

ComputerEdge™ Online — 05/01/09



This issue: Macintosh Rumors and iPhone Apps: The Latest from Apple

As a company that constantly innovates, Apple always has something new for us to investigate.

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Digital Dave

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

What's the deal with the bracketed numbers in cookie filenames?; a reader's Web e-mail account was hacked and used to spread spam; a reader transferred her files to a new hard drive, but now her iTunes songs won't play.

Dear Digital Dave,

If I have a cookie file in my cookie folder listed as "jcolman@c.msn[1].txt," what is the significance of the bracketed number?

There is always either a [1] or [2] as part of the cookie filename, but I can't figure out what it means. Even if the cookie folder is emptied, the folder is immediately repopulated with various cookie files with different bracketed files upon a visit to a Web site.

There are theories about what it means, but no definite answers anywhere. This is related to a forensic analysis, and I might have to testify on it. Thank you!

*Bob
Arlington, VA*

Dear Bob,

If you have cookies turned on in your Web browser, then Web sites will write cookies (files that give your computer a random identification number) to your computer. The cookies can also save other data, which can be used for special features on the site and user tracking.

The cookie has two parts. The first part (before the @) is your user name (known only to your browser, not the Web site). The second part identifies the Internet domain name associated with the IP and Web site that you accessed. The Web site can only access cookies that have the same name as Web site.

The cookies that you reference are from Microsoft Web sites. Microsoft is using the bracketed numbers in the domain name portion of the cookie that you have accessed. The number in brackets tells you how many times that cookie has been updated. It could be that different information is being saved in each cookie version. When you delete all of your cookies, the process starts all over. Most likely Microsoft is using these cookie version numbers for some specific type of tracking.

If anyone has more specific information, please let me know.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I have an online e-mail account (Yahoo), which I use for all of my e-mail purposes. I had too many problems in the past with viruses/Trojans being downloaded, and was under the (obviously mistaken) impression that, if I did not download my e-mails, it would keep my account from being hijacked or used for harmful purposes.

I am conscientious about changing passwords, checking e-mail only on my personal computer, and not opening e-mails from people I don't know, so I was shocked and dismayed to discover that my account was used to spam every address in my contacts list, and the list was then completely deleted.

Based on the timestamp, the messages were sent while I was gaming online (LOTRO). The only reason I discovered this was because some of the messages bounced back to me.

My questions are: How can someone hijack an online-only account? What can I do to prevent it from happening again? Is there something in game clients that opens a vulnerability to this sort of thing?

*Maxi Morgan
Ekalaka, MT*

Dear Maxi,

The major difference between online e-mail and local (on your computer) e-mail is that the program that does your client work (picking up and sending e-mail) is located on a server rather than on your computer. While you would think that servers from a company like Yahoo would be well protected, all computers can be infected with malware.

If there is a virus problem, it belongs to Yahoo—many people have complained about it. It seems that there isn't much you can do, other than open a new online e-mail account with a new name. On the plus side, it's highly unlikely that your computer has been infected.

Since this type of virus is generally spread through e-mail, if you have friends with the same problem, you will continue to run the risk of getting it again—unless all your friends are clean or until Yahoo takes specific steps to clean its servers.

Another possibility is that you could have been infected with a keylogger that picked up your password, or you just had a really easy to brute-force guess password. You may have responded to a phishing e-mail requesting your password. Just in case, I'd recommend that you change your password for any online services you might be using (banking, e-mail, etc.). If this is the problem, your password is more than likely compromised.

The fact that you were playing a game at the time of the incident is probably a coincidence, although I can't be sure. People who create viruses are pretty devious, and it's always possible that they are exploiting a bug in the software. However, it seems that the fact that you're using online e-mail actually should make it less likely that the game and e-mail service are interacting.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I transferred my files from my old computer to an external hard drive before buying a new computer. I then transferred my files and folders to the new computer successfully—I thought.

My "tunes" on iTunes will not play. I get the message: "The song could not be used because the original file could not be found. Would you like to locate it? Yes or No," when I try to play a song from iTunes.

Can you help me solve this problem?

*Phyllis
Tucson, AZ*

Dear Phyllis,

iTunes is basically a list of paths to where your songs are actually located. When a song is included in iTunes, the path to the song rather than the song itself is saved—unless you have given it specific commands to save the song at a new location. Each time you play a song, iTunes reaches out to the saved location.

You need to back up the song files themselves so you don't lose them. When moving music to a new computer, you should copy the song files over, install iTunes, and then point iTunes to your songs.

In your case, when you transferred your files to the new computer, either the songs didn't go with the transfer, or the path to the songs changed when they were copied to the new hard drive. If you say "Yes" to locating the files—and can find them—the new path will be saved. You need to know where the actual files are located before you take this step.

Digital Dave

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The Latest Apple Rumors

“The future looks bright for iPhone and Mac owners.” by Wally Wang

While most companies sit around, unwilling to take risks, Apple has quietly lined up a slew of product releases that promises to gather its share of copycats all over again.

Despite capturing less than 10 percent of the total computer market, Apple still manages to capture everyone's attention. Apple has had its failures, including the Newton, the G4 Cube and Apple TV, which still lingers while Apple tries to figure out how to improve it.

Besides its failures, Apple has also had more than its share of successes. The all-in-one design of the iMac spurred numerous copycat models from Sony, Gateway and Dell. The thin dimensions and light weight of the MacBook Air has likewise garnered its copycat knockoffs from Dell and Lenovo. Before the iPhone, cell phones had physical keyboards and parts that flipped open or slid apart. Now every cell phone manufacturer is rushing a touchscreen model out that looks strangely similar to the iPhone's simple shape with no moving parts.

With all of the brainpower and high executive salaries at these other companies, you have to wonder if any company is willing to do anything without watching to see what Apple does first.

While most companies sit around, unwilling to take risks, Apple has quietly lined up a slew of product releases that promises to gather its share of copycats all over again.

Mac OS X 10.6 Snow Leopard

Reportedly by this fall, Apple will have its latest operating system out, dubbed Snow Leopard. This new operating system promises a redesigned user interface focused on simplifying the way people interact with a computer, while also providing an aesthetically pleasing new look, as well.

Snow Leopard also promises to break with the past. While the current Mac OS X Leopard runs on both Intel and PowerPC processors, Snow Leopard will reportedly run only on Intel-based Macs. If you're still clinging to an older Mac with a PowerPC processor (last built in 2006), it's time to move up to a newer model.

By eliminating support for obsolete PowerPC processors, Snow Leopard can shed much of its bulk and reduce its size considerably. Now you get an updated operating system that actually takes up less space.

More importantly, Snow Leopard focuses on optimization to make the operating system run faster, even on older machines, which is something normally unheard of in the computer industry. There's a good chance that your current Mac may be running nicely today, but with Snow Leopard, it could speed up noticeably without upgrading any of its hardware components.

Of course, optimization isn't anything new. Ever since Mac OS X 10.1, each iteration of Mac OS X has added new features and made older computers run faster than before. The latest version of Mac OS X 10.5 Leopard halted that trend by simply adding more features. Snow Leopard promises to bring back this optimization trend.

The ability to install a new operating system on an older computer and speed it up is one reason why Mac owners tout the superiority of their computers. Why bother constantly upgrading a computer to run an operating system that simply gobbles up more resources, while running as slowly as your older computer? Paying less for a new computer is pointless if it doesn't run faster than your older computer or give you any new features that make computing more fun and productive.

The greatest feature of Snow Leopard is its Grand Central technology, which is designed to optimize the use of multiple processors. Despite hardware advances with dual and quad-core processors, most software is still designed to work with a single processor. Shoving two or four processors into a computer should speed up your computer by two to four times, but since the operating system can't use multiple processors efficiently, all that extra processing power largely goes to waste.

With Grand Central, Snow Leopard will not only know how to maximize the efficiency of multiple processors, but it will also be able to take advantage of the graphics processor, as well.

Nvidia and Nero recently announced Nero's new program that takes advantage of Nvidia's parallel computing architecture, which is similar to what Grand Central will do for Snow Leopard. In this press release (www.nvidia.com/object/io_1240400059772.html), Nvidia and Nero claims that what used to take hours can now occur in minutes, thanks to parallel processing.

Of course, Nvidia's parallel-processing technology is useful only with programs specifically designed to exploit it. Grand Central avoids this problem by simply optimizing the entire operating system. Now it won't matter which program you're running, since the operating system will take care of optimizing the task.

If Nvidia and Nero claim processing speeds up to five times faster through parallel processing, Snow Leopard could dramatically boost the speed of your computer through nothing more than a simple operating system upgrade.

The iPhone OS 3.0

It's no secret that Apple is continuing to update its iPhone. Despite its futuristic appearance, the iPhone lacks common features found in ordinary cell phones, such as copy and paste of text, video capture and multimedia messaging service (MMS) that allows you to send audio and pictures as well as text messages.

The new iPhone 3.0 promises to add these features along with eliminating the main criticism of the iPhone: its virtual keyboard. Current versions of the iPhone display the virtual keyboard in portrait mode, which means you have the skinny width of the iPhone to display the virtual keyboard. Not surprisingly, cramming the entire virtual keyboard into this minuscule space makes each key small and hard to type correctly. The new iPhone will let you tilt the iPhone on its side to make the virtual keyboard appear wider and thus easier to type.

These minor features simply bring the iPhone on par with current cell phones. What promises to really change the cell phone market is the iPhone's addition of more than 1,000 new API (Application Programming Interface) routines, which will allow developers to create even more sophisticated apps.

For many people, the main appeal of the iPhone isn't its multitouch interface but its ability to find thousands of apps that can turn your iPhone into anything from a medical reference book to a point-of-sale handheld device.

With these new API routines, expect iPhone apps to get even more powerful and sophisticated while still retaining the simple multitouch interface. Although BlackBerry maker RIM and Microsoft's Windows Mobile have created similar online stores for selling their applications, Apple's App Store has a gigantic head start and will continue growing.

If you're a developer looking to make money, the iPhone represents the best mobile phone platform to support. As a result, if you're looking for the most versatile mobile phone apps, there's only the iPhone. Other companies can mimic the multitouch interface, such as Google's Android or Palm's Pre, but none of them can duplicate the success and popularity of Apple's App Store.

The Apple Netbook

Everyone knows Snow Leopard and the iPhone 3.0 will arrive later this year. The big question mark is, what else is Apple developing?

The latest rumor focuses on a possible Apple netbook, although Apple has denied creating a cheap computer with a cramped keyboard and substandard hardware. Apple has reportedly developed a device with a 10-inch screen, making it small enough to be a netbook but too large to be another iPhone model.

This mysterious 10-inch device might be Apple's version of a netbook, or it might be a larger iPod touch-like device. Whatever its ultimate name, you can bet that it will run a subset of Mac OS X like the iPhone and be able to run either iPhone apps or current Mac OS X programs.

As long as Apple keeps the price reasonable (unlike its \$10,000 Lisa computer), this new 10-inch device could further cement Apple's reputation as a trend setter, while further burying its competitors behind to play another game of catch up with copycat products.

With all of these innovations coming out of Apple, there's plenty of excitement among Mac and iPhone users. With a faster operating system capable of speeding up older Macintosh models, and an even more versatile iPhone, the future remains bright for Apple and its customers.

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 the following books:

- Microsoft Office 2007 for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470009233?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470009233)
- Beginning Programming for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470088702?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470088702)
- Breaking Into Acting for Dummies with Larry Garrison (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0764554468?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0764554468)
- Beginning Programming All-in-One Reference for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470108541?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470108541)

- Steal This Computer Book 4.0 (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271050?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271050)
- Visual Basic Express 2005: Now Playing (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593270593?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593270593)
- My New Mac (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271646?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271646)
- My New iPhone (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271956?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271956)
- Strategic Entrepreneurism with Jon Fisher and Gerald Fisher (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1590791894?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1590791894)

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 (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), using the techniques he learned from a professional Wall Street day trader.

Wally can be reached at wally@computoredge.com and at his personal web site (www.wallacewang.com/).

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iPhone Applications Overview

“Apps make the iPhone a one-of-a-kind smartphone.” by Michael J. Ross

While the iPhone boasts an impressive list of features, another major attraction is its extensive and growing list of applications—programs that run on the phone itself.

Apple's iPhone is currently the most popular smartphone, as measured by sales, according to numerous sources. For instance, AppleInsider reports that the iPhone is outselling T-Mobile's G1 (which is based upon Google's Android platform) at a staggering ratio of six-to-one. Morgan Stanley estimates that, as of January 2009, Apple has sold approximately 1.75 million iPhone 3Gs—the latest version in the product line. The initial, non-3G version certainly got off to a fast start when it was launched in late June 2007. During July, its first full month of sales, it outsold all other smartphones in the United States (according to iSuppli). Only 74 days after its first appearance, the one millionth unit was purchased.

What accounts for this tremendous popularity, aside from the kind of brand loyalty that most companies can only dream of? The iPhone certainly boasts an impressive list of features. It possesses all of the capabilities that you will find in any of the leading smartphones: cellular phone service, as well as robust voice mail and contact management; SMS (Short Message Service) text messaging; storage and playback of music files (in MP3 format); Internet connectivity using Wi-Fi and the 3G telecommunications standard; mobile Web browsing (using Apple's Safari browser (www.apple.com/safari/)); geolocation utilizing built-in GPS, Wi-Fi, and coordination with cell phone towers; mapping with integrated Google Maps (maps.google.com/); language and keyboard support for multiple languages; and integration with corporate e-mail systems using Microsoft Exchange. The iPhone goes beyond rival smartphones by featuring automatic syncing with Apple's iTunes (www.apple.com/itunes/) music store.

In addition to the aforesaid features, the iPhone 3G sports Apple's characteristic clean and functional design, as well as a touchscreen that allows the dynamic sizing of buttons, so the user is not restricted to mechanical buttons that consume valuable space on the unit's front panel.



