LAN port, a VGA port for connecting an external monitor or projector, headphones and microphone jacks. It has a built-in microphone, stereo speakers and a Wi-Fi Certified 802.11b/g wireless LAN, so it is ready for running Skype or other video/chat applications.

It has a mouse touchpad with buttons on either side. Along with its SD card slot, it has a multi-in-one card reader that supports the following cards: MMC, reduced size MMC, SD, Memory Stick, Memory Stick Pro and xD Picture Cards. Mine has the sapphire blue case, which I really like. Battery life is a bit over 2.5 hours. The unit weighs about 2.2lbs.

Along with Windows XP, it comes with Microsoft Works, a trial version of Windows Office, Adobe Acrobat Reader, a trial version of McAfee Internet Security Suite, and other apps. Last year, I reported on my annual trip to Italy using my Asus Eee PC (Digital Dave dated October 17, 2008). I plan to do a similar story this fall using my Acer Aspire One.

Review contributed by Joe Nuvolini

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

Carr has covered such diverse topics as pesticide use in area schools, invasive background checks for county volunteers, asthma awareness, the debate over standards-based grading, potential vulnerabilities in electronic voting machines, and Southern California's devastating 2003 and 2007 wildfires. He has also written many humorous pieces.

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

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

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

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

Carr will soon publish his first book, *What a World*, a collection of his best writings.
Learn more at *www.charlescarr.com*.

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EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher

"The Future of Broadband" by Jack Dunning

Instead of capping and throttling, ISPs should be figuring out how they're going to supply more bandwidth in the future.

There is a continual conflict brewing between Internet users and the Internet Service Providers (ISPs). The users want unlimited bandwidth for downloading files, watching videos and other services that demand high speed. The ISPs (cable companies, phone companies, satellite companies) want more money. If you want more speed for watching television over the Internet, then the ISPs think they should get a bigger cut. It's not that you've gone beyond the limits of your service—most people don't. It's just that the cable companies don't think you should be able to get more value out of your connection without paying them more—regardless of the original deal.

To change the rules, some companies are applying caps and/or throttles to the available bandwidth. If you use too much—in their opinion—you could find that you are operating at a dial-up speed. The ISPs claim that it's not fair to other users, but that is just an excuse to implement more controls. Rather than trying to control and nickel-and-dime users, ISPs should concentrate on increasing their bandwidth capacity. In a few years they're going to need it to compete.

Businesses often contract T-1 lines for their Internet needs. The beauty of a T-1 line is that it gives high speed for both downloading and uploading (1.544Mbps). For the vast majority of today's applications, this is plenty of bandwidth. A number of people can use the same T-1 line without noticeable degradation—depending upon their applications. Providers of T-1 lines don't worry about how the connection is being used, nor do they throttle anyone if they are operating high-bandwidth applications, such as a Web server for video and/or audio applications. The downside of the T-1 line is that it costs about $350 per month.

Some ISPs are now offering a wireless broadband connection. This is not the same wireless broadband that you get from cell phone companies. A wireless Wide Area Network (WAN) would be owned by the ISP and require that you set up an antenna on your roof or near a window. The available bandwidths are 500Kbps and 1Mbps, priced at about $125 and $250 respectively. While not as expensive as a T-1 line, the speeds are respectable. If the price comes down a little more and these wireless ISPs don't impose silly throttling rules, then they could compete with the broadband cable ($50-60 per month). These services are currently marketed to businesses that need more than DSL, but don't want to pay the T-1 price.

The cellular telephone companies are currently working on their own answer to the near monopoly of the cable Internet companies. The 4G networks, which should become widely available in a couple of years, offer speeds that actually will give users a choice. Today's 3G services are adequate for most travel situations, but cable and DSL connections have proven to be more reliable in the home situation. Plus, the 3G connections, while better than dial-up, are some of the slower broadband connections. (A couple of the cell companies are also participating in capping and throttling their Internet users.) The problem of spotty service for the cell companies is starting to be addressed with in-house cellular towers. A cellular repeater (about $500), which will bring the signal directly into your house, is being introduced by some of the companies.

While these alternatives are currently either too costly or not yet available, the home ISPs should take note

of the future of broadband service rather than worrying about how their subscribers are using their contracted bandwidth. Instead of capping and throttling, they should be figuring out how they're going to supply more bandwidth in the future. Maybe they should concentrate on laying more fiber-optic cable (maybe they are?). In the long run, there will be no monopolies—only alternative ways to contract as much bandwidth as you need at a reasonable price. The competition between all of these forces will bring this about.