Figure 1. iPhone 3G.

Another major attraction for the iPhone 3G is the extensive and growing list of applications—programs that run on the phone itself, which has its own operating system (the iPhone OS 3.0, as of this writing). There are currently thousands of such applications, in a wide range of categories, ranging from the most straight-laced business programs to the most frivolous games. Even though, within the scope of this article, we can only scratch the surface of all the available iPhone applications, there are some that have been singled out by industry pundits and consumers alike as notable and worth the price of admission, if any.

What's in Store

As with all Apple hardware and software, the company makes every effort to maximize its control and thus its profit margins. As a consequence, the only place to purchase iPhone applications is the iPhone App Store (www.apple.com/iphone/appstore/).



Figure 2. iPhone Store.

The store Web site provides an overview of the available applications, and lists the most popular ones in various categories: What's New, Books, Business, Education, Entertainment, Finance, Games, Health Care & Fitness and Lifestyle. Clicking on the link of each individual application shows you a brief preview, but no product details. In fact, to see that information for almost all iPhone apps, you have to be running Apple's iTunes on your computer. This can be quite annoying if you simply want to read those pages and learn more, before making a commitment to iTunes/iPhone, because the installation file alone is more than 71 megabytes, and over 91MB on disk. To reiterate, if you wish to see those product pages, then you will need to search by product name within iTunes running on your desktop, and not the iTunes Web site.

The official iTunes application store is not the only source of information on products that run on this platform. Appsafari.com (www.appsafari.com/) has information, screenshots and user ratings for over a thousand programs. The home page shows the newest releases, another page has applications grouped into dozens of categories, and there is a page that groups them by top-rated games, chat programs, utilities, iPhone mods and finally the rather confusing title "App Store Apps." Their store page does not actually sell applications, but instead iPhone-related hardware.

iPhoneApps.org (iphoneapps.org/), like Appsafari, discusses available applications, and also suffers from quirky

navigation. The site provides brief independent reviews of some apps, as well as articles on iPhone hardware and software. Their iPhone 3G store sells various accessories, such as cases, sleeves and other protective items.

Despite these attempts at third-party sites, your best bet for browsing and purchasing applications is to go to the source, at Apple.

Appetizing Apps

Those iPhone users who enjoy exploring the world via Google Earth (earth.google.com/) will be pleased that this remarkable application has been ported to the iPhone. While the small screen of an iPhone—or any mobile phone—is far from optimal for viewing satellite and map imagery, the Google Earth app (www.apple.com/downloads/macosx/home_learning/googleearth.html) makes the most of the available space. Like its full-blown version, it is free, and includes an essential compass. Taking advantage of the iPhone's built-in accelerometer, Google Earth will tilt the horizon when you do the same to the phone itself. As noted in a Wired article (blog.wired.com/gadgets/2008/10/google-earth-co.html) on the subject, this iPhone-specific version lacks road labels, and the weakest link is the speed with which your iPhone can download the imagery and map data being streamed from the Google servers. Nonetheless, Google Earth is just as amazing on a phone as it is on a desktop computer or laptop.



Figure 3. Google Earth.

While the Amazon.com Kindle may be the most powerful mobile reading device, the iPhone could prove an alternative for people who do not mind reading text on a significantly smaller screen. There are several promising book applications, such as Lexcycle Stanza, which allows you to purchase any of more than 50,000 new titles.

You can also select from more than 50,000 free books, such as the classics of literature, offered by Project Gutenberg. Stanza has been cited by many reviewers as one of the best iPhone apps, and during 2008 was downloaded over a million times. It is completely free to download and try out.



Figure 4. Stanza.

Another extremely popular book-reading application is named simply Classics. It comprises 20 well-known titles from the past, ranging from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland to The Iliad. The product detail page indicates that the vendor will be adding more titles in the future. The price is currently \$2.99, which is far less than what you would pay to purchase just one of the books through Amazon.com—but it is more than what you would pay to check them out from the public library.



Figure 5. Classics.

Another Internet-powered service that had transitioned to the mobile device market is Pandora (www.pandora.com), the controversial application that allows users to find and listen to music that best matches their stated favorites—utilizing music analysis and matching done by the Music Genome Project. The Pandora Radio application for the iPhone allows you to freely create a custom stream of songs, much like an ad-free radio station. The program can display the album art and artist's biography of the music currently playing. Songs can be bookmarked, and samples from them played at any time. You can even e-mail your personalized "station" to someone else.

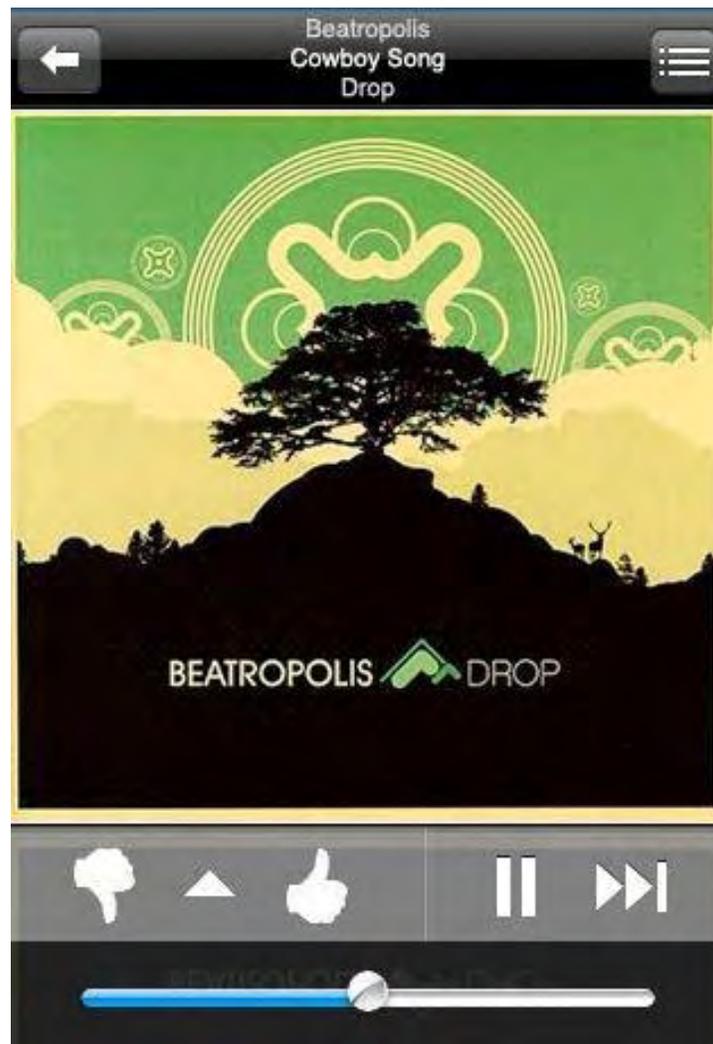


Figure 6. Pandora.

These are just a handful of the wide range of apps that are available. The iTunes program also allows you to search for songs, albums, TV shows, music videos and podcasts.

Worms in the Apple?

But something may be rotten in Apple's garden of iPhone Eden. While the list of available applications in the iPhone store continues to increase, that is no guarantee that the usage of those applications is also increasing. In fact, it is possible that the download counters displayed for the most popular apps are absolutely no indication of whether iPhone users are running those programs on a daily basis, or even beyond the first few minutes of trying them out.

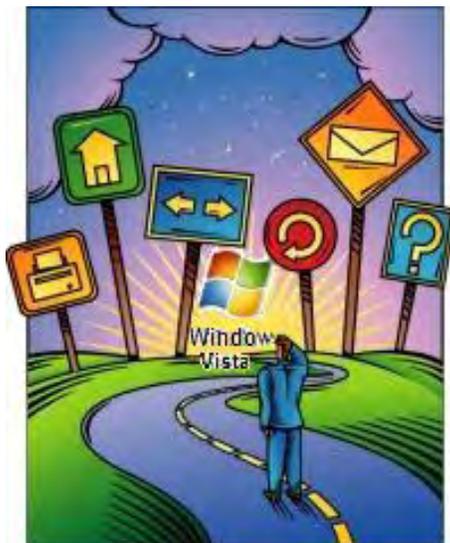
Pinch Media, a firm that assists iPhone developers in tracking the usage of the apps they create, published a presentation titled "AppStore Secrets" (www.pinchmedia.com/appstore-secrets/), which shows that, on average, only 20 percent of downloaders use any given application the next day, and far fewer continue to use it in the days that follow. One might assume that the usage rates are much higher for paid applications, but they aren't: Only 30 percent of people who paid money for an iPhone app even bother to use it the next day, and the decline in usage after that day is just as steep as for free applications. The news only gets worse. Only one percent of downloaders continue to use these apps on a long-term basis. Of course, technology buffs and electronics geeks are certainly not renowned for having excessively long attention spans. But this does not bode well for iPhone-based application usage over the long haul.

It is probably a good thing that almost all of the applications listed in the iPhone store are free or only cost a few dollars, considering how poorly some of them work. In forums outside the control of the Apple empire, iPhone owners complain of a variety of problems, including navigation elements within programs not working. Undoubtedly, this is to be expected with any new technology—particularly one in which such a mix of third-party developers are cutting their teeth on their very first applications for a new platform.

Yet given time, application developers will hone their skills, and iPhone users will continue to vote with their dollars and their feedback—thus improving the process for everyone involved.

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

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Windows Vista Tips and Tricks

Windows Vista Tips and Tricks

“Windows Vista's Clock” by Jack Dunning

Besides keeping accurate time, the clock feature in Windows Vista also has a couple of other features that may make the computer clock more useful for you.

In the early days, the time displayed on computers would drift. Even though you might expect otherwise, the clocks on computers are not super-accurate. After a week or two, the clock could be off by seconds—or even minutes. Resetting the time required opening the Time program and resetting the clock by hand—usually against an even more inaccurate wristwatch.

By default, this problem has been solved in Windows. Once a week the computer will automatically reach out to a time site on the Internet and update the clock to the correct time—as long as the computer is both powered up and hooked to the Internet. The clock in Windows Vista also has a couple of other features that may make the computer clock more useful for you.

One of the best feature of the clock is having the time, day or the week and date in the lower right-hand of the notification area of the taskbar. It is a convenient, unobtrusive way to keep track of time. Plus, the Time/Date area serves as a quick launch to the other clock features. Merely click on the Time area, and the calendar and clock(s) will appear, as seen in Figure 1.

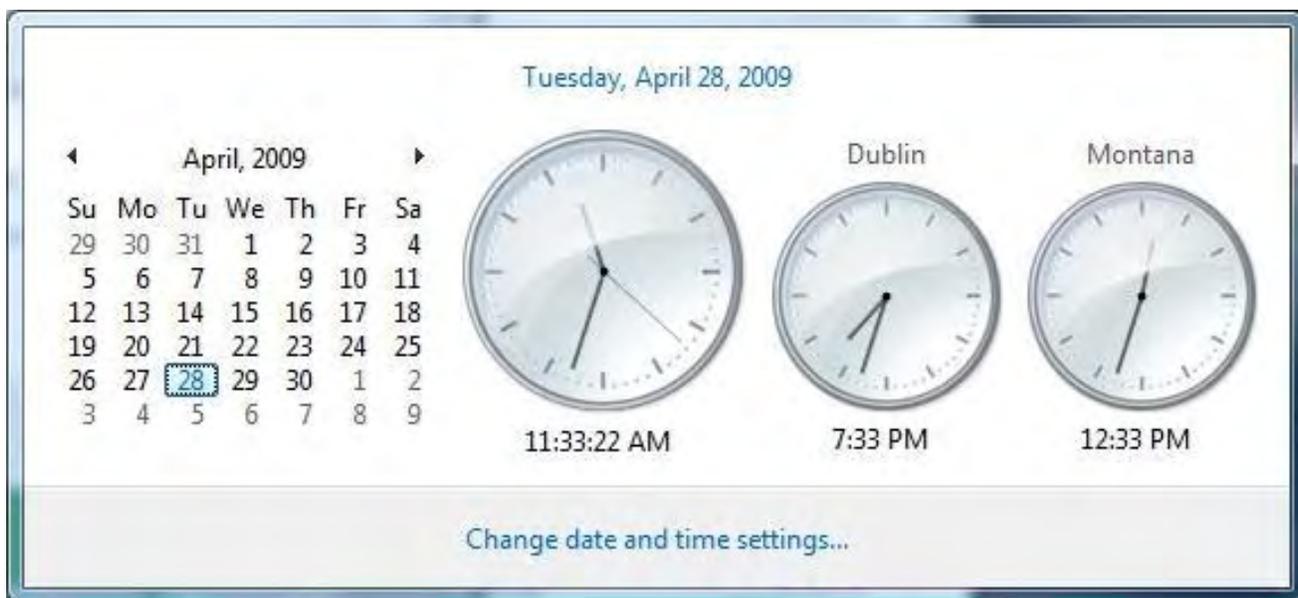


Figure 1. Windows Vista computer calendar and clocks.

Note: If the time and date do not appear in the lower right-hand corner of your computer screen, right-click on an

empty spot in the taskbar and select Properties. Select the Notification Area tab, check the Clock box, and click Apply. The time and date should then appear. On the other hand, if you hate keeping track of the time, uncheck the Clock box (and Apply) to remove the time and date from the Notification area.

As you can see, there are up to three clocks that may be displayed on the screen. The larger clock always represents the computer's time (local time), or the time the computer is using for time and date stamping, plus syncing. The other two clocks are for the convenience of seeing the time in other parts of the world, which may be important to you. If your entire world exists in one time zone, then there is no need to activate the other two clocks.

To access the settings for the date and time, click "Change date and time settings" at the bottom of the window. This will open the Date and Time window, as shown in Figure 2. This window may also be opened by typing "date" or "time" in the Start Search field of the Windows Start Menu, or via the Control Panel, or right-click in the Time Notification box and select Adjust Time/Date.

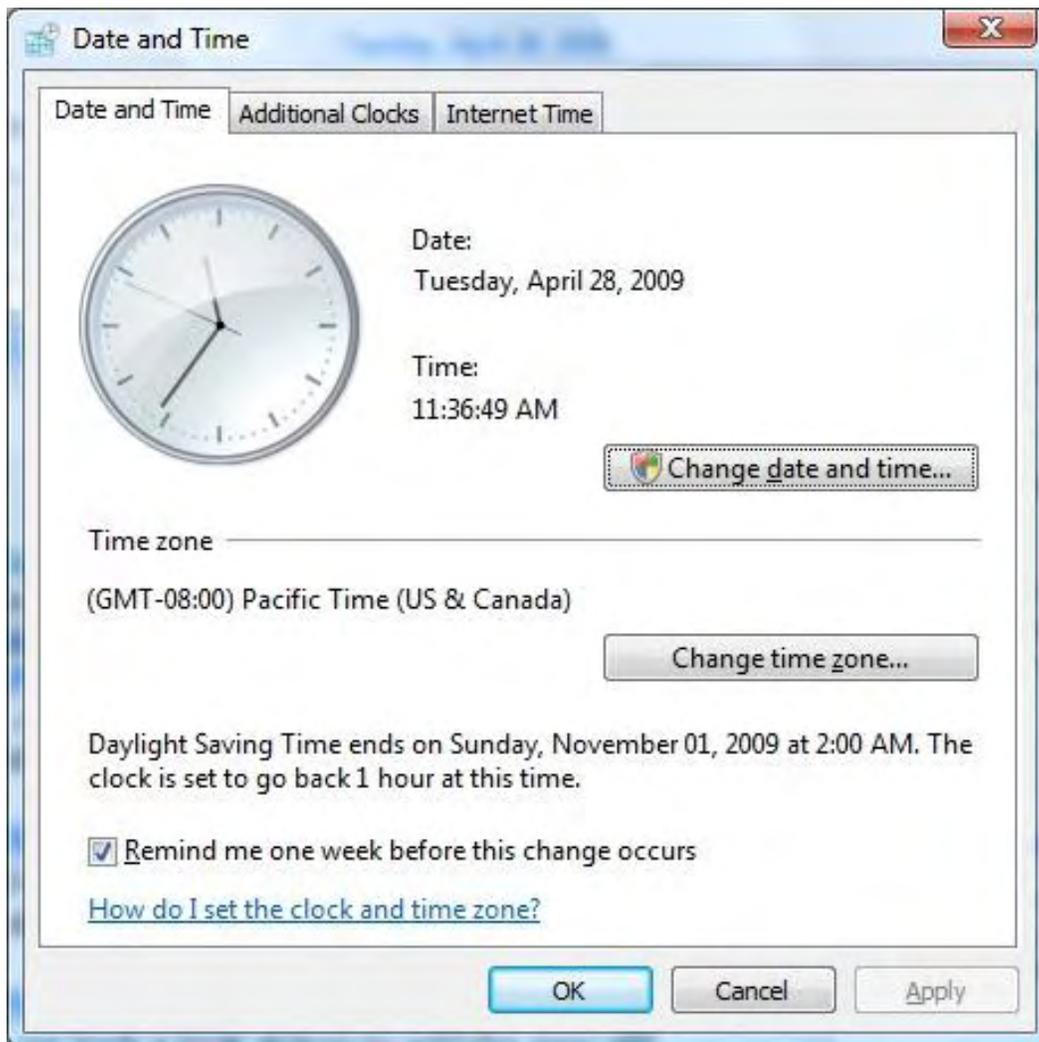


Figure 2. Windows Vista Date and Time settings window.

If you need to set the time by hand, click the "Change date and time" button. You'll probably need to give permission to continue. You can then select the appropriate date and time.

You may wonder why you would want to change the date or time, since they both are automatically updated once a week. One reason for temporarily changing the date or time is to test programs that are time sensitive or scheduled to run at a future date. Changing the computer clock will make it possible to run tests hours, days, or weeks before the real activation date. Changing the date will also affect the time stamp put on any files that you

save during the changed period (just in case you want to pretend that you did your work earlier, or later, then you really did). There are legitimate (?) reasons for temporarily adjusting your computer clock.

This first tab is also where the local time zone is selected. This is important because the automatic time updates will use this time zone for setting the display of the local clock. Plus you can use this to change your computer to another time zone when traveling. If you click "Change time zone," you will have access to all the world time zones, including those on the half-hour, such as Newfoundland and Rangoon. Most of the time zones have duplicate selections with different cities listed to make it easier to find the one you want. (I didn't realize that Kathmandu had a 45-minute off-set: +05:45.)

Select the Additional Clocks tab to add up to two more clocks. Check the clock(s) that you want to add, pick the appropriate time zone, and give the clock a name for the display (see Figure 3).

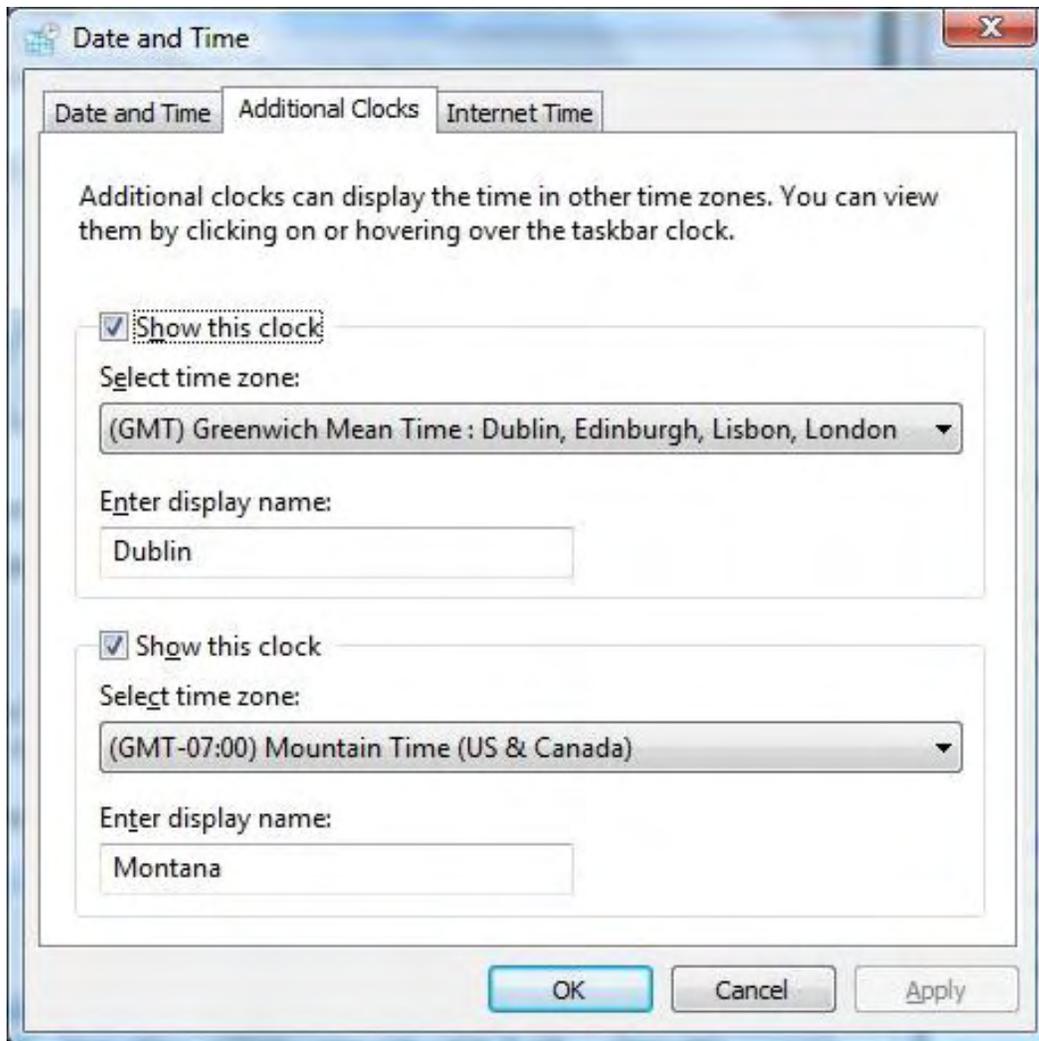


Figure 3. Windows Vista Additional Clocks tab in Date and Time window.

The last tab is for controlling the automatic time update (see Figure 4). This window will tell you when the next synchronization is scheduled, and if you've forced a new sync, when it was done. When your computer synchronizes the time, it goes out over the Internet to a specific time server and changes the computer's clock to match. To access these settings, click the "Change settings" button.

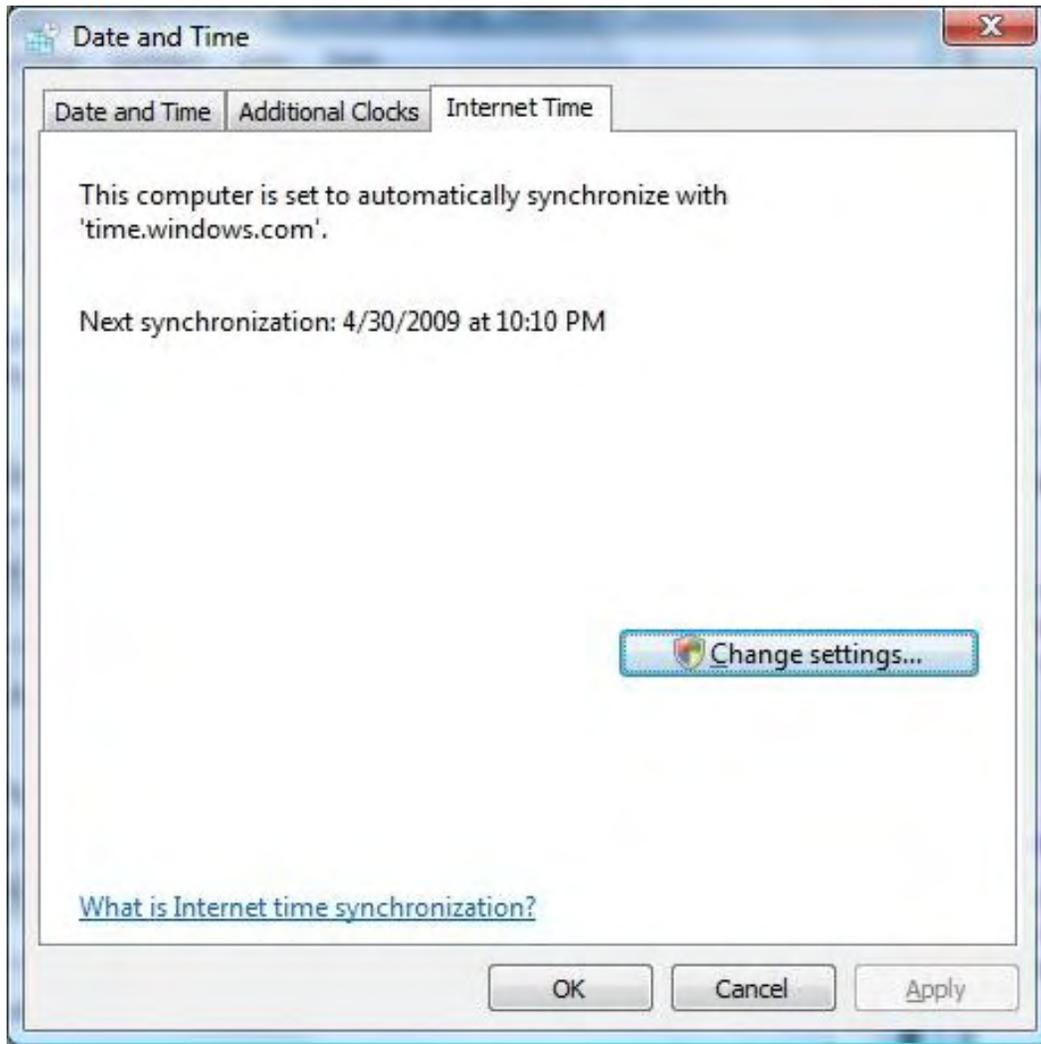


Figure 4. Windows Vista Internet Update tab in Date and Time window.

When you access the Internet time-sync settings, you will see the window in Figure 5. Checking the "Synchronize with Internet time server" box will activate the automatic weekly adjustments. This is a default setting, so in most cases this box will already be checked. Normally, the server will be set to time.windows.com as the default time server. (If you try to visit time.windows.com with your Web browser, you will be redirected to the Microsoft site.) In most cases, this is what you should use. The other settings are designed for NTP (Network Time Protocol (www.ntp.org/)) servers, which are used to set the time for other computers. (The Microsoft NTP server, time.windows.com, is updated from these other servers.) Unless you've set up your machine to set the time for other computers on your network (or have another special purpose requiring it), you should stick with time.windows.com and not add the time update load to any of the NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) servers.