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

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Editor's Letters

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

"Three Thumbs Up," "Slow-Booting Computer," "The Future of Newspapers," "Satellite Internet," "Full-Screen Goodness"

Three Thumbs Up

[This letter is in regard to Jack Dunning's April 10 article, "On the Move with the Internet."]

I think that [in-vehicle Internet access] will be very useful for all kinds of activities, even info and work-related activities.

I would also like to take this chance to give you all three thumbs-up for the work everybody does in the magazine; it is very helpful for my schooling and any other information I need.

-Conrad Saul, Chula Vista

Slow-Booting Computer

[This letter is in regard to Digital Dave's April 10 column, where a reader wrote in wondering how you can tell if a slow-booting computer is up and ready to go.]

The reader, Steve F., stated, "My computer takes a while to completely boot up. I usually just wait until my taskbar appears to be finished populating to determine when the bootup is complete."

I would add to your excellent advice to check how many startup programs are running, and if they are required. Many users are unaware that "helpful" startup programs are often automatically installed along with their applications. Over time these can add up. I've seen some users' computers with 30 or more programs set to run at startup, all competing for processor time.

In Windows XP, click Start/Run, type "msconfig.exe," and then click the Startup tab. Uncheck the programs you don't use, or don't need on your taskbar. If you uncheck one you needed, you can just go check it again.

-Phil Martin, San Diego, Calif.

The Future of Newspapers

[The following letters are in regard to Jack Dunning's April 17 Edgeword column, where he addressed the future of the newspaper industry.]

Jack, I hate to break it to ya buddy, but the future is now. I stopped my paper subscription a few months ago even though it was one of my most favorite and "required" pastimes. Now, instead of paying $8 per week and having to lug out all the circulars and old news, I pay 99 cents a week and read only what I want

online. My electronic version is an exact duplicate of the paper version, but I can quickly skip all the stuff that doesn't interest me, and spend my limited time reading just the sections that do.

I had considered subscribing to one of the larger newspapers, but realized one of the things I wanted was local news, especially entertainment and local events. The problems I've encountered have been few, but annoying: pages that don't appear; partial pages; and the lack of certain inserts that are included in the paper version, but not the electronic. Still, I'm glad I made the change. I don't know how the paper will survive based on what I'm paying, but I much prefer hitting the delete button to hauling 10 pounds of newsprint to the trash every week.

-Joe Piluso, San Diego

Some time ago, The New York Times began charging for the online content of several of its more well-known columnists and writers. It was a supplemental charge for readers to get their daily fixes of their preferred authors. After several months, the experiment ended when not many readers signed up, even though their favorite columns were not in the regular online edition. The NY Times also received many complaints about beginning to charge for that content. The online edition now carries all its writers without additional cost.

-Nathan Clark, San Diego

There are so many uses to put a newspaper to that you can *not* do with online news (or online anything). I'm sure you don't want to line your bird cage with your monitor. Nor use your monitor to blot up puppy mistakes from the floor. And on and on.

-Paul Lee, San Diego, Calif.

Satellite Internet

[This letter is in regard to Michael J. Ross' April 10 article, "Satellite Internet Service."]

You may also want to mention that some of the providers have a daily data "cap" of 350MB (uploads and downloads). If you exceed this cap, your connection rate is cut to 56Kb/s for 24 hours—barely better than a good dial-up connection. However, some also have a three-hour window in the early morning when data does not count. Needless to say, you won't be using most satellite connections to download your Netflix movie.

Also, it may be good to add that the satellite round-trip delay makes the connection poor for gaming or VoIP.

-Bob Cook, Deltona, FL

Full-Screen Goodness

[This letter is in regard to Jack Dunning's April 10 Windows Vista Tips and Tricks column, "Supersized Fun with the F11 Key."]

Jack, that F11 trick has been a favorite of mine for some time with XP (and possibly earlier). IE, Windows Explorer, Windows Media player, even Google Earth go full-screen with F11. I've become a big fan of Google Chrome, so I hope they implement a full-screen view soon.

Another full-screen trick with Adobe reader: Ctrl-L for full-screen, then various Ctrl-something combos for zoom: 0, 1, 2, 3 for preset zooms, or with +/- for variable zooming.

-Chuck Edgin, Coronado

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*.

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