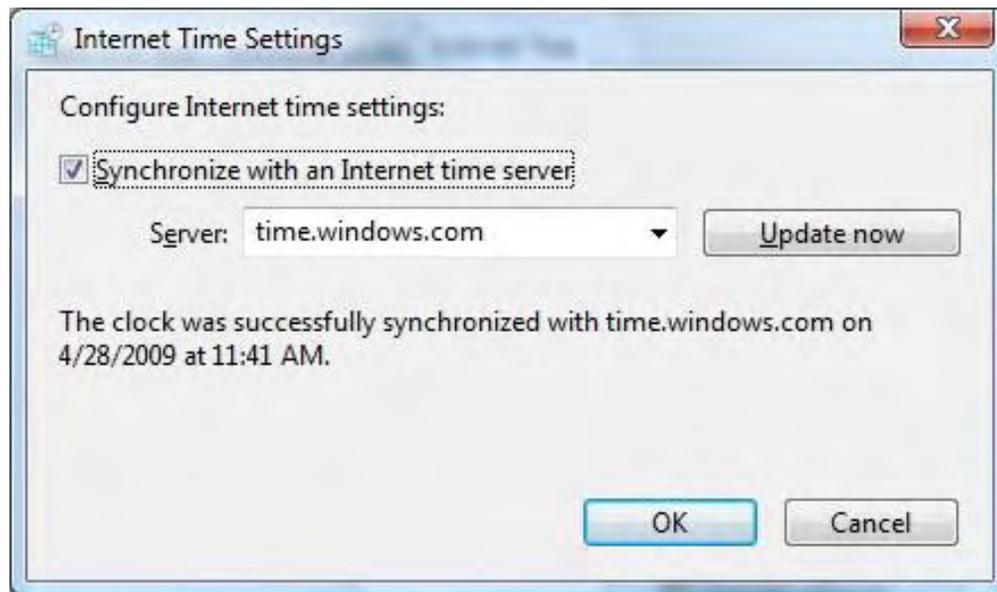


Figure 5. Windows Vista Internet Time Settings window.

If you click the "Update now" button, your computer will reach out over the Internet to the time server and reset your time and date. This is the best way to accurately reset your clock. If you turn off your computer every night (no Internet access), you may want to reset the next update time to during the day by doing a manual update at the appointed hour. (Trying to update in the middle of the night without an Internet connection could be the cause of a time drift, even with automatic time synchronization selected.) The computer will schedule the next update for the same time one week later.

If you need other specialized clocks or calendars, you can add them to Windows Vista Sidebar, as covered in Vista Tips and Tricks dated June 6, 2008.

One last tip: If you hover over the time and date in the Notification area of the taskbar, a summary pop-up of the date and the time in all regions will appear for about five seconds.

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

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

“The Magic of Software” by Wally Wang

The only difference between a PC and a Mac is the Mac OS X operating system, and that makes all the difference in the world. Also, a look at Strategic Entrepreneurism author Jon Fisher's recent report on the only job security in this economy; Redbox is changing the online video-rental model; and a tip on storing a portion of a favorite Web page as a Dashboard widget.

What made the Macintosh an initial success wasn't anything that Apple did. It was the introduction by Aldus Corporation of a new desktop publishing program called PageMaker. While everyone loved the then-revolutionary graphical user interface of the Macintosh, few people wanted to spend thousands of dollars to get a Macintosh when PCs were so much cheaper.

That all changed when PageMaker arrived. For less than \$10,000, you could get a Macintosh, PageMaker and a laser printer to start your own desktop publishing business or department. No matter how much you might have loved PCs, no amount of money could get you anything comparable.

That's the reason why the Macintosh took off: It finally solved a problem that PCs couldn't. Of course, when Aldus (later acquired by Adobe) continued developing PageMaker, they ported it to Windows. Once again, PCs could do whatever a Macintosh could do, and do it cheaper.

Oddly enough, graphic artists and designers still clung to their expensive Macintoshes. Now, with the resurgence of the Macintosh, more people are looking at the Macintosh for desktop publishing and a whole lot more. Instead of being considered just a graphic artist's computer, the Macintosh is now inexpensive enough to be considered a computer truly for everyone.

It's the Software

Given that graphics programs like Photoshop, InDesign and Flash run on both Windows and Macs, there's clearly no reason why graphic artists can't use Windows or Mac OS X to get their work done. The reason why so many graphic artists prefer the Macintosh isn't just blind loyalty or because they like Macs better than Windows. It's because they like and prefer using Mac OS X over Windows.

It's not just aesthetics, either. The Mac Pro looks as big and chunky as any desktop PC. It's just that, for most graphic designers, Mac OS X works better than Windows.

Obviously this is subjective, but with an army of graphic designers swearing allegiance to the Macintosh, even during the darkest days when the Macintosh was way overpriced and nearly extinct, there's more than a subjective reason for people clinging to their Macs.

The loyalty to Windows XP comes less from people loving the operating system to people just finding that Windows XP does what they need, and they don't want to bother learning anything else. People don't love

Windows XP; they just don't want to change.

Mac fanatics not only were willing to tolerate change, they went along with it, even when Apple switched from OS 9 to Mac OS X and then from PowerPC processors to Intel processors. People stay loyal to the Macintosh because, for the most part, Macs generally look better than PCs, Macs have fewer problems than PCs, and Macs are more fun to use than PCs.

That doesn't mean that Macs are perfect, but that the overall perception is that Macs are simply better computers than PCs in much the same way that people still think Japanese cars are better than American cars. Despite numerous reports that rank some American cars higher than their Japanese counterparts, and the fact that many Japanese cars are built in America, people still believe that Japanese cars are better because at one time, that was a fact.

Even today, Macintosh owners express higher satisfaction ratings than any rival PC manufacturers. There's a reason why people perceive Macs as better than PCs, and that's because at one time (maybe even today), they were noticeably superior.

Given a choice between buying a car made by GM or Toyota, more people trust Toyotas. Now, given a choice between PCs or Macs, more people are trusting Macs. With nearly identical software and hardware, the only difference between a PC and a Mac is the Mac OS X operating system, and that makes all the difference in the world.

A Special Report on Entrepreneurism

A year ago, I helped Jon Fisher, who had started three companies and sold his latest one to Oracle, write a book called *Strategic Entrepreneurism*[#]. Now, in today's economic uncertainty of job losses, plant closures and falling sales, Jon has issued a much shorter report detailing the main ideas in his book.

Basically, everyone knows you can't rely on a job to get rich, or even for economic security anymore. The only way you can possibly create job security is to go into business for yourself. While thousands of entrepreneurs rush to start their own companies, most will be doomed to failure, not through outside circumstances that are beyond their control, but through making simple, yet avoidable mistakes.

In this special report (which you can download here (www.computoredge.com/images/2718/Special%20Report%20Jon%20Fisher.pdf)), Jon emphasizes his main theme: To create a successful company, you can't rely on growing big and creating the next Google or Amazon anymore. Instead, you have to aim for a more realistic and more readily attainable object, and that's to design your company from the start to be acquired by a larger one.

If you wanted to sell books online, you could try competing against Amazon.com, and likely get wiped out in the process. Or you could create a social networking site around books and then sell your company to Amazon.com, which is exactly what the creator of Shelfari (www.shelfari.com) did.



Figure 1. Shelfari, a social networking site based on books.

Rather than compete directly against a much larger company, Jon argues that it makes much more sense to focus on a niche that a larger company is ignoring. Not only will this keep a larger company from wiping you out, but it will make your company an attractive acquisition target. Would you rather have a larger company squash your company into the ground or buy you out for millions?

Jon currently appears on television and radio stations giving his opinion on the current economic problems, and also giving guest talks at business schools around the country, while also teaching business classes at the University of San Francisco. If you want to get a taste of what being an entrepreneur is like and learn from someone who has successfully done it, grab a copy of this free special report today.

* * *

Unless you've been living in a cave for the past decade, you know that businesses come and go rapidly. At one time, Blockbuster Video took over the video rental market, wiping out thousands of mom-and-pop video rental stores in the process.

Now Netflix is wiping out Blockbuster Video. Why settle for limited choices and high prices when you can just order practically any video in the world from Netflix and enjoy it without the risk of late fees? For the price of renting three videos at Blockbuster, you could rent a dozen movies through Netflix in a month.

Apple TV is promising instant movie downloads through the Internet, but it's been shackled by the reluctance of studios to release their movies through Apple. As a unique compromise, a company called Redbox (www.redbox.com/home.aspx) has been quietly installing self-service kiosks in supermarkets all over the country. In fact,

Redbox now has surpassed Blockbuster Video in its number of locations.

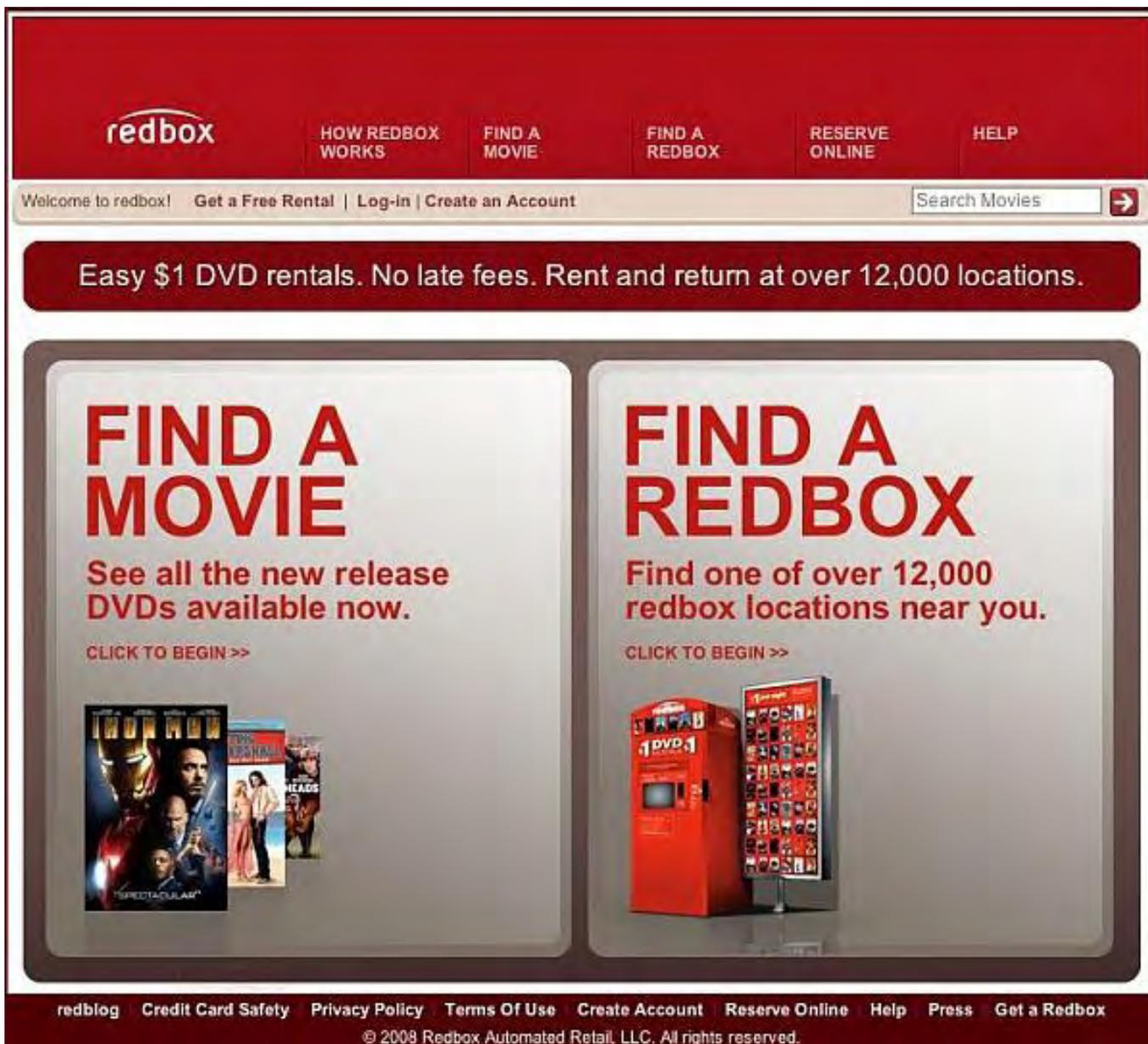


Figure 2. Redbox's Web site.

With Redbox, you reserve a movie online (the latest releases), and then go pick it up at your nearest Redbox kiosk. Each night you keep the DVD, Redbox charges you \$1. Keep it for 25 days and it's yours for \$25. Keep it for one night and you pay only \$1, even for the latest releases.

Redbox effectively eliminates the need for expensive storefronts like Blockbuster Video, while getting rid of the inconvenience of waiting, as with Netflix. It's not quite as fast as Apple TV's instant downloads, but it's much cheaper if you rent a movie, watch it that night, and return it the next day. Best of all, you aren't locked into a monthly fee like Netflix.

* * *

If you visit a favorite Web site frequently, you can store part of that Web site as a Dashboard widget. That way, you can highlight the latest list of stories off that Web site and view that list whenever you open Dashboard by clicking on the Dashboard icon or pressing F12.

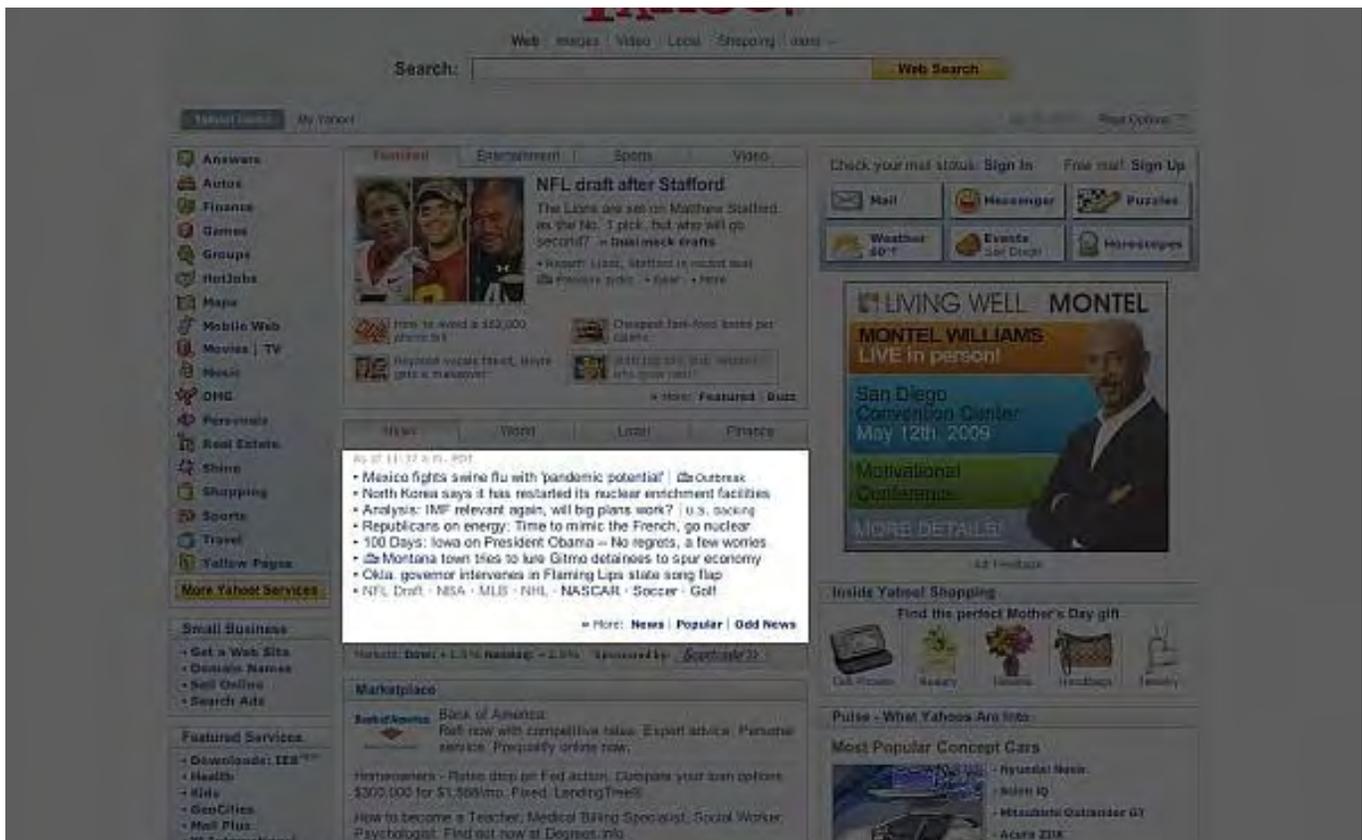


Figure 3. Dashboard can store part of a Web site as a widget.

Just load Safari, visit your favorite Web site, such as Yahoo!, and choose the File/Open in Dashboard command.

Now you can highlight the portion of the Web page you want to store as a Dashboard widget. After choosing this portion, you'll be able to view it any time you open Dashboard.

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

Wally is responsible for the following books:

- Microsoft Office 2007 for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470009233?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470009233)
- Beginning Programming for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470088702?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470088702)
- Breaking Into Acting for Dummies with Larry Garrison (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0764554468?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0764554468)
- Beginning Programming All-in-One Reference for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470108541?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470108541)
- Steal This Computer Book 4.0 (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271050?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271050)
- Visual Basic Express 2005: Now Playing (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593270593?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593270593)
- My New Mac (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271646?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271646)
- My New iPhone (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271956?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271956)

20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271956)

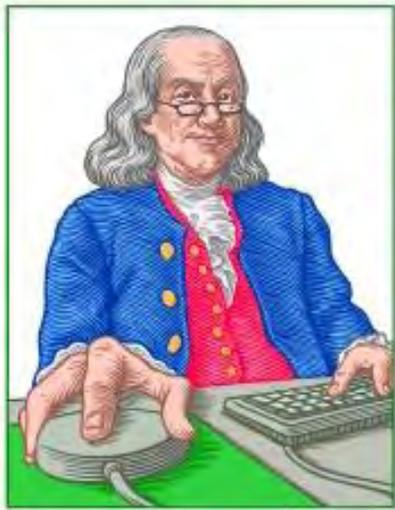
• Strategic Entrepreneurism with Jon Fisher and Gerald Fisher (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1590791894?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1590791894)

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 (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), using the techniques he learned from a professional Wall Street day trader.

Wally can be reached at wally@computoredge.com and at his personal web site (www.wallacewang.com/).

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LITTLE LINUX LESSONS

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

Little Linux Lessons:
Tips and Tricks from
Users

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

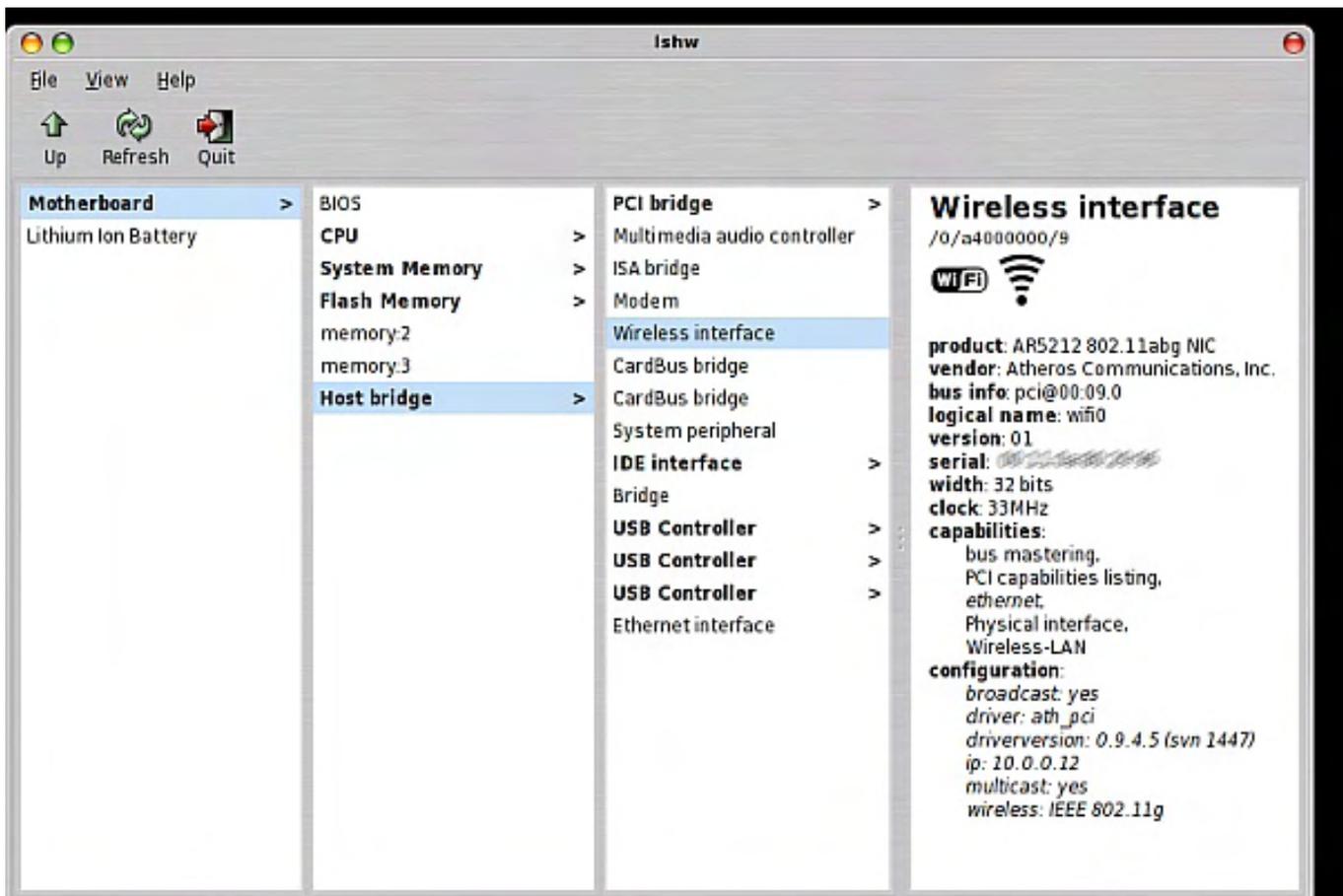
A reader offers a tip about the lshw command, which tells you a lot about the particular hardware on the computer in question, helping you choose the right Linux distro.

More Linux Computer Information with Hardware Lister (lshw)

One thing that is so useful about Linux is that you can run various distributions right off of a flash drive or a live CD. When dealing with a misbehaving Windows installation, the first thing I will do when trying to determine which Linux distribution to install is to run a live CD, open up BASH and use the Hardware Lister (ezix.org/project/wiki/HardwareLiSter) lshw command, which tells you a lot about the particular hardware on the computer in question. Running that command as root will let you know most if not all of the details that will affect your choice of distribution.

When someone donates a computer to our school, that's the first step in the process of using Linux to bring the computer back to a happy life.

Can't remember where I first learned the "lshw" command, but I remember thinking it was the greatest thing in the world when I finally was taught it by a fellow Linux user. Saved me a lot of headaches.



Richard
Longmont, CO

Give Us Your Linux Tips and/or Questions

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

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

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

Jack Dunning
ComputerEdge

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Rob, The Computer Tutor

Rob, The ComputerTutor Does
Visual Basic for Applications
“Forms and VBA” by Rob Spahitz

Last week, we wrapped up our import queries and created a custom VBA function for use in a query. This week, we'll work on a form that uses some VBA.

Last week, we wrapped up our import queries and created a custom VBA function for use in a query. This week, we'll work on a form that uses some VBA.

As usual, if you'd like to pull some previous databases, look on my Web site at www.dogopoly.com/ce.

Forms and Files

Today's topic was inspired by Tom, who came to me looking for a way to modify an existing database that needed to pull some information from a table and output it to a file. Let's see if I can share some of the key parts of that, since it was a good exercise in real-life problems and solutions. (The names were changed to protect the innocent!)

For this, you can either take an existing database or make a new one with a new table that we'll create.

Create a very simple new table with three fields as follows:

```
tblExport
=====
ExportID, Autonumber, primary key
ItemName, Text, length 50
Quantity, Number, Long Integer
```

Tom's database actually had several new tables, each with differing numbers of fields. For him, we could either use a brute-force approach for each table, or a generic approach that shared the processes that were similar between the tables. We chose a brute-force approach initially, to prove that things would work, and then migrated these to a more generic approach, with decent documentation so he could adapt it to his future needs. We'll take a similar approach, starting with a simple solution that works, then exploring ways to improve it based on expected future needs.

Also, as mentioned in one of Wally Wang's recent columns on RealBasic (a cross-platform programming language similar to VB), there are essentially an unlimited number of ways to solve a computer problem—and even more ways to *not* solve the problem. I'll offer one solution, and then change it to offer another solution. If you have a solution you'd like to share, send it along and I may include it in a future column.

OK, by now you have a table. Enter some data in the table for this inventory-style table, such as Keyboards, 10, Monitors, 5, Hard Drives, 7, Computers, 3. It may look something like Figure 1.

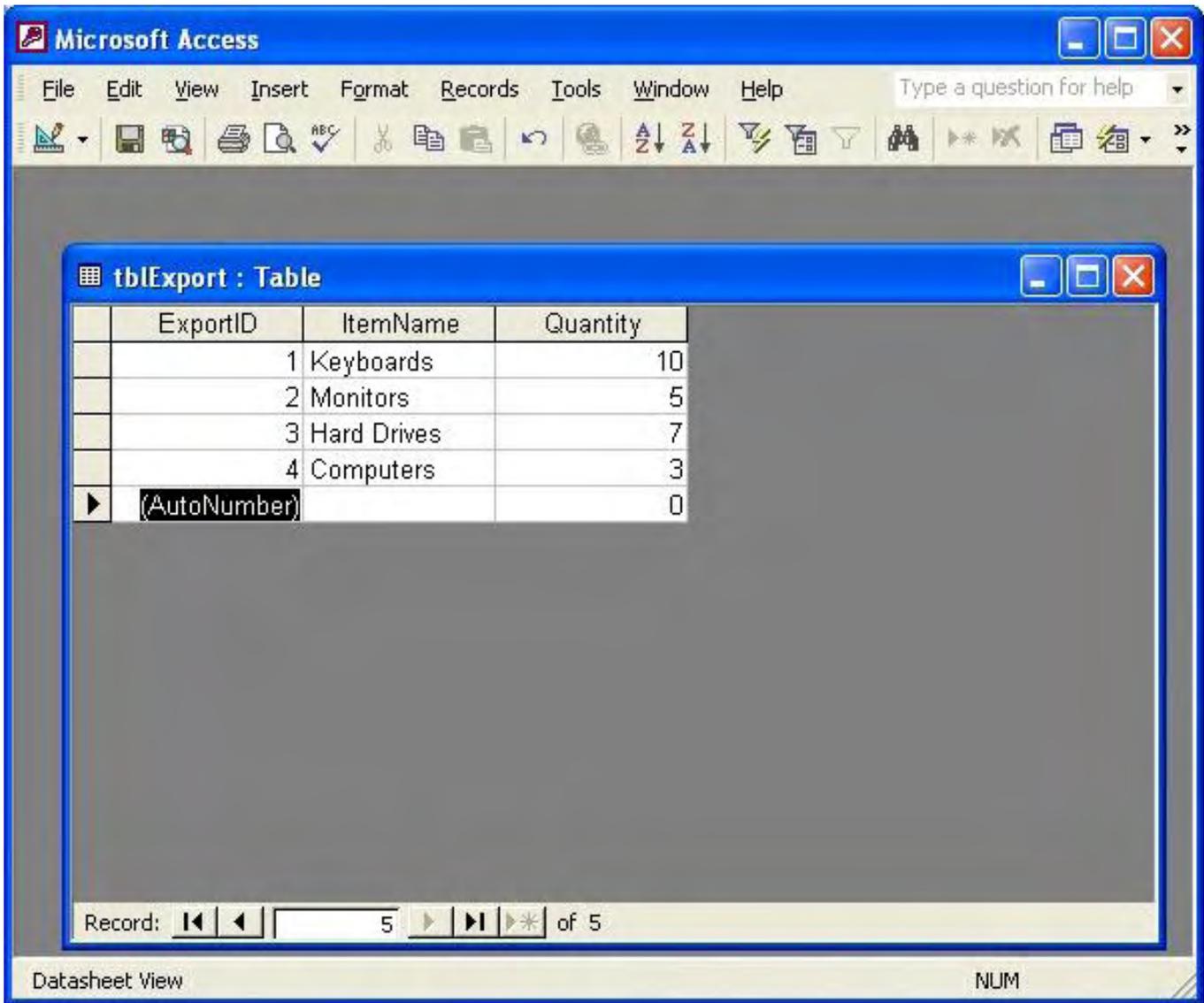


Figure 1. Sample data in a table, ready for export.

Now, our goal is to take this data and output it to a file on the hard drive. It should include headings that match the names of the fields (excluding the ID) and have tabs separating the fields. So basically we want to create a tab-delimited file from this data that includes headers.

First, the easy way. Since Access supports an export feature, we can simply export the data. And since the export feature supports the way we want to output the file, this works great.

With the table selected (as above), choose menu File/Export, and when the file dialog box appears, choose type Text Files, as seen in Figure 2.

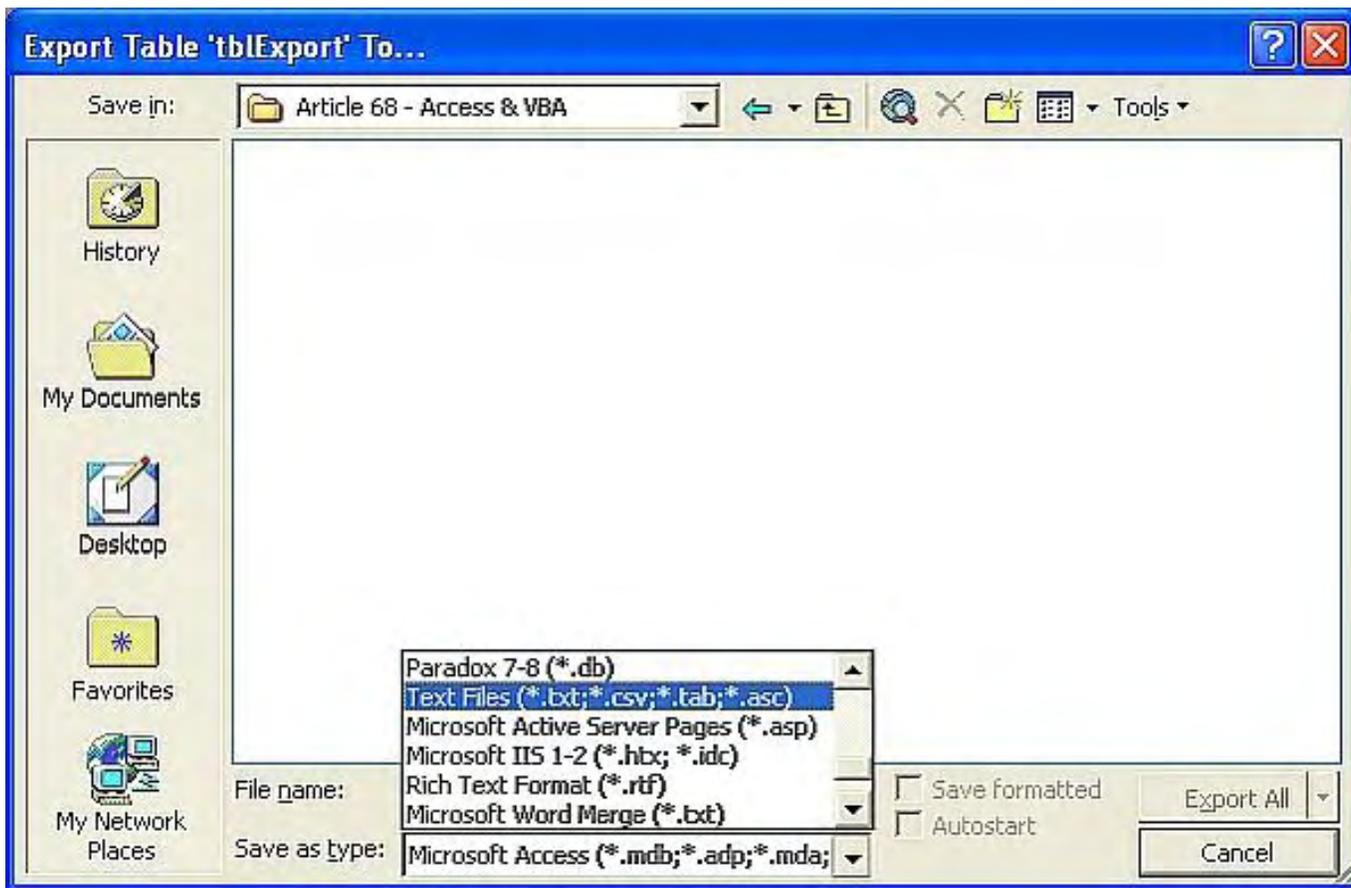


Figure 2. Export type set to Text Files.

Keep the default name of tblExport if you like, then click on the Export All button. This will start the Export Text Wizard, which we've looked at before for imports. Choose Delimited, then click on the "Next >" button. The default will be commas, but we want tab-delimited, so select that. We also want to include headers, so select that check box. There's also a Text Qualifier option, which defaults to double-quotes. Although you can change that to nothing, it's safer to leave it, and typically it won't hurt any good import process that's trying to use the data. You should now have something like Figure 3.

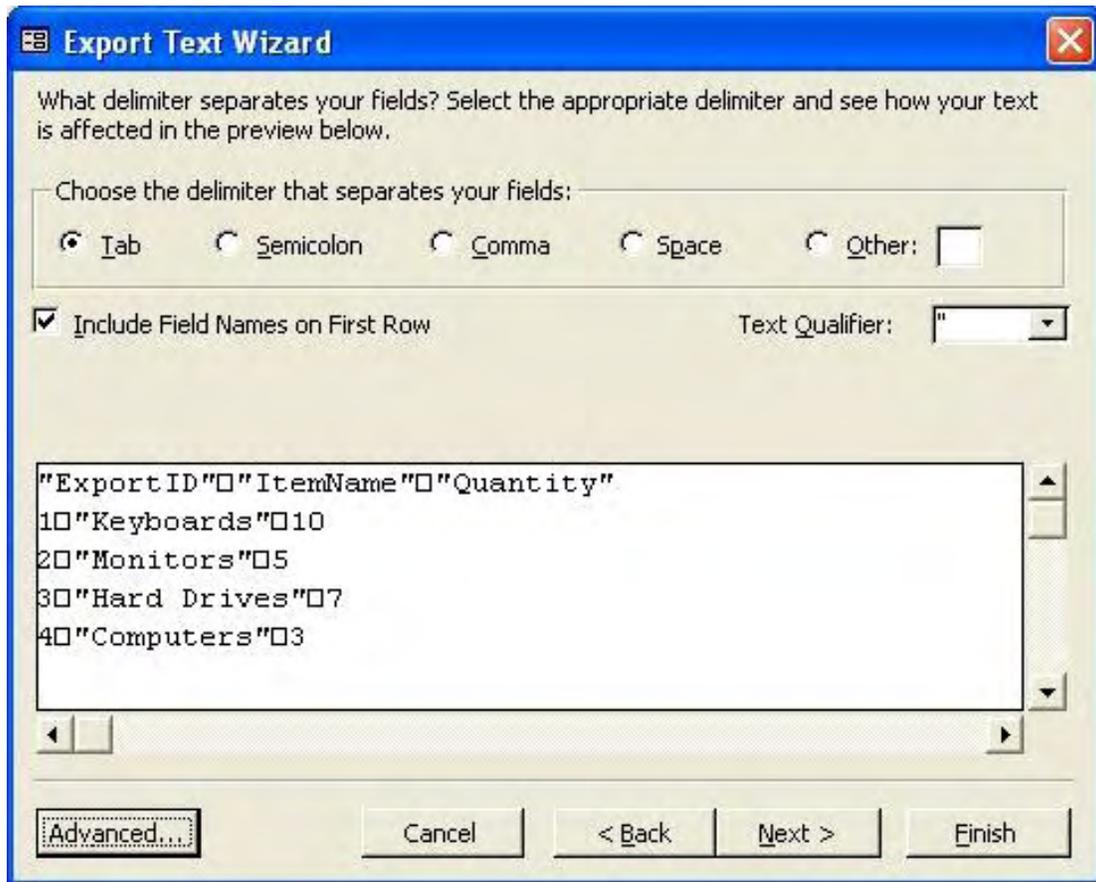


Figure 3. Export delimiter options.

The only problem is that the tabs show up as weird boxes (which is actually OK), and that the ID is included. Since we chose to export the table, we get all fields. If you want a subset, you'll need to create a query with just the pieces you want, and then export it. I'll leave that for the reader to try.

When you click on the Next button, it confirms the file that you want to export. Click on the Finish button, and you get a confirmation that the export succeeded.

If you locate that file in Windows and open it in Notepad (probably the default for the ".txt" file it created, you'll see something like Figure 4.

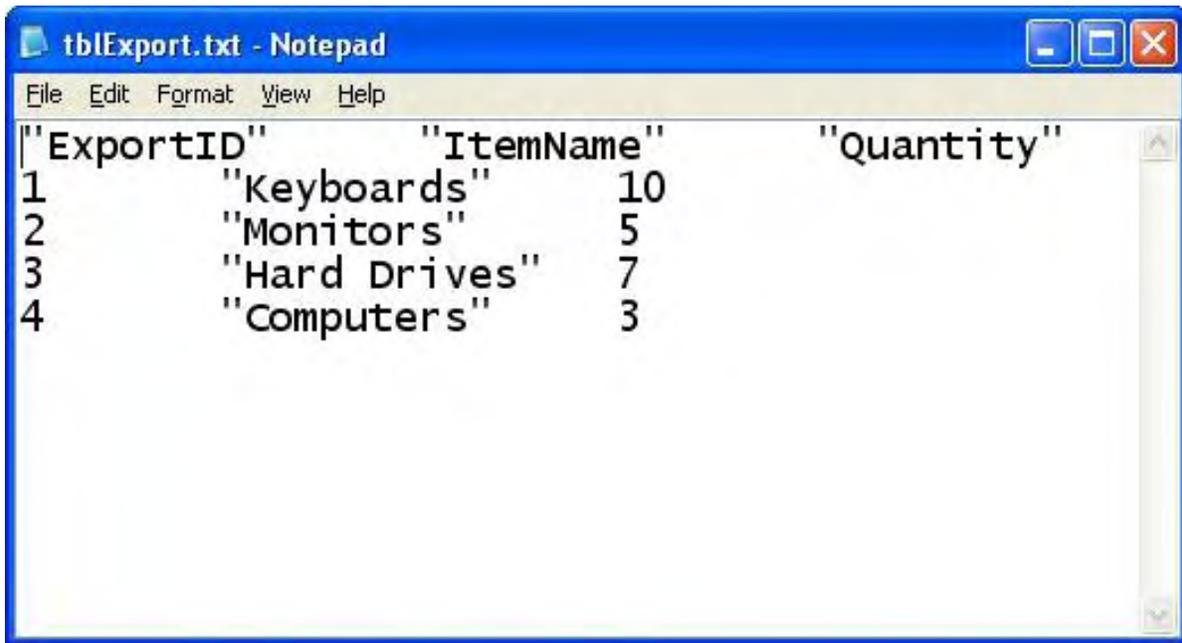


Figure 4. Export result.

Although it looks like it's not lined up, everything is good. If you loaded it into Excel or re-imported back to Access, you'd see that it's fine except for the first column.

OK, let's explore another way, using VBA, which gives us more control.

VBA Files

First, create a form in Design view (called frmExport) with a button (called cmdExport and caption Export) used to launch the export process. Cancel the button wizard if it appears, since we will create our own process.

On the button, define the OnClick Event with an Event Procedure. Click on the corresponding "..." button, as discussed in a previous column, and you'll be in the VB world.

Add the following very simple code to write a message to the C drive. Once this works, we'll refine it.

```
Private Sub cmdExport_Click()
    Open "C:*bckslsh*ItemExport.txt" For Output As #1
    Print #1, "test"
    Close #1
End Sub
```

This procedure runs when you click on the Export button from Access. It creates (opens) a new file called ItemExport.txt on the root level of the C drive. If the file already exists, it overwrites it without notice. Next, it writes (prints) the word "test" to the file and adds a new line at the end (since we didn't tell it to stay on the same line—we'll explore that another time). Finally, it closes the file, which makes it available to Windows and other applications.

If you go to your C drive, you'll see the file out there. If you open it, you'll find the word "test" inside.

Now let's explore this a bit more. First, it's possible that there will be problems writing this file (because the C drive is inaccessible or someone opened a file by that name, preventing VB from recreating it). If so, VB will be

notified that it cannot proceed, and an error will be presented. Since we didn't ask VB to intercept any errors, it'll look nasty. We'll address that "error-trapping" concept next week.

Right now, we're only printing one value on one line. Let's get it to print that line once for each record in our table. To get there, we should make sure that the form's RecordSource matches the table with the data we want to export. If there's only one table, you can do that directly. If it varies based on the button you push (as in Tom's case), you need to handle that through VB. Let's do that in VB anyway. Before the "open," put this:

```
Me.RecordSource = "tblExport"
```

This is the same as doing it manually in Access, since you are simply setting a property on "me," the current form.

Next, we'll need to jump to the first record, and then repeat the exporting once for each record. To handle that, we can use this:

```
RecordSet.MoveFirst
```

Next we can use either of two VB looping commands for this. Many people use "While," but the "Do" command is more flexible, so I use that like this:

```
Do Until RecordSet.EOF
```

Note: the other method is "While Not EOF(RecordSet)"

And we'll need to complete the loop with this:

```
Loop
```

Just before that, you need to move to the next record like this:

```
RecordSet.MoveNext
```

Put it all together and you now have this:

```
Private Sub cmdExport_Click()  
    Me.RecordSource = "tblExport"  
    Open "C:*bckslsh*ItemExport.txt" For Output As #1  
    Recordset.MoveFirst  
  
    Do Until Recordset.EOF  
        Print #1, "text"  
        Recordset.MoveNext  
    Loop  
    Close #1  
End Sub
```

If you run this from Access, your new text file will contain the word "test" four times since there are four records. If you didn't get that, check each line carefully (and hopefully this got put into the ComputerEdge PDF file without losing anything in translation!)

Now let's get the right data out there. Instead of "text," we want to grab data from the Recordset's Fields. To handle that, we can use this:

```
Print #1, Recordset.Fields(1).Value
```

When you update that line, it will take the second column (since the first column is counted as number zero) and put it into the text file. If you run now, the text file will contain this:

```
Keyboards  
Monitors  
Hard Drives  
Computers
```

Since we want the second and third fields, separated by a tab, we can change the line to this, using the VB special constant name for a tab character, vbTab:

```
Print #1, Recordset.Fields(1).Value; vbTab; Recordset.Fields(2).Value
```

Now your output looks like this, with tabs between the pieces:

```
Keyboards      10  
Monitors       5  
Hard Drives    7  
Computers      3
```

Finally, let's add headings and call it a wrap for this week.

Before the loop starts add the field's names rather than values:

```
Print #1, Recordset.Fields(1).Name; vbTab; Recordset.Fields(2).Name
```

Your final result in the text file is this:

```
ItemName      Quantity  
Keyboards     10  
Monitors      5  
Hard Drives   7  
Computers     3
```

And your final code is this:

```
Private Sub cmdExport_Click()  
    Me.RecordSource = "tblExport"  
    Open "C:*bckslsh*ItemExport.txt" For Output As #1  
    Recordset.MoveFirst  
  
    Print #1, Recordset.Fields(1).Name; vbTab; Recordset.Fields(2).Name  
    Do Until Recordset.EOF  
        Print #1, Recordset.Fields(1).Value; vbTab; Recordset.Fields(2).Value  
        Recordset.MoveNext  
    Loop  
    Close #1  
End Sub
```

Next week, more VBA, and we'll look at how to handle error-trapping and look at some ways to test our VB code without hoping that we typed everything right the first time.

See ya next week.

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

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



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Hot on the Web

“Is Twitter the Next ICQ?” by Jim Trageser

Success is fleeting, and never more so than in the tech world. Twitter is the current high-tech darling, but without a compelling reason to use it, will it survive?

If you're tech-savvy enough to be reading *ComputerEdge*, then you've most likely heard of Twitter.com—the current hot topic in tech media. In early April, CNN and actor Ashton Kutcher held a contest to see who could get to 1 million Twitter followers first. The actor won.

It seems that everyone is on Twitter—you can twit or send tweets. Little applets let you put your Twitter updates in your MySpace or Facebook or blog pages.

All of which is very impressive, as is the growth in the number of people with Twitter accounts.

But what does it mean?

Not much if some compelling reason to use Twitter doesn't emerge.

What It Is

Twitter is simply a broadcast of your "status"—like what MySpace and Facebook already offer on your profile, but untethered to a specific site.

You type in what you're doing, or whatever else you want to share with your subscribers—a news headline, a new YouTube video—and then they are notified based on their own preferences (e-mail or text to their cell, or simply an update the next time they log in to Twitter.com).

It's sort of a centralized version of texting on your cell phone or instant messaging on your PC.

But I still have to ask: So what?

Where's the Beef?

Look at the example of instant messaging. Five years ago, IM was hot hot hot. It seemed like everyone was jumping on the IM bandwagon—AOL had AIM, Yahoo had its own, so did Netscape and Microsoft—and the big buzz was whether Google was really going to issue its own IM client. And a small company named ICQ was among the IM leaders simply by virtue of being among the first to have an IM client and protocol.

The fact that none of the above clients were compatible with one another even had members of Congress threatening to pass laws compelling interoperability—the fear being that if we weren't all able to chat with one another on our PCs that, well, I'm not really sure what the fear was.

Whatever it was, it didn't come to pass, because instant messaging is utterly passé. Sure, there are still people IMing each other. Heck, for that matter, some people still write letters to each other. In longhand. And mail them,

with stamps and everything.

Whatever.

The reality is that the proliferation of cell phones and the drop in price for text messaging on those phones doomed instant messaging as a ubiquitous (and thus, perhaps, massively profitable) means of communication. Nobody IMs anymore because instant messaging isn't nearly as universal as texting. Let's face it: No matter how sleek your laptop, it's a heck of a lot more cumbersome than a cell phone.

The MySpace Model?

And now Twitter is all the rage—we even had a seminar on using Twitter at my place of employment recently. The woman who led it covered all the bases and gave a very nice, comprehensive presentation on how to use Twitter to strengthen our business—but at the conclusion, I was left wondering if we weren't putting the cart before the horse. By a couple miles.

More recently even than IM, MySpace.com was the hot tech app. Designed to make it easy for bands to share their music and tour schedules (and thus build up fan bases independently of the record labels), MySpace exploded in popularity. Until just a couple years ago, it was the most popular destination Web site (trailing only Google and Yahoo in total visitors). Everybody had a MySpace page.

And you know what? MySpace is still a hugely popular site—but it no longer has the all-valuable cachet of the Next Big Thing. Facebook took that away, and—until Twitter sprung on the scene—was the media darling of the Internet.

Long-Term Success

So the point of all this meandering is to say that I wouldn't wager too heavily on Twitter's long-term financial potential. Success is fleeting, and never more so than in the tech world.

Particularly when the value of your brand isn't immediately evident.

MySpace's basic design remains geared toward helping bands build a following. MySpace may not be the dominating one-size-fits-all social network it once was, but it remains a robust online community due to its strength at connecting musicians to fans.

Facebook may be the more dominant generic social network now, due to the fact that it is designed to help friends and family connect and stay in touch. But it's not quite as good at helping bands promote themselves—so MySpace still has that niche.

But with its online games, polls and other entertainment, Facebook is probably the more fun way to spend an evening.

So both sites could end up being here to stay indefinitely.

But what does Twitter offer? A way to let your friends know what you're doing? To share a link to another Web site?

You can do all those things with your friends on MySpace and Facebook already.

There just doesn't seem anything particularly unique or compelling about Twitter. It's interesting (sort of); it's got the media buzz going.

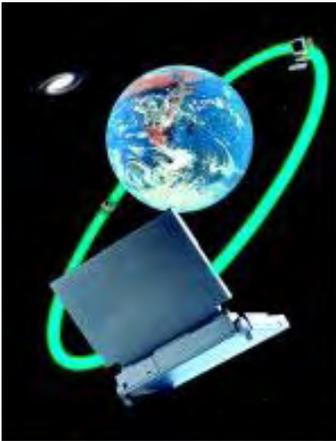
But will it last?

As we've seen with IM, and with Linux before that (remember when Linux was going to replace Windows as the operating system of choice on PCs?) and MySpace after (and tons of other examples, from WinAmp to BeOS), the media is a fickle mistress.

With a particularly short attention span.

Jim Trageser can be reached via his Web site (www.trageser.com). Jim is the Publisher/Editor of *Turbula.net*, an odd little online publication to which truly talented people seem strangely compelled to send interesting works for others to enjoy. Visit www.turbula.net.

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Techno Talk

Techno Talk

“Digital Photography 101: The Care and Feeding of a Digital Camera” by D'Artagnan Fischer

A little TLC can make sure that you have a working digital camera when you really need one.

Although the convenience of the latest compact digital cameras makes you want to shove the camera into a pocket or purse, that action might just as easily shorten the life of the camera. It is true that newer digital cameras do have a more utility-type presence in our lives, but a little TLC can make sure that you have a working camera when you really need one!

The Viewfinder

The camera's viewfinder is most often an externally displayed LCD panel. The panel is normally quite small, and does not have a lot of surface area that is subject to breakage. However, rest assured that it can, and will, break in the right situation. Personally, I have witnessed where a small digital camera was frequently tossed into a purse. Ultimately, the LCD didn't get broken, but it did become scarred from a set of keys, and from that point on, there was a permanent mark in the screen itself. The real point to keep in mind here is that LCD screens, albeit small, are still quite susceptible to being broken. Camera manufacturers normally put hard, protective covers over them, but in just the right situation, they can break.

There are some camera models that either seal the LCD inside when it is turned off, or have the ability to turn the LCD around so that it is protected when not in use. The biggest thing here, is to not be lazy, and to make sure the screen is protected whenever possible. It's just a protective measure that can make your camera last longer.

The Lens

The lens of the camera is probably the single most important component of a camera. The lens is essentially the "eye" that sees the world for us. Sure, there are electronics behind it that truly make the picture-taking happen, but without the lens, we have nothing. The lens is most commonly made out of a precision piece of glass. And, although such a tiny piece of glass might seem nearly indestructible, it can still be scratched quite easily.

So, when you think about cleaning your lens, what is the first thing that most of us think to do? Use your shirt or your finger, right? Well, suffice it to say that this is very bad. First, clothing is not always sufficiently soft, and quite often during the course of the day, the clothes collect microscopic bits of dust and dirt. Those bits of dust and dirt can scratch the lens. Next, your finger can cause a similar problem due to the microscopic dust and dirt too, but there is an added problem from using a finger. Your fingers have natural oils on them, over and above anything that you might add (like lotions or special soaps). These oils adhere to the lens surface, and they smudge as well as become an attractant for more dust.

So, don't use your shirt! Don't spray with Windex! Using Windex, or a similar product, can leave film, or worse, overspray could sink into the cracks of the camera body and affect the electronics inside.

My recommendation is inexpensive and simple, and it can be found in many places; either go directly to a photo

store, or track down the photo department of most department stores. You will find a "lens brush." However, look a little farther and find the one that is both a brush and a cleaner. This typically resembles an oversize lipstick container, with a slide button to extend the brush, and a cap covering the cleaning end. Since these typically cost only a few dollars, I highly recommend having more than one. You just never know when you might need one, and if there is always one handy, you will never go wrong!

Memory Cards

The memory cards that we use in our cameras might also seem indestructible, but the typical memory card is susceptible to too much moisture or being crushed or broken. However, what is the number-one most common place for to stick a memory card? That's right, in your pocket! In your pocket, they can get crushed *and* exposed to moisture.

Now, there is yet another aspect of danger that can take its toll on your camera via your memory card. That is sticky goo! If you put a piece of candy in your pocket, or you throw the memory card in a purse, you never know the things that it can come in contact with. Personally, having kids, I find that we're constantly attached to some form of goo! Once your memory cards get a dose of goo, and you inadvertently insert them into your camera, the goo isn't easily cleaned from the inside of your camera.

The best recommendation is to reinsert the memory card into the protective cover that it came with. And, whether or not you still have the protective covers for your memory cards, to put all your memory cards into an inexpensive memory card wallet. These products can have any number of variations on the name, but in essence, this is little more than a flat pouch that is suitable to keep your memory cards in. It helps to keep them from being crushed, helps them to stay dry, and it helps to keep them from the dreaded goo!

Water and Sand

Water and sand stand to do their own whammies to just about everything we own. Water in particular, unless you truly have a waterproof camera, will make your camera not work! And, even worse than that is salt water, because of corrosion. In the off chance that you drop your camera in the water, quickly take the battery out and then your memory card. Then let it sit and dry out for a week, and just maybe it will work again. However, the prognosis is not optimistic—especially with the newer cameras with vibration adjustments—but there still is some hope.

Sand is another thing altogether. You surely would not drag your camera through the sand, but sometimes in sandy areas, the wind will carry sand in the air. And, as luck would have it, all those little nooks and crannies of a digital camera will seem to attract those little sand particles like a magnet. Sand is most dangerous to the lens, but if you don't clean all those other particles on the outside of your camera, they may eventually get inside and wreak more havoc with the camera.

If you ever plan on visiting the beach or another sandy area, then consider taking along a can of compressed air (found at a lot of the places that carry the lens brush—you can also find it at camera stores and Fry's). Worst case, use the compressed air when you get home, but do make a point to use it. Those little stray particles of sand do have a habit of migrating inside the camera when it doesn't get properly cleaned.

Note: Using compressed air is good, but avoid pointing the stream of air directly at the lens. If the lens is clean and free from sand particles, cover it if possible while cleaning the rest of the camera. The reason is that, with such a high-velocity stream of air, bits of dust and sand can be propelled at the lens and scratch it. Compressed air is certainly fine to use, but just avoid direct use on the lens, especially when there is sand involved. If there's no sand, then the likelihood of scratching is greatly reduced.

Good Cleaners

Here's some special notes about good and bad cleaners for your camera and lens. Any cleaning supplies that are

made specifically for cleaning the lens of the camera are good to use. In addition, using a lens brush helps to remove larger particles that might adhere to the camera. However, the old-fashioned lens wipes are also a good thing to have handy. Lens wipes amount to little more than a tissue paper that is specially formulated to be a cleaner, and yet is non-abrasive. Typically, lens wipes can also be used with lens-cleaning solution. However, there are also lens wipes that can be purchased that have the cleaning solution built in (like a moist wipe you get with messy food, but *don't* use the food-type ones on your lens).

Bad Cleaners

The biggest problem in using cleaning solutions that are not specially formulated for camera lenses is that they can have harmful chemicals in them. Or, not so serious, they might just leave streaks on the lens. No matter what, if it isn't made for cameras and lenses, then don't use it on your camera!

Here's a few examples as to why: Some lens material is not glass at all, but instead it is a form of plastic composite. Some chemicals can blur or fog this type of lens permanently. And, not quite so serious, some plastic components of the camera itself can be affected by harmful chemicals. The real bottom line is to *only* use the products that are made for cameras.

Conclusion

Our favorite little digital cameras may seem to be nearly indestructible these days, but things like dust, water and sand can each take their toll on the unforgiving camera. LCD screens may have protective covers, but a little pressure in the wrong spot, and the screen is marked for life, or worse...broken! You should always take care of the camera and use the proper cleaning products, and that precious camera will last a good long time!

D'Artagnan Fischer has been a Technology Manager for a major accounting firm, a senior systems administrator, an Enterprise Consultant, has worked for DHS, the Navy, and even San Diego City Schools. His main interests are computers, technology, and digital photography. He also enjoys writing Science Fiction stories, and dreams of one day having one of his stories made into a movie. He lives with a menagerie of animals, and is in the process of growing a family.

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ComputerQuick Reviews

News and Reviews from Readers and Staff

ComputerQuick Reviews

**“doPDF for Creating PDF
Files”** by ComputerEdge
Staff

A reader has high praise for
the free doPDF PDF-
creation too.

This column is in response to Michael J. Ross' article "PDF-Creation Programs" in the April 17 issue.

After finishing Michael J. Ross' great article, I reviewed the various choices of alternate PDF creators, and was especially drawn to doPDF (www.dopdf.com) by Softland.

I like doPDF because it:

1. Is free
2. Contains no nag screens
3. Is self-contained, not needing GhostScript or .NET
4. Deposits no watermarks
5. Is truly an outline format, as it should be (seen by zooming way in), not a pixilated graphic image
6. Requires little disk space for created files, as do some PDF creators, and
7. Works very well for my particular genre of applications.

I am a translator, working in both Thai and Lao scripts. These complicated Indic-based writing systems "stack" certain consonant-vowel-tone-marker spelling combinations in vertical sets up to three deep.

My PDF manuscripts are sent to printers in Asia, so they need to be right, and usable between readers! My finished work is highly formatted and "tweaked," making it a greater challenge for any PDF creator. Even Adobe Acrobat "drops the ball" once in a while.

After installing doPDF, I tried files containing various scripts, both pre-Unicode, and Unicode TTF font scripts. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that doPDF had done its job perfectly, so far, as far as I could see.

I feel like a kid with a new toy, provided freely by a rich uncle. Kudos to Softland for their invaluable contribution to my work.

Ron Myers
El Cajon

The purpose of this column is to give our readers an opportunity to express their opinions about products and services that they have found particularly useful. If you have had experience with hardware, software or a Web site that made you say, "This is really great! I want to tell everyone about it," then this is a good place to do it. We

are not interested in slamming the bad products, because there are too many of them. We would like to hear about those things that you would recommend to your best friend. The only caution is to please capitalize when appropriate and use complete sentences. If it takes us too long to edit the piece, it may be a long time before it's published on this site.

Please send your personal reviews to ceeditor@computoredge.com.

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

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

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Industry News . . .

Benjamin Franklin's Virtues Now on Your iPhone

“iPhone OS technology” by
ComputerEdge Staff

Age-old wisdom meets iPhone OS technology to help the tech-savvy improve their character—and chances for success.

Equilibrium Enterprises, Inc. has unveiled its latest iPhone application, Virtues for the iPhone, which is designed to help users, step by step, follow in the footsteps of Benjamin Franklin's time-honored self-improvement system, updated for a digital age.

The Virtues app is based upon Benjamin Franklin's own system of tracking how well he displayed virtues in his character daily for a period of one week. He focused exclusively on tracking one virtue per week. With 13 virtues—temperance, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, silence, order, resolution and humility—he surmised he could cycle through the process four times over the course of one year.

He wrote about this daily practice in his autobiography at the age of 79, and attributed much of his success to it, saying, "I was, by the endeavor, a better and a happier man than I otherwise should have been if I had not attempted it." He also wrote, "I hope, therefore, that my descendants will follow this example and reap the benefits."

Character Equals Success

With the Virtues app, you have the option to select from Franklin's original 13 virtues "starter set" or create your own custom virtues. If you're not sure which virtue to focus upon, let the universe decide for you with the app's unique "Select Random" feature.

To put the app into action, identify a virtue, tap it, select a focus period start date and monitor your progress/score daily. Scoring is subjective—grade yourself up to 5.0 for how well you achieved the virtue you are working on. You can give yourself a negative score for days that didn't go so well. Track your success in demonstrating virtues in your character—and see how well your overall well being improves.

Benjamin Franklin recognized early on the importance of refining his character to realize success. At the time he conceived of his unique tracking system, he was largely in debt and was known to be argumentative and an often abrasive person. By isolating the weak points in his character, and then identifying desired character traits (and related virtues), he charted a course for improvement so profound that he marveled at the long-standing results over the course of his life.

About Virtues

Virtues for the iPhone is available now at the App Store (itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/)

viewArtist?id=312015304) for only \$2.99. Coming soon: Virtues for Android and BlackBerry devices.

About Equilibrium Enterprises

Equilibrium Enterprises delivers applications and publications designed to add a tech twist to age-old precepts for achieving success.

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

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

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EdgeWord:

“A Note about Apple” by Jack Dunning

edge WORD

I'm guessing that I will one day own an iPhone, but it won't be for the phone. It will be for the computer and the apps.

When talking about Apple's cellular phone product, the word iPhone is a misnomer. The fact that it is a phone at all is almost incidental. The iPhone is primarily a handheld computer that just happens to be able to make a call—at least according to all the hype. It's the applications (apps) that drive the marketing of the iPhone. Based upon on the commercials, there is very little you can't do with an iPhone.

As you may have guessed, I don't have an iPhone. It's not that I don't want one—I love toys—but experience has taught me that I wouldn't use the iPhone as it was intended. However, there are plenty of people who do. I see professionals everywhere staring at the little screens while flicking their finger here or there. I have no doubt that they are doing important work. Knowing that it is a little computer, I'm sorely tempted to indulge myself and dip into the market. There are a few things holding me back.

First, I once owned a handheld computer. It did everything for me—well, almost everything. I could pick up my e-mail over a Wi-Fi connection, write articles with a screen keyboard and a stylus, and browse some useful Web sites. The only reason I gave it up was because my work became so computer intensive, that anything smaller than a laptop wouldn't get it done. It was redundant to travel with both a handheld computer and a laptop.

Soon after, the battery on the handheld died and I never replaced it. The small Pocket PC went the way of all my previous electronic organizers (only organized people can use organizers) into a box of electronic relics—all of which I intend to revive someday.



The second reason I don't have an iPhone is because I already have a cell phone. I want my phone to be just a phone. I didn't even want the camera that came on the phone, but I couldn't find one without a camera. Therefore, if I get an iPhone, it won't be because it's a phone. I want the computer, although, as mentioned above, I probably wouldn't use it enough. If I found just the right app, then I might take the plunge. That brings me to my complaint about Apple.

I want to browse the Apple iPhone apps to see if there is a compelling reason to get an iPhone. The problem is that I must download and install iTunes in order to merely look at what's available. I'm not an iTunes user and don't particularly want to install it on my computer. I know that this is Apple's way of getting a toehold on my computer, and I am not ready for it. I would like Apple to produce a parallel

"I was merely trying out a brand new app, when she grabbed my iPhone and tossed it in the ocean."

Web site where non-iTunes people could browse the selections of iPhone apps. From my point of view, this would be good marketing, but it doesn't fit Apple's culture.

Apple has always been all about control. The company builds excellent niche products that create new industries, but then attempts to control every aspect of the market—as is the case with the marketing of iPhone apps. (From

this perspective, Apple fits right in with the attitude displayed by the cellular companies. Nothing gets on a cell phone without them getting a piece of the pie—no pun intended.) This has caused many lost opportunities for Apple.

As a company, the latest lost opportunity for Apple was Windows Vista. (What? Apple's market share increased from a meager 4 percent to an awesome 10 percent.) If Apple wanted to truly become a major challenger to Microsoft, it would have cut prices (if only temporarily) and gobbled up millions more dissatisfied Windows users. All the evidence shows that once someone becomes an Apple user, they tend to stay one—fanatically so. The last two and a half years have been squandered with clever commercials about Vista problems (they worked), but the Apple price point severely limited the inroads that could have been made. Now, I'm afraid that the window (again, no pun intended) is closing. If the reviews on Windows 7 are accurate, then it will take the PC world by storm and leave Vista (and the effective Apple anti-Vista commercials) languishing.

As a culture, I'm much more a lover of Apple than Microsoft. Apple represents creativity and innovation. It has survived some tough, Jobs-less times, to become one of the healthiest companies in the world. Microsoft is a behemoth trying to be all things to all people. It's annoying, but when a company is as large and wealthy as Microsoft, it will occasionally do something right. Window 7 appears to be an excellent product that has survived the Microsoft bureaucracy.

I'm guessing that I will one day own an iPhone, but it won't be for the phone. It will be for the computer and the apps.

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

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Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

“Computer and Internet tips, plus comments on the articles and columns.” by ComputerEdge Staff

"PDF Forms," "Alternative PDF-Creating Programs," "Windows Briefcase"

PDF Forms

[The following letters are in response to Jack Dunning's April 17 article, "A Look at Adobe Acrobat."]

Good job on the Adobe Acrobat article. I did not know it was becoming so popular.

I have one nagging question: When I open a form in PDF format, I always like to fill it out using the computer. I hate having to print the form and manually fill it out. A lot of forms will not allow me to electronically fill out the form.

Is there a way to convert the form so I can fill it out online, instead of having to print it and fill it out manually? Also, I like to save forms I fill out. Is there a way I can get the file to save? A lot of PDFs will not allow saving either.

-Joey O. Derden

If the PDF has not been formatted as a form with fields for entering text by a PDF generator that makes forms—most aren't—then you won't be able to fill in the form online. If the PDF does not allow saving in the reader, you should still be able to save it by printing it to another file with the proper PDF print driver, although I haven't tried this. —Jack Dunning]

I know it [is possible to input data in a PDF file,] as I did it a couple of years ago. I downloaded a PDF rebate form. It was supposed to be printed out, and I [was able to type in my information].

I can't remember what program I used, but it allowed me to view the PDF and to [edit type]. I could type in my name, address, etc.

Does anyone know how I can just type in my name, one letter per block? The closest I've gotten was an online PDF site called "pdfvue," but the letters I inputted ended up inside an inputted rectangle that printed over and through the blocks.

As retailers seem intent on finding ways to deny rebates for technicalities, I am hesitant in sending in this form and have just written in my data.

-Mark Cornelius, San Diego, Calif.

As mentioned in the previous letter, a form needs to be created with a program that includes a forms generator, such as Adobe Acrobat, before you can enter data on the fly. Otherwise, you won't be able to enter data in a form. I have use Acrobat to enter data in pages that are not forms, but the text editing in Acrobat is severely limited and not always possible. —Jack Dunning

Alternative PDF-Creating Programs

[The following letters are in response to Michael J. Ross' April 17 article, "PDF-Creation Programs."]

At the end of Michael J. Ross' article on PDF-creation programs, he solicited suggestions of other programs that work in the Windows framework. I've been quite pleased with PDFill. You can download it for free, but when you print out from the free version, it adds watermarks. After becoming familiar with its tools, I decided to pay the \$20 to get a version that doesn't print watermarks. I use its whiteout feature to update dates and correct typos. I also use the merge feature to merge several documents into one. You can also rearrange and/or delete pages. I haven't even touched the tools for forms, which it includes.

-Jan Mayer, Murrieta, Calif.

[I'd like to suggest the] free printer-based PDF creator called PrimoPDF (download.cnet.com/PrimoPDF/3000-10743_4-10264577.html). You can also get it at many filesharing sites, such as CNET.

-Carl Wyles, Denver, CO

I think [Ross' PDF program article was] great and very needed.

One suggestion, though. Is everyone aware that the absolutely free OpenOffice suite (www.openoffice.org/) [includes] a very good built-in PDF-creation function?

I utilize the OpenOffice suite all the time, [using] both Writer (MS Word's compatible alternative) as well as Calc (MS Excel's compatible alternative).

Typically, I will first create or edit a file in either Word or Excel (simply because I am more used to them), then I'll load the file into Writer or Calc, depending. There, I may do minor editing and then create the needed PDF file.

I was pleased to discover that the resultant new PDF file is not extra large at all, and is often smaller than the file from which it was created.

-R.M., El Cajon, Calif.

R.M. also took a look at the doPDF PDF-creation program. His thoughts appear in this week's ComputerQuick Reviews.

I am in total agreement with R.M. regarding using Open Office, since most of us simply generate documents that we may want to send to some distribution group without having them [be] editable. OpenOffice fits the bill nicely.

-Don Piller, Escondido, Calif.

I'm surprised no one has mentioned Foxit Reader (www.foxitsoftware.com/pdf/reader/). It is a lightweight, fast, and free PDF reader.

I recommend it if you do not want to spend the time downloading Adobe Reader.

-Pete, Roy, Utah

Online Fraud and Telephone Fraud

[This letter is in regard to Wally Wang's March 20 article, "Online Fraud 101."]

Good information. I have seen an increase in e-mail scams. I have seen e-mail scams trying to rip people off to send to Swine Flu fund raising scams. General Naboo fom Nigeria never misses an opportunity.

I have spoken with people who have received scam e-mails with personal details. A new strategy you have described.

Keep up the good work.

-JB, San Diego, CA

Windows Briefcase

[The following letters are in regard to Jack Dunning's April 17 Windows Vista column, "Windows Briefcase for Taking Your Work to Another Computer."]

Great article and an excellent tip on using Briefcase in a bit of a different mode.

-Don Piller, Escondido, Calif.

Thanks for the tip. I tried to use Briefcase with Access, but gave it up with corrupted files. Probably operator error. I think your comments will straighten me out.

-Ted, Poway, Calif.

